

# The Resources of New Guinea

(Continued from previous page)

## The Big Six of Gold

So much for coconuts—before the war, despite the mushroom growth of gold-mining, still responsible for a third of the total export wealth of New Guinea.

In 1937 the value of gold exported annually from the Territory of New Guinea passed the £2,000,000 mark. In 1927 about a tenth of that amount was produced, while the total up to the end of 1926 was only about £100,000 worth altogether. The year 1921 marks the birth of modern New Guinea, for it was then that W. Park ("Shark-eye" to his friends) discovered gold on Koranga Creek, near the Bulolo River, and the Morobe goldfield began to come into the world's news. But conditions were so hard and costs so high that by 1925 there were only 50 miners and prospectors in the field, few making more than tucker. Then in 1926 the lodes of Mount Kaindi and Edie Creek were found, and the real rush began. The two discoverers, Bill Royal and Glasson, and the next four to follow them, Albert Royal, Chisholm, Money and Sloane (afterwards known as "the big six") made fortunes.

Men from all over the Southern Hemisphere flocked to Salamaua—at that time nothing but a swampy, fever-ridden beach with a few native huts—the port of entry to the goldfields. Many died of malaria on the coast, while waiting to obtain native boys to carry their stores and equipment. The little cemetery at "The Port of Hopes" is their mute memorial. Some set out for the inland and died before reaching their goal—victims of fever or of hostile savages. Others survived everything, including the 6,000 foot range of mountains and the fortnight of jungle and swamp between the coast and the goldfields, and pitched their tents or built their huts on the hillside where the township of Wau now stands.

## The Air Service

It is only 15 years since those days, but Wau is now only 25 minutes from Salamaua. For, parallel with the development of Edie Creek and the Watut alluvial goldfields, there sprang up the world-famous New Guinea air services. Everything from four-ton dredge parts to cows, pianos, roofing iron and beer—besides passengers, both brown and white—shuttle backwards and forwards by aeroplane from the goldfields to the sea. For some items, of course, like the beer, there is only a one-way traffic. But to replace them, on the outward journey, are the ever-increasing loads of the yellow gold, a quarter of a million ounces of it a year.

And then oil. For several years now, each of the biggest oil companies in the world has been spending thousands of pounds exploring for oil—employing scores of Europeans—English, Dutch, Americans, Australians, New Zealanders—and hundreds of natives; penetrating further than government patrols or missionaries have ever been; mapping unknown mountains and rivers; making contact with unknown tribes; and lifting corners of the veil that has hung for

centuries over the greater part of the world's largest island. All the indications are there—seepages, type of rock, geological structure—and the consensus of opinion is that it is only a matter of time before New Guinea's name will be added to the list of oil-producing countries. In fact, rumours persist in coming from the little-known Dutch New Guinea that oil in commercial quantities has already been struck. Drilling was begun in the British half a year or two ago.

## Tempting to the Japanese

There is no doubt that New Guinea is a tempting morsel for the Japanese—over-crowded, hungry for raw materials—even if more for its potentialities than for its present worth. For besides its minerals and the protean coconut palm (from whose products are made soap, candles, margarine, chocolate, fat,

ointments, medicines, cattle-food, fuel, ropes, charcoal), New Guinea has been proved suitable for growing nearly all types of tropical products. Neglected groves of rubber trees, planted by the Germans, may be seen in an odd corner of many a plantation. Tobacco, cocoa, kapok and sisal hemp are already grown on a commercial or semi-commercial scale. Successful experiments with rice, tapioca, tea, coffee, the oil palm, and quinine are among the proud attainments of the New Guinea Agricultural Department on their model plantations. Sago, sugar and bananas are native to the country. And native fruits and timber supply an almost inexhaustible field for exploitation.

Much has been done in the way of development by the floating population of about 5000 Australians in New Guinea—a mere handful compared with the tens of thousands Japan has per-

manently settled in her Mandated Islands—but much remains to be done. Will Japan attempt to take this opportunity from Australia, and if she attempts, will she succeed?

Of course, of far more importance to Australia than New Guinea's trade is the island's obviously great strategic value, on account of which the colony of British New Guinea was founded 60 years ago. And Australia has always been aware of the avaricious glances of Japan (so much aware that there were only 40 Japanese in the Mandated Territory in 1937, as against 1525 Chinese. Unlike the Philippines, there's not much danger of a fifth column here). Construction of an air base at Port Moresby, capital of Papua, on the south coast, was begun while I was in New Guinea three years ago. The north coast and the Bismarck Archipelago are, however, more vulnerable to attack.

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