

how old it was, was it going to live there, and so on. Some of the older people were so uplifted with pleasure and excitement that they hopped about, crowing and slapping their stomachs. It was, I gathered, as good as a circus to them; or, rather, as good as a circus would be to any little buried country town at the back of beyond.

The Work that the Mission has Done

among these tribes, during the twelve years that it has been established, is little short of marvellous, for the Kuni and Oba-Oba people were, until lately, among the very worst of the New Guinea cannibal tribes.

They did not kill and eat only for revenge or in battle, they did it for the pleasure of enjoying human flesh, and they even killed in their own villages, which is a thing that cannibals very seldom do. They were fierce, intractable, murderous, in the very last degree, and the Fathers and Brothers who took up their abode among them had so many narrow escapes for their lives that they grew quite callous over the matter, and can hardly remember one adventure from another enough to tell you about it. In appearance, the tribes have altered not at all; a wilder-looking set of little savages I never saw. Small as a ten years' child, with hair not dense and bushy like the lowland people, but short, though woolly; with queer little monkey-paws that gripped and held, and great toes turned far out to clutch with when climbing; oddest of all, with bodies that seemed to be permanently bent back from the waist upwards, so that the chest and stomach almost described a semi-circle—the mountaineers assuredly suggested by their appearance the strange abnormal life they led. Some of the young women were pretty, and a few of the fighting-men were comely enough in their small way, but the old folks were unspeakably hideous, mere tatters of humanity, their naked bodies covered with bags of drooping skin, their faces like those of aged, weary, unhappy monkeys. Yet, despite appearances,

These Folk are Largely Civilised—

in all that matters. The Catholic Mission has acted with great wisdom in confining its efforts simply to the moral and religious life of the people, and in letting alone their native dress, customs, dances—everything, in fact, that is not absolutely wrong or wicked in their lives. The missionised pigmy is not the useless, immoral hybrid that one knows only too well about the Pacific generally—a creature that, in ceasing to be a savage, has not become a white man, but halts between the vices and bad points of both. About this district of Oba-Oba, the Catholic Mission has succeeded, at peril of life, in putting down, to a large extent, cannibalism, tribal war, and murder; it has almost done away with the custom of throwing unwanted children away in the bush to be eaten by wild pigs; it has wiped out polygamy in part, and made many Christian marriages, which are, as a rule, notably successful. It has placed the women on a somewhat higher plane than before, and ensured them decent and kindly treatment; it has taught the natives to care for and feed their sick people, and to be good to animals. It has baptised many, and hopes to baptise many more; but, in this matter, it goes slowly, and demands long probation. Strangest of all, among these wild mountaineers, it has found a good many who are eager to lead the actual Christian life—to make frequent Communion, attend often at Mass, keep up kindly and helpful relations with all their fellow tribes folk. But it has let them free.

The mountaineer remains a Papuan pure and simple. There is no attempt to drag him forcibly across a gulf of many thousand years; to make him leap at one bound from the stone age to the age of the aeroplane; teach him things for which he will have no use, and uproot customs that do him no harm, and keep him out of mischief. In the little schools, the children are taught catechism (in native), prayers, reading, writing, arithmetic, and some English—the 'lingua franca' of Papua, among whites and natives alike. Road-making, carpentering, the proper care of pigs and fowls, gardening, house-building, they learn from their work for the Mission—which, be it especially noted, is always paid for; no free labor is demanded from the natives, and no collections are taken up. Tools, salt,

beads, knives, looking glasses, and other things of inestimable value to the inland native they get from the Mission, in payment for work, or as the price of vegetables, pigs, fowls, and so on. There the civilisation stops, and there it is likely to stop. They do not wear clothes—true, the Sisters provide decent wrappers for the women to wear when they receive Holy Communion, but at no other time do they depart from their ordinary custom of going practically naked. It is no kindness to savages to teach them clothes-wearing, as medical and scientific men have long since learned. They are learning now that too much cheap civilisation is not good for the brown man either. There, the Catholic Mission has been ahead of them this many a year. Before the tribes dispersed to their homes again, I distributed largess among them in the form of salt, of which they are passionately fond.

Salt is the Current Coin

of the mountains, if anything is; the natives want beads, tools, or looking glasses at times, but salt 'goes' all the time, and everywhere. If you give a mountain child a handful of sugar, it will probably spit the stuff out as soon as it discovers that it has not got salt. They will eat it by itself as eagerly as a white child takes chocolates. What I gave the tribe was carefully wrapped up in leaves and taken home, to enjoy with the evening meal of sweet potatoes; the children, however, devoured what they could get on the spot, and afterwards licked each other's fingers and faces of the last remaining grains.

Next day I went to see the nearest of the villages. It looked to be almost within touch, but took the best part of an hour to reach; so is the way of things among the mountains. Once off the Mission track, we reverted, the Father and I, to the alleged arboreal ancestor of whom one has heard so much—crawling and climbing along, and using our hands almost as much as our feet, for that was the way of the native 'road.' Some of it at first I took for a landslip, some for the track of a torrent, and the rest I could not see at all, until the Father showed me certain depressions in the foliage of thick low bushes hanging right out over a cloudy precipice of unknown depth, and told me that this was the road now, and that one had to hold on tight!

It seemed impossible, but it was true; we had to walk for quite a good way in the tops of the bushes, hanging on for support to those immediately above. The light showed through the foliage on which we took our bird-like way; the angle of the slope scarce seemed to be an angle at all, being almost perpendicular. One false step would have sent us crashing down through the foolish little leaves and twigs to the very bottom of the peak. . . . This was the main road to the village, used by thirty odd inhabitants. One ceased to wonder at the prehensile great toe of the mountaineer, and the hand-like appearance of his foot. One would have been glad to be prehensile-toed oneself.

We did not find the people at home; they had nearly all gone to work in their gardens, leaving only one or two very old people and a few children behind. To see the way those little toddlers ran about on the extreme edge of nothing at all—for the village was built on the needle-like summit of a spiring peak, and most of its houses projected like brackets out over the clouds below—was enough.

To Make the Unseasoned Traveller Giddy.

How children are ever brought up in such places remains a mystery; one might as well (or so it seems) attempt to raise a dozen families on the scaffolding about some new public building, and expect them to reach the years of discretion uninjured. Yet, somehow, they do bring up children in these birds' nest places, and without accident, too.

The houses were very poor indeed, mere roofs of grass laid almost on the ground, and all supported on rickety piles that overhung the giddy depth below. You could see the clouds boiling beneath your boot-soles, when you climbed inside one of these precarious little shelters, and walked across its sagging floors of interlaced twigs and saplings. There were bows and arrows and spears inside, for hunting; pig-jaws for ornaments; little stages of bamboo to sleep on; nothing

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