

VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Papuan Missionary Tells of
the Dark Island—and a
Miracle Worked by
Modern Radio

Special to the "Record"
by

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EIGHTEEN months ago a party headed by two white men, Champion and Adamson, was sent to make a more extensive exploration of little-known country in the centre of New Guinea. They were away eight months, and then there were fears for their safety. A party was formed to travel to an outlying tribe which, it was suspected, had established contact with the unknown people whose country the white men were exploring, in the hope that the fate of the missing men could be learned.

Every night while preparations for departure were under way the reluctant relief party listened in to the Australian radio stations, hoping to hear that the missing men had been found—for they knew the outside world would have the news first by radio.

On the night before the morning the party was due to leave they listened again, hopefully, only to have those hopes dashed when no word came from the Australian stations. Then idly they tuned into the shortwave station at Daventry.

From that station, 11,000 miles away, it was learned that Champion and Adamson were that very moment rafting their way down the river only 60 miles distant from where the relief party was due to set out.

What more emphatic instance could be given of modern radio's annihilation of distance and its influence on life in primitive lands?

This, and even more, remarkable stories of adventure in the little-known country of Papua were told me by the Rev. Leonard Hurst, secretary for Australia and New Zealand of the London Missionary Society, who recently conducted a several months' administrative tour of New Guinea, and who is now conducting a similar tour of New Zealand.

Referring to the missionary work in the least explored of all countries, he said: "Some of our keenest support comes from former cannibals. Through our work, cannibalism has become almost a thing of the past, but from outlying districts one occasionally hears of an outburst, and someone is killed and eaten. Such cases, fortunately, are few and far between. However, primitive passions are very strong, and murder is still regrettably frequent, the most trivial reason being considered quite sufficient to take life. One man admitted he had killed simply because he was annoyed that the other talked too much!"

Communication, even in modern New Guinea, was a problem, there being practically no roads except in the vicinity of Port Moresby. Communication was principally by means of canoe or launch along the sea coast,



THE WIDOW WOMEN.

A macabre study of native women in the interior carrying their husband's skulls.

or along the banks of the rivers. "There are roads in the forest," said Mr. Hurst with a smile, "but they are the merest tracks, and have been used for generations by tribes seeking overland communication, or, more frequently, on the warpath. Since the establishment of resident magistrates more tracks had been constructed, but it is a constant fight against the jungle to keep them clear. When I was not moving about in canoe or launch I was walking, either through the jungle paths or along the beaches."

The native method of bridging rivers is primitive—and still the one chiefly employed. All that was done was to fell a tree trunk from bank to bank and, as this was not staided in any way, crossing for the novice was dangerous indeed. Whereas the sure-footed Papuans tripped lightly over the "bridges," Mr. Hurst was forced to adopt all manner of balancing tactics, and on his first attempt at making such a crossing he had to straddle the log and work his way across as best he could.

"Copper and rubber are being extensively exported to-day," he explained, "and the country is progressing well. A not-very-extensive trade is being done in shell, but experiments are being carried out in growing coffee and several species of fibre. An international syndicate is conducting an extensive search for oil in the Fly River area."

"There are several thousand white people scattered through the country, the greater part being in Port Moresby. The natives have accepted their presence calmly, and are very kindly disposed towards them."

"Health? Oh, Papua is quite a healthy country, much more so than most people think. In 50 years of mission work we have never once sent a man home because of ill-health, and some of our men have been there for between 30 and 40 years. They do contract fever, and get it pretty badly too, but with ordinary precautions, health



REV. LEONARD HURST.
I must go back to them . . .

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