

A NUTSHELL

Written for the Record
by
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use for the walls of their houses were all made from the leaf of the coconut. They could use coconut wood to build their houses and to make their implements, their agricultural tools.

"Their fishing lines were made from the fibre of the coconut, and their fishing nets. The nut gave them their most important food. The milk of the young nut was their drink, and its flesh their food. The flesh of the matured nut was good for cooking, and the cream from the matured nut was a sauce for tasty dishes.

"They could make their clothes, their sleeping mats from the coconut fibre and ropes for the lashing of their houses and canoes."

Via Apia

THE two investigators sailed first from Frisco to Apia. From Apia they caught the only passenger line service to Pukapuka, a trading schooner that called twice a year.

They knew very little about the island, except that it had been discovered in 1765 by Commodore Byron, who called it "Danger Island." No ship could find access to it; there was just a break in the reef navigable by the Polynesian canoes.

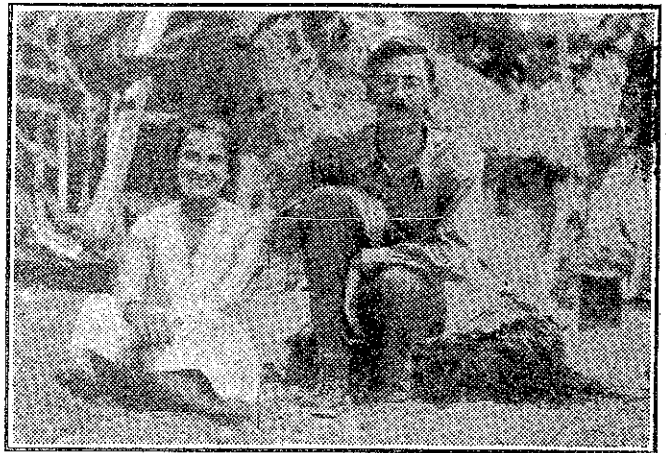
They knew the island had been missionised by the London Missionary Society sixty years ago and that native missionaries were on the island. Sometimes a warship from New Zealand called and stood off the reef. The journey from Apia in the trading schooner, with the wind behind them, took three days.

THE schooner anchored off the reef, the natives came out and the Beagleholes went ashore with their equipment in an outrigger canoe.

"It was a typical coral atoll," said Mrs. Beaglehole, "with a reef all round it and the land inside, three small coral islets strung in a lagoon inside the reef. The 600 inhabitants lived all on the one island and grew reserve food supplies on the others."

At the season of the year the natives would all leave the main island to make copra on the coconut plantations, collecting the matured nuts, husking them, breaking them open, drying them and taking the flesh out of the shell. They sold the copra and bought European goods of clothing, fish-hooks and knives.

Sometimes they met disaster through the hurricanes and tidal waves. Five hundred years ago a tidal wave swept the island that wiped out all the inhabitants except 13 men and their families who had found refuge on a 40-foot hill, the highest point on the atoll. And, in 1914, a tidal wave had washed away the taro beds and the coco-



DR. ERNEST AND PEARL BEAGLEHOLE.

"... We were very happy there."

nut cultivation and the people were faced with famine. This time the Cook Islands came to the rescue and took away a number of the people.

IN a house made of coral limestone with a corrugated iron roof—"A fine house," says Mrs. Beaglehole—the two strangers settled down to their job.

The house had been built by a native carpenter from the Lower Cook Islands, who had come to Pukapuka seven years before to build a church and had stayed on because no boat arrived that was going the right way to take him home.

"The house had one room," says Mrs. Beaglehole. "There was a bedroom at one end of the room and the study was at the other. The sitting-room was somewhere in between."

WITH this as their headquarters they set to work to explore the lives of the people and gather data for their book.

They found themselves among a contented, generous and happy race who had evolved a system of existence that fitted in with their needs and environment.

All the basic economic property, of land, and the food cultivated on the land, was owned by the village as a whole. Private ownership was limited to such things as clothes, fish-hooks and small canoes. But the land and the food grown on the land was owned by and shared out to every man, woman and child in the village.

Communal Life

"If a village grew papaia fruit," says Mrs. Beaglehole, "and the trees produced 60 papaia, these 60 would have to be divided among the 200 people of the village. The men might get only a half each and the women and children a quarter each, but the fruit was always shared."

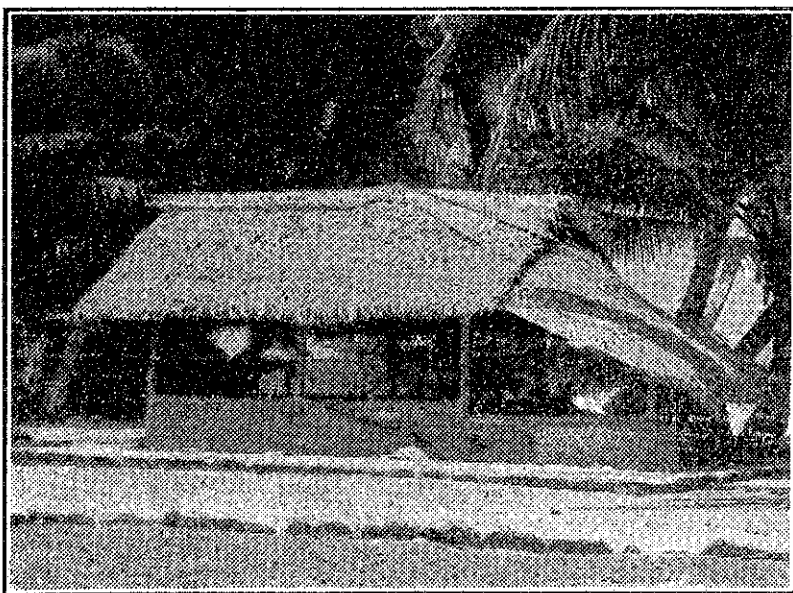
In each village there was a special guard of police set up to look after the village property. Property offences—of damage or theft—were considered the most serious of crimes.

The explorers found a lovable people with an economic and social system evolved to meet their needs, a knowledge of astronomy, and a good understanding of anatomy.

For serious illnesses they had their native medical practitioners who gave the patients some psychological help with their magic, but could do little else. Every man and woman on the island was a practised obstetrician.

THE Beagleholes, during their stay, studied every side of the life on the island, assisting at births, deaths and marriages, attending feasts and competitions; took the physical measurements of 200 natives to check up with

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NATIVE HOUSE AT PUKAPUKA.

"... It can all be made from the coconut."