

saw some of the old crafts employed. Great pains were taken to get the best of materials, and, if need be, the smallest item was brought a long way, even when something nearly as good stood at hand. In this instance the natives did employ a modest amount of ornament, but they did it, as the work proceeded, in the manner of the medieval craftsmen who built cathedrals. For instance, as soon as a pillar was set in place, it might be carved in relief with some simple symbol from daily life, such as the image of a crocodile. This decoration then merged with the structure, and did not have the appearance of something applied as an afterthought, as our ornamentation often does.

The comparatively recent arrival of European influence was a sudden blow to this age-old way of life. Their system, which fused all aspects of the human span into a closely-welded whole, has now vanished. The coherence of their living was destroyed because European life did not present itself to them as a rounded alternative system. European influence arrived in three main ways, at different times, and the separate institutions which brought it never really co-ordinated their policies. The Missions influenced religion; commercial interests influenced economic affairs; and the Government, last in the field, and, in the case of the Solomons, remotely controlled from the Colonial Office in London, took over administration, with nominal control over all aspects of native life. It was impossible for a simple people to adjust itself to such a radical change, when the alternative was presented in such a disjointed manner.

Now the native no longer has an integrated way of life; his problems tend to confuse him, and he has no single body of custom to tell him what he should do.

In the sphere of religion, most of the natives have been converted to Christianity, and they have adopted their new faith with impressive fervour. Especially at Vella we had opportunity to observe that

their new beliefs play an important part in daily life, and that their religious outlook is now positive and enlightened.

It was in the economic field that degeneration was most marked. Many natives possessed treasured relics of ancient workmanship, but could no longer make such things themselves. When a small party visited an ancient burial-place in the hills of Vella, we saw lying broken among the mouldering skulls an ornament which had been carved from a slab of white shell of the giant clam. It had a delicate fretwork pattern of great felicity, with dancing figures arranged in rows. We asked a native who the craftsmen were who had done this beautiful work, and he replied that this thing had always existed, because no man could possibly have made it. It was clearly unbelievable to him that his race had ever possessed such skill, which had vanished with the old beliefs which it adorned.

The old system of currency has also largely broken down. Shell money, pigs, and other ancient currency still seemed to have value, but the common medium of exchange and store of wealth was the Australian shilling piece, which was a labourer's hire for one day. Thus, so far as we could find, shell money was no longer manufactured.



Evacuation.