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Papua and New Guinea:
An Introduction

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Eastern Highlands
District,
New Guinea,
Territory of Papua
and New Guinea

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Dear Mr. Nolte,

One of the more noticeable features about the rather vast literature dealing with the island of New Guinea and its smaller outliers is the extent to which certain clichés of both thought and expression have impressed themselves upon itinerant writers and students. Most of the many hundreds of books that make mention of the area at some time make reference to its pteradactyl-like outline upon the map, while few escape the fascinating influence of its more readily observable differences from the countries of the Western European culture area.

The Pacific islands generally have long been a testing-ground for anthropological theory, and a treasure trove of curiosa and unknown customs, plants and animals, and even languages, but few have suffered so sadly from their reputation as store-houses of things new and wonderful as has Papua and New Guinea. Long reputed to be "the largest natural history museum in the world", the Australian half of the New Guinea mainland and its surrounding islands, the largest and best-known of which are New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, the Admiralty Islands and the groups of islands off the Southern tip of Eastern Papua, have been described by countless writers as "Stone Age Islands", the "Land that Time Forgot", the "Last Unknown", etc., but few indeed have been concerned to outline or analyse the vast changes that have swept this land since Europeans first arrived and settled here in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Although knowledge even about its past is sketchy at best, and quite often almost non-existent, the Territory's reputation as a preserve for natural scientists and anthropologists has scarcely aided in the dissemination of information about, or of views concerning, its rapid emergence into the modern world.

It is, for example, a cliché of the endless discussions about the Territory's future, in which the majority of the European population indulge, that the Territory has no existence. In a sense, what is usually meant by such a crude assertion is that the majority of the indigenous who inhabit the coastal beaches, the vast

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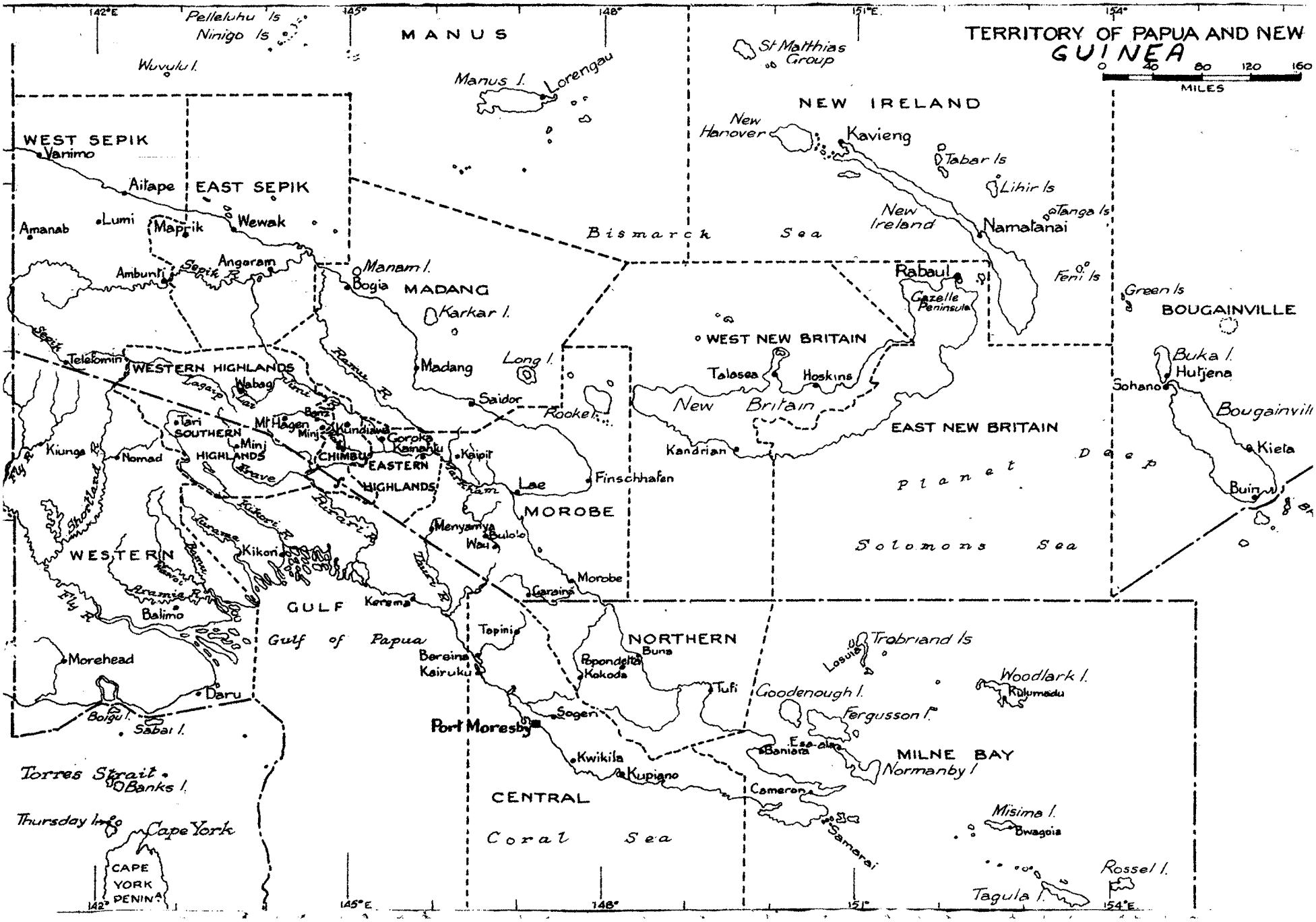
TERRITORY OF PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA
0 40 80 120 160
MILES
142°E
145°
148°
151°E
154°
MANUS
Pelleluhu Is
Ninigo Is
Wuvulu I.
Manus I.
Lorengau
St Matthias Group
NEW IRELAND
New Hanover
Kavieng
Tabar Is
Lihir Is
Tanga Is
New Ireland
Namatanai
Feni Is
Bismarck Sea
WEST SEPIK
Vanimo
Aitape
EAST SEPIK
Amanab
Lumi
Maprik
Wewak
Ambunti
Sepik R.
Angoram
Manam I.
Bogia
MADANG
Karkar I.
Rabaul
Gazelle Peninsula
Green Is
BOUGAINVILLE
Buka I.
Hutjena
Sohano
Bougainvill
Kiela
Buin
WEST NEW BRITAIN
Talasea
Hoskins
New Britain
EAST NEW BRITAIN
Kandrian
Long I.
Madang
Saidor
Rooke I.
Telefomin
WESTERN HIGHLANDS
Wabag
Jiwaka
Jagaip R.
Ramu R.
Tari
SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS
Mt Hagen
Minj
Kundiawa
Goroka
Kainantu
CHIMBU
EASTERN HIGHLANDS
Kiunga
Nomad
Fly R.
Strickland
Kaiapit
Watabung
Lae
Finschhafen
MOROBE
Menyamya
Boulolo
Wau
Kikori
Kikori R.
Purari
Tauri
Omati R.
Bamu R.
Aramia R.
WESTERN
GULF
Balimo
Kerema
Morobe
Garaina
Gulf of Papua
Tapini
Bereina
Kairuku
NORTHERN
Buna
Popondetta
Kokoda
Tufi
Trobriand Is
Losuia
Woodlark I.
Kulumadau
Goodenough I.
Fergusson I.
Morehead
Daru
Boigu I.
Saibai I.
Port Moresby
Sogeri
Ese-ala
Baniata
MILNE BAY
Normanby I.
Kwikila
Kupiano
Cameron
Torres Strait
Banks I.
Thursday I.
Cape York
CAPE YORK PENIN.
CENTRAL
Coral Sea
Misima I.
Bwagoia
Samarai
Rossel I.
Tagula I.
Solomons Sea
Deep
Planet

swamps and river deltas, the mountainous retreats and kunai-covered Highland valleys of the mainland, and its many surrounding islands, are as yet only dimly aware of the outside world beyond their own small, isolated communities, or even of the existence of life beyond their own small-scale societies. They do not yet identify themselves as members even of as large a grouping as a language group, much less as "Papuans and New Guineans". But changes are occurring at a pace that can only amaze the observer, changes in the physical and intellectual environment of daily life, and in the material and physical welfare of the people, in their ideas and beliefs, their art-forms and their daily work, that, although quite often perhaps not for the good, are probably of greater long-term importance to the people of the Territory, as well as to the outside world, than the many books that describe pre-contact life in the Territory would imply.

The Territory of Papua and New Guinea consists of the Eastern half of the island which is, confusingly, known simply as New Guinea, and of those outlying islands which lie between the borders of Queensland to the South, the American Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to the North, the British Solomon Islands to the East, and West Irian (formerly Dutch New Guinea) to the West. The Territories of Papua and New Guinea are, legally, two separate entities, amalgamated, allegedly for primarily administrative reasons, since the end of the Second World War, although the administrative union has, technically, only been permanent since the proclamation of the Papua and New Guinea Act in 1949.

Papua was first proclaimed as a Protectorate of the British Crown, and later formally annexed to Great Britain, during the 1880s, at a time when German ambitions in the area had become apparent, although the Australian colonies had been pressing for annexation for some time before this, as they had long feared French, German, Russian and even Japanese interest in the Pacific islands close to Australia. The Territory was first known as British New Guinea, and only formally became known as Papua when it was handed over to the new Australian Commonwealth in 1906. The Australian colonies had contributed fairly substantially to the costs of the British administration of the Territory, but, once Australia's defence fears in the area had been quietened, interest in the area became so slight that it took the Australian Government the best part of five years to annex the Territory formally to Australian rule.

New Guinea was also first annexed by the Germans during the 1880s - the Dutch had annexed the Western half of the mainland in 1828 - and was ruled by them under several different legal systems of control until 1914, when the Australian Army captured Rabaul, and undertook the Territory's administration until 1921. From 1921 onwards, until 1942, New Guinea was controlled by Australia as a C-class mandated territory of the League of Nations, while the attacks by the Japanese on Australian installations in New Guinea

led the Australian Government to place both of its New Guinea Territories under the legal control of the Army's Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (A.N.G.A.U.) as from early 1942. Until 1942, the two Territorial Administrations had existed in virtual isolation from each other, both in legal and administrative terms, as well as in terms of their respective attitudes towards their indigenous charges. If anything, the pre-War Papuan Administration under the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Hubert Murray, had been more protective of indigenous interests and welfare than the pre-War New Guinea Administrations, although both Administrations had lacked the funds, if not the zeal, to advance indigenous welfare and development policies in a serious manner.

The very nature of the War's progress, as well as reasons of administrative economy and efficiency, led the Australian Government to seek to continue the administrative union of the two Territories under the civilian Provisional Administration which gradually took over from A.N.G.A.U. as the Territories were cleared of the Japanese in 1945-6. With the placing of New Guinea under the United Nations Trusteeship System, while Papua remained a direct possession of Australia, the Australian Government of the day sought to continue the joint administration of the two Territories, and this was formalised under the terms laid down in the Papua and New Guinea Act, 1949, the principal constitutional document setting out the system under which the Territory of Papua and New Guinea is to be governed. Port Moresby, the former capital of Papua, became the capital of the combined Territory.

It is almost a cliché of anthropology that generalisations about the Territory's inhabitants are impossible, yet there are at least a few rather broad statements which do seem worth making at the outset of any discussion about the Territory's traditional way of life, in terms of which the rate and extent of change in the Territory since "first contact" can be evaluated.

The two and a quarter million people of the Territory live in approximately twelve thousand separate villages, although, in fact, these villages are of administrative significance for census-taking purposes rather than natural social and living units of the people themselves. The settlement patterns of the indigenes vary in size from villages of several hundred, even up to two thousand, people, down to the usual Highlands pattern of separate homesteads scattered over the country, each containing no more than ten to twenty people, although in trading and ceremonial relationships with many more.

Margaret Mead has estimated that between them the people of the Territory speak approximately one-fifth to a quarter of the world's known languages and dialects. Although linguists are continually discovering new language variants in the Territory, it seems relatively safe to estimate that the indigenous people of the Territory speak something of the order of seven hundred mutually indistinguishable languages and dialects, which vary in the extent

of their employment from Kuman, which possibly 180,000 people can understand, to probably no more than half a dozen languages which number populations of more than twenty or thirty thousand people among their speakers, down to some language groups which number no more than one small settlement group of no more than 30 or 50 people, who can communicate with one another in their primary language, but with no one else outside it, and are, therefore, forced to be at least bilingual in order to trade or marry with other groups.

Bleak as the traditional picture of the Territory's language situation may appear, contact has brought to the Territory three new systems of communication which have wrought a virtual revolution in the lives and thinking of the Territory's people. Pidgin English, a creole language which finds its roots primarily in English, German and Kuanua, the language of the Tolai people of the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, and the syntax of which is basically Melanesian in kind, is spoken now throughout New Guinea, but less in Papua, where the pre-War Administration resisted its use in favour of Police Motu. Pidgin is also extensively used in the British Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides, although its vocabulary, and even its syntax, vary rather widely between one part of even the one territory and the next. Despite United Nations criticism of its continued use, Pidgin, or Neo-Melanesian as it is now called, is the mother tongue of probably 10,000 New Guineans, and is the normal language of inter-racial and inter-language-group communication throughout New Guinea, and is being increasingly used in Papua, where a creolised version of Motu, the trading language which has developed along much of the Papuan coast from the language originally spoken by a number of villages in the vicinity of Port Moresby, Police Motu, is being increasingly displaced by the use of English and Pidgin. Some other indigenous languages have been used by particular missionary organisations in both Territories to further the range of possible communication beyond the traditional range, and Yabim and Kottec, for example, two small languages from the New Guinea coast, have spread further inland and along the coast with the Lutheran missionaries in the area, although they too are rapidly giving way before the rapid spread of Pidgin throughout New Guinea.

The traditional economies of the Territory were of a subsistence kind, in which there was no division of labour or widespread specialisation of function, except between men, who fought and conducted ceremonies, and protected the women, who carried out most of the agricultural work. In some societies, there was a further, rather narrow, division of labour, which allowed some men to spend their time in carrying out ritual and ceremony rather than devoting themselves fulltime to the usual pursuits of warfare, hunting and some agricultural work. The staple crops were yams, taro, sweet potato, sago, bananas, coconuts, some vegetables, and pig in the inland, supplemented by fish on the coast. The technological level of the Territory's societies stopped short at the Stone Age, while the major non-subsistence activities were dancing, singing, warfare, and religious

ritual and ceremonies, while some artworks, of primarily religious significance, and often of very great beauty and complexity in design, were produced in some parts of the Territory. Most trading was conducted through barter, often over many hundreds of miles of continual exchanges, and food, weapons, shell-money, Birds of Paradise feathers, earthenware pots and salt were often traded over very great distances between islands on the coast, or far into the mountainous interior of the Highlands. Thus, some Highland people were found to have received steel axes, which had been traded along the traditional trade routes, long before they saw their first white man, the source of these goods.

Although, then, there seem to have been certain similarities between the various societies of the Territory, and in the nature of their economies and size of residential community, it would be foolish to assume any wider uniformities than those outlined above. Anthropologists have long argued over the nature of the Territory's pre-contact political systems, although there does seem to be some basic agreement. In most of the traditional societies, power was rarely exercised by the one man over more than a very limited area indeed, and usually only over a few hundred - most often far fewer - people at the outside. Leadership tended to be relatively unstable, and was acquired, either through superior prowess in magic or war, or through possession of large numbers of pigs or wives, i.e. wealth, rather than inherited. It seems likely, however, that there were a certain number of leadership positions which were inherited, either through the male or the female line in particular societies, on some islands in South-Eastern Papua, while certain ceremonial and magical positions were subject to inheritance in many different parts of the Territory. Not only did leadership tend to be acquired and unstable in character, depending as it did quite often upon the fortunes of battle, or wealth derivable from skill at agricultural production, but it tended too to be acephalous, i.e. power tended to be held not by a single man in each residential group, but by a number of, usually older, men, who shared the power of political decision-making for the group among themselves, and did not defer to an individual leader for any great or continuous period of time.

Whatever the limited uniformities as between the various traditional social groupings outlined above, there are very few generalisations at all that can as yet be made as to the nature of the land tenure or kin systems of the Territory. It is just too simplistic to conclude merely that the traditional societies of the Territory were kin-oriented, and too early to provide any other worthwhile generalisations.

The traditional religions or systems of belief of the Territory have barely been outlined, although two anthropologists have tentatively concluded that the Highlands societies are probably more secularly oriented than the societies of the Papuan and New Guinea coasts. One critic of this theory has wondered aloud if almost exactly the opposite conclusions would be reached if one

simply changed the areas of study of the respective anthropologists around. At least there is still a lot of research to be done in the Territory, and very little study at all has been made of the impact of the forty-odd Christian missions on the people of the Territory.

Perhaps the major impression one derives from but brief observation of the Territory is the differential nature of its development. The coastal and island areas were first contacted with any lasting results in the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, although the first permanent settlements were only set up after the Germans and the British staked their claims in the 1880s. Apart from a number of mission and Administration stations set up on the coast, settlement in the Territory remained on a relatively small scale, except on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain where the Germans probably alienated far more land than was advisable, if one took the likely future needs of the indigenes of the area into account, while land alienation was very strictly controlled - in the indigenous interest - in Papua.

The most fascinating feature of the Territory's development in many ways was the simple failure of any Europeans at all to penetrate the Highlands until the early 1930s, when a number of patrols, principally concerned with the search for gold, discovered the homelands of what was later revealed to be more than 800,000 people whose very existence had not previously been suspected by the outside world.

Before the 1930s, it had always been assumed by the Europeans in the Territory that the Highlands were too barren and rugged for human habitation, and the two Territorial Administrations had lacked both the money and the curiosity to probe much further inland than the immediate surrounds of, and the valleys leading into, the coast. What they found, despite their expectations, were huge valleys, hidden in the mists of the Highlands, above 6,000 feet, and often higher, containing the vast populations of what are now known as the Chimbu, Goroka, Wahgi, and other Valleys. As late as the early 1950s, 100,000 people, whose existence had previously remained unexpected, were sighted for the first time, from the air, living precariously on the ridges of the Strickland Gorge of the Southern Highlands of Papua. Even today, some small groups of people are still being discovered for the first time, and contact is being made with them, in the Western Highlands and Sepik Districts of New Guinea, and in the Southern Highlands and the Western District of Papua. After the Second World War, in fact, "first contact" was often made from the air, with the result that much of the Territory has been advanced by a process of what has been termed "spot development", i.e. isolated airstrips and patrol posts were established, and the benefits of contact extended outwards from these spots on foot, rather than through even progress throughout the Territory.

The Territory, then, contains a population which varies in its degree of relative sophistication perhaps as widely as any in the world. In Port Moresby is to be found the new University of Papua and New Guinea, which was established in 1966,

and most of whose students, for obvious historical reasons, are drawn from the coastal and island areas of the Territory. In the Southern and Western Highlands and in the Sepik, people are still to be found only just emerging from the Stone Age, while in many areas the only Europeans who visit are the Administration's Patrol Officers, who may visit each village and bring the government to the people but once or twice a year. The Members from the Open Electorates in the House of Assembly, then, are men whose education varies from that of a teacher trained at an Australian teachers' college to one Member who speaks none of the Territory's linguae francae, and is a traditional fight-leader from the Southern Highlands. Nonetheless, selfgovernment is no longer a strange and distant concept to the people of the Territory, even if it still frightens many of them when the concept is discussed. In large part, in fact, the Territory is already selfgovern ing, even if the fundamental constitutional law is still a law of the Australian Parliament, and the House of Assembly is still subject to the Australian Administrator's power to disallow some of its Bills and the Australian Governor-General's power to withhold assent.

The tremendous variations in the relative development of different parts of the Territory is not simply a matter of luck, or the result of a failure of imagination on the part of the first European settlers and explorers in the Territory. Some parts of the Territory were neglected for some time simply because their indigenous populations resisted European influence for too long or with too much vigour, while the major part of the Territory was opened up at a time when it was held, not only in Australia, to be unsound policy for a metropolitan power to spend much money on the administration of its territories. Thus, the pre-War Administration of New Guinea had to pay for the development of the Mandated Territory from the income derived from its copra and gold exports, while the rather poorer Papuan Administration never received in any one year more than the exorbitant sum of £50,000 to pay for its entire work. After the War, of course, the Australian Government introduced the first large-scale development and welfare policies into the Territory, and it is with their effect on the development of the Territory that I hope a number of future Newsletters will be concerned.

Now, the Territory represents a rather different picture from that still painted by anthropologists and journalists in search of lost tribes and exotic practices, but the influences of the past remain, sometimes as particular modifiers upon otherwise modern practices and customs, sometimes as problems of belief and habit to be overcome. It simply seems a pity that so many visitors to the Territory tend to see it as a museum rather than a newly emerging country, struggling, somewhat belatedly, to catch up with the rest of the world. I trust, therefore, that the foregoing serves as something of a background to the problems of the Territory, and not as an apology or justification of past policies; simply as a background to the changes which I shall be concerned to try to analyse in future Newsletters.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Wolfers.

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