

## ADVENTURES IN PAPUA

### WITH THE CATHOLIC MISSION

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#### Introduction.

It is almost unnecessary, one might suppose, to describe Australia's own first-born colony to her; but as some may need the knowledge, we will offer it briefly.

According to the fantastic notion of an old-time missionary, New Guinea, when one looks at it on the map of Oceania, suggests a duck perched on the end of the long peak of Queensland. It would, indeed, be a gigantic duck, for it measures more than two thousand miles from beak to tail; its spine is formed by a huge chain of mountains 9 to 13,000 feet in height, its arteries are rivers like the Fly, navigable for five hundred miles, and its thighs could contain three United Kingdoms.

'Without past history,' says another missionary, Father Jullien, 'owning no legendary glories save the tales that connect New Guinea with the ancient Ophir, that mysterious, enchanted land whither Hiram's fleet went to find gold and treasure for the adornment for the gloriously shining throne of Solomon, New Guinea has no notable dates, no famous names to show, save the dates of the explorations that revealed her to the world, and the names of the great discoverers, George de Meneses, the Portuguese, 1524-1530, and the Spaniards, Ortis de Retes and Saaverda, 1528-1545.'

Later on, other sailors, passing by on the high seas, noted a few of its lofty peaks, and marked out, little by little, the shape of the land. But it was not till near the end of the nineteenth century that the great island began to attract attention, and to excite the desires of the greater powers.

It occurred to them, quite suddenly, that the situation of New Guinea pointed to much influence in the political and commercial future of the Pacific, since it was placed at the junction of two great sea routes, one running from Panama to India, the other from Australia to the ports of the Far East. On this account, it seemed advisable to take possession without delay of a place that enjoyed such a valuable strategic position.

Holland, by the simple right of neighborhood (her colonies adjoining New Guinea), had already taken possession of half the Papuan Continent, a share twelve times as large as herself. In 1884-6, England and Germany divided the rest, Germany taking the north-eastern portion, which adjoins her colonies, and England taking the south-eastern part, next to Australia. It is with this last part that we have to do.

When the Commonwealth became a nation, it wished, like every other self-respecting nation, to have its colony. The Mother country, always indulgent towards the stronger of her children, offered her powerful daughter British New Guinea as a coming-of-age gift, and the emancipated daughter made haste to unbaptise her mother's present. British New Guinea thenceforward was called 'Papua'—a harsh, ill-sounding, unmelodious word, whose ugliness made old inhabitants shudder with disgust. To-day, however, it only troubles the geographical memories of the older people, and continues to offend the susceptibilities of scientific men.

Papua, in spite of its ugly name, is a young colony with a future, and promises both honor and profit to Australia. It is a big new country, very rich and very beautiful. Read the descriptions that the author of this booklet has written; they are fine 'genre' paintings, made by an artist who has lived in the country she paints, and thus has learned to see correctly, and who, in describing what she has seen, uses a pen that can do the work of a brush—so vivid is the local color in her work, and so marked the realism.

#### THE MISSION FIELD.

In this great country, the influence of the Catholic Mission closely confined at each side by that wretched

piece of political Erastianism, called 'spheres of influence'—which one is astonished to see exercising its narrow tyranny among a free, proud people like the English—extends principally over the Mekeo plain, which is the tract of country lying immediately behind Hall Sound. The Mission influence extends also far inland, into the rugged foothills of the huge Owen Stanley range, and passes over them to reach the mighty ramparts of the great Central Chain.

The Mission headquarters are at Yule Island, a lovely island situated on the southern coast, about sixty miles from Port Moresby, the capital. It is framed by a wonderful amphitheatre of mountains which lifts itself in six gigantic steps up to the heights of the Great Central Chain, raising its magnificent circle of peaks far into the sky from end to end of the horizon. It overlooks the bay of Hall Sound, which lies outspread like a beautiful lake at its feet, and shields it so effectively against the storms of the north-west, and the persistent trade-wind of the south-east, that it may fairly claim to be the best harbor in New Guinea. It is large enough to float a squadron of men-of-war, calm enough to shelter a single dinghy. In truth, God has provided a wonderful and lovely cradle for His young Church in New Guinea.

It was at this spot that a young priest of twenty-five landed one day—Father Henry Verius, of the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Growing impatient at the official delays which kept him waiting at Thursday Island, he had daringly loaded up a little fishing cutter, and made for New Guinea by himself, with a few Australian blacks and a compass. Through the perilous labyrinth of the reefs that stud the coral sea he travelled, trusting his boat to the care of our Lady, whose picture he had fastened to the foot of the mast. The Blessed Virgin heard the simple prayer of this truly ingenuous soul. She took the rudder, and on the first of July, 1886, the vessel cast anchor on the south side of Yule Island, at the foot of the hill where Father Verius celebrated the first Mass said in New Guinea, three days later.

This was the definite act of occupation of the Catholic Church. The massacre of Father Mazzuconi and his companions, in Woodlark, in 1855, had for a time turned away the stream of missionary effort to other shores. It was Leo XIII. who brought it back again.

At his command, Mgr. Navarre, at the time Bishop of Melanesia, travelled from New Britain to Torres Strait, in order to reach New Guinea from that place. It was in pursuance of his orders that Father Verius, after his dangerous voyage, landed on Yule Island.

He arrived there alone, destitute of everything save confidence and hope, and strong in his faith in the mission that he had received from the Vicar of Christ, to plant the Church in New Guinea.

He did indeed plant the Church of Jesus Christ there—at the price of what hardships, what labor, God alone can tell! We know this much, that he died in seven years, at the age of thirty-two, utterly worn out. He had just been consecrated Coadjutor-Bishop to Mgr. Navarre.

The beginning was full of hardship, like the beginning of every mission. The first ten or fifteen years were mostly passed by the missionaries in exploring and clearing the country, in studying native character, customs, and languages, in building, and also—in dying. During this short period of time, the venerable Head of the Mission saw the third of his staff fall by the way—twenty-eight missionaries, all in the fulness of youth and strength. In spite of these trials, or rather on account of them, the work of God took root and flourished. In 1897, the mission had already three districts on the coast and in the plain. In 1900, a fourth district was opened in the Owen Stanley Range, from whence the light of the Gospel shone upon sixty-three villages. In 1905, further in the interior, a fifth district was brought under influence; and this present year of 1913 is seeing the commencement of a sixth district, in the Upper Vanapa, very high up among the lofty ramparts of the Central Chain.

The apostolic work is carried on to-day in six different languages among a populace divided into forty-

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