

NOTICE

RESPECTING THE

NATIVES OF NEW GUINEA.

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BY  
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F.R.S., M.R.A.S., &c.

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IV.—*Notice respecting the Natives of New Guinea.* By *Wm. MARSDEN, Esq.*  
*F.R.S., M.R.A.S., &c.*

Read July 3, 1830.

THAT the extensive island of New Guinea (by the Malays denominated *Tanah Papūah* or land of people with frizzled hair) should be less known to Europeans than almost any other part of the Eastern Archipelago, may be chiefly attributed to the savage manners of its inhabitants, whom the more civilized race of people in the neighbouring islands have always represented as cannibals; but of the justness of which imputation no direct proofs have hitherto been furnished by our navigators. How far the following detail of circumstances may warrant a belief that a practice well ascertained to exist in Sumatra and New Zealand, prevails also in a district of this country, the reader will form a judgment for himself, upon estimating the degree of credit to which it is entitled. The evidence of what is so abhorrent from our nature ought, doubtless, to be free from the suspicion either of credulity, or of a disposition to the marvellous; but on the other hand it may be questioned whether those who, from attachment to preconceived opinions, endeavour by captious arguments, or by ridicule, to discredit what is supported by unexceptionable testimony, are not equally enemies to the cause of truth, with those who by plausible relations give colour to what is false.

The Northumberland East-India ship, commanded by Captain Rees, sailed from Bencoolen early in March 1783, on her way to China, and, on account of the season, proceeded by what is termed the Eastern passage. On the 30th of that month she anchored in a bay situated in latitude  $2^{\circ} 26' S.$ , on the north-west part of the coast of New Guinea; which seems to be the Freshwater Bay of Dampier. What follows is extracted from the Log-book of that ship:—

“ April 1st. Sent the boats on shore with the second and fourth officers, to reconnoitre, as we are in want of wood and water; but on their getting near the shore, found the natives in great numbers on the beach, and the

officers, not liking their appearance, thought it prudent to return to the ship without landing.

“ 2d. Sent the boats on shore under charge of the first and fourth officers, with some presents, to endeavour to make friends with the natives. At one P.M. the long-boat and jolly-boat returned to the ship, and informed me that the natives had run away with five of the Lascars and taken them into the woods. Immediately sent the jolly-boat to the assistance of the cutter, which had not returned, and soon after observed a firing on shore. At seven P.M. the cutter returned and informed me that the jolly-boat had been cut off; that Mr. Sayer the chief officer, Mr. Niven the fourth officer, and a Mr. Holmes, with six of the boat's crew, were killed on shore by the natives, and that the cutter had a very narrow escape of having been cut off also, being chased by many boats; but on three shots being fired at them from the ship, they returned to the land.”

About two years after this unfortunate occurrence (no memorandum of the precise time having been preserved), an opportunity presented itself of acquiring some knowledge of the subsequent transactions on shore, by an examination of three persons who were among the number of those made prisoners on the occasion, and who had fortunately been enabled to obtain their release. One of these was an Englishman, a carpenter's mate of the ship; the other two were Lascars, of which class five in the whole were saved. From the former no satisfactory information could be procured, as it seemed to be his object to raise the importance of his adventures by giving them a romantic air. Paying, therefore, little further attention to him, I proceeded to question the black sailors in the Malayan language, of which they had acquired a competent knowledge, either in some previous voyage, or during their latter residence with the people to whom they owed their deliverance.\* These were plain men, but not deficient in intelligence, who shewed no disposition to disguise or exaggerate the truth, and gave clear answers, distinguishing what they had themselves seen, from what they had been told. The following is briefly the substance of their relation:—

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\* It appears from the journals of Dampier, Forrest, and others, that the inhabitants of the islands on the western side of New Guinea, and even of one so near to the coast as *Pulo Sabuda*, are of the race commonly termed Malays. At an island of this description it was that M. Sonnerat had intercourse with some *Papūah* people, and not on the main.

The name of the place near to which the ship anchored they called *Braou*.\* In the fight that ensued between the crews of the boats and the natives, the former were overpowered; several of them were killed, and others made prisoners. When first seized, their hair was cut off, their hands were bound, and ropes were fastened about their necks; but they were afterwards suffered to go about freely in the day-time, and only at night had clogs attached to their legs, to prevent any attempt at escape; for which reason also they were kept in separate huts, that the less opportunity might be afforded for concerting plans. They were not treated with severity, were not beaten, nor compelled to work, and had a sufficient allowance of provisions; chiefly sago-bread.

The dead bodies of the people belonging to the boats, who fell in the attack, were *eaten* by the natives, according to their usual custom; but none of the prisoners were killed for that purpose, nor, as far as they knew, were they in the habit of feasting upon the bodies of any persons sacrificed for the occasion. No distinction, however, is made between such as are slain and those who die a natural death. Of three Europeans thus devoured, they were eye-witnesses of the fate of two; one of them a mate, the other a midshipman or petty officer: the third was a Portuguese helmsman, who was not eaten in their presence. The Lascars were desired by the people not to be alarmed at these proceedings, but to go to sleep; no harm being intended to themselves. The flesh was cut from different parts of the body and limbs, with small knives, then prepared by heating over the fire in earthen vessels, and eaten without salt or pepper.† The bones they broiled slightly, and when the remaining flesh was picked off, they were laid up in the house, in order to their being afterwards employed in the manufacture of weapons, tools, and fish-spears; specimens of which these people brought away with them. The skulls, being stripped of the flesh, were kept in baskets. On occasions of this kind a number of persons are collected together from the neighbouring dwellings; such meals not being made in a private or family way, although the bodies of friends and relations are eaten, as well as those of enemies. Both are treated in the same manner.

\* This name is not found in the maps, but I read it in a Malayan letter from the Sultan of *Tidore*. The European called the place of his captivity, *Yaloupe*; but the prisoners may have been distributed among different villages.

† The *Battas* of Sumatra, in such feasts, use both; the red or chili-pepper being understood.

There is no deficiency of provision in the country. Sago in particular, of which they make a kind of bread called *toyo*, is abundant.\* They also eat fish, worms picked from rotten wood,† and the vermin from their heads. They are uncleanly in their persons; never washing the body, which, they say, is injurious to health. The running water of the place, and what the natives drink, is of a red colour, proceeding from the quality of the soil; but their favourite beverage is toddy or palm-wine, drawn from the sago-tree, with which they intoxicate themselves, not only at their feasts, but habitually in the evening.

The inhabitants are very numerous. Ten thousand men (according to the ideas of the Lascars) would not be sufficient to subdue them: yet they have no king! Each house or family seems to be independent, and is in the continual practice of making war on its neighbours; seizing each others' wives and children and selling them for slaves, to the people of the adjacent islands. They go naked for the most part; the men sometimes wearing a covering made of the bark of a tree, and the women a sort of apron of a loose texture, reaching to the knees. Bows and arrows, as well as spears or lances, are commonly employed.

The small knives before spoken of they procure from an island named *Onin* or *Honin*; of the inhabitants of which the *Braou* people stand much in awe.‡ These the Lascars described as a civilized race, reasonable in their conduct, and behaving to strangers accordingly as they themselves are treated; returning good for good and evil for evil. Their religion is that

\* For an account of their method of preparing this bread, see Forrest's Voyage to New Guinea. He brought to England and gave to Sir Joseph Banks, one of their earthen ovens for baking it.

† Such worms are also a common article of food with the natives of New Holland, who climb old trees to procure them.

‡ I do not find this island laid down in any chart, but in Valentyn, vol. iii., incidental mention is made of it. Captain Forrest's Voyage also contains the following passages that seem to apply to it:—"North-east of *Goram*, one day's sail, is *Wonim*. In Keytz's Voyage mention is made of *Onin*, which I take to be *Wonim*, being 20 leagues north-east of *Goram*. . . . . The people of *Efibe* told me, that a day's sail south of *Wonim*, a gulph stretched far into the land of New Guinea." If this gulph, as is probable, be meant for M'Cluer's Inlet, *Onin* should lie between the first and second degree of south latitude, and we may suppose it to be the island described by Dampier, in lat. 1° 43' S., the inhabitants of which, he says, "are a sort of very tawney Indians, with long black hair, who in their manners differ but little from the Mindanayans

of *Islām*, and the language of the Malays is familiar to them.\* The *Papūah* people of the coast nearest to this island of *Onīn* are subject to its *raja*. They resemble the natives of *Braou* in person, complexion, and frizzled hair; but speak a different dialect, and do not eat human flesh.

By the interference of this *raja* it was that our prisoners, after a detention of about six months, obtained their release; but in what mode, whether by ransom or intimidation, I could not satisfactorily learn from my informants, who probably had not themselves much knowledge of the negotiation. "As the *Braou* people (said one of them) did not require us to work, and we were only a burthen to them, I do not know with what view they kept us; unless it were to make a meal of us one day or another." But their own previous statement of the native customs shews that such an apprehension (however natural in their predicament) was groundless, and the more obvious motive for the detention of the prisoners was the chance of their being ransomed. Be this as it may, it appears that this remnant of the sufferers was picked up at one of the islands by another India ship (the *Queen*, I believe) and conveyed to Canton.†

Such is the limited extent of the information obtained from these Indian sailors, through the medium of a language with which they were not per-

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and others of these eastern islands. These seem to be the chief; for besides them we saw also shock, curl-pated, New-Guinea Negroes; many of which are slaves to the others, but I think not all. . . . They have large boats and go over to New Guinea, where they get slaves, fine parrots, &c., which they carry to *Goram*."

\* Their language, as appears from scanty specimens, is a dialect of the Polynesian, or general language of the eastern islands, of which the Malayan itself is a cultivated dialect.

† Captain Henry Wilson, in the East-India Company's packet-ship *Antelope*, was on the north-eastern coast of New Guinea, near Schouten's Island, about the time of the *Northumberland's* accident on the north-western side. The country thereabouts he described to me as being remarkably populous. Upwards of fifty canoes came off to the ship, and many of the natives were allowed to come on board, who returned to the shore in a peaceable manner. By means of Captain Forrest's short Vocabulary of *Papūah* words (collected by him at Dory Harbour, but differing from those spoken at *Braou*), he managed to make himself pretty well understood. Upon the third day, however, they came off in such multitudes, and with an appearance so evidently hostile, that he found it necessary to repulse them with his small arms. Much had been previously said by them about a large ship, the purport of which he did not comprehend until his arrival in China, where he found the *Northumberland* and was informed of her disaster. The *Antelope* sailed from Canton in June, and in August 1783 was wrecked on one of the *Pelew* (*Pilū*) islands.

fectly acquainted. Whatever degree of importance may attach to it can be relative only to the very slight knowledge we have of the country or its inhabitants. There is reason to expect, however, that the cloud which has hung over it will ere long be dispelled, as we learn from the public Gazettes that directions were some years since given by the Government of the Netherlands for taking possession in the King's name of its western coast, and that accordingly a settlement was formed, in August 1828, at a river in lat.  $9^{\circ} 42'$  S., nearly opposite to the North coast of New Holland; where the natives are represented to be not wholly uncivilised. From the known liberality of his Majesty's sentiments we have the strongest grounds to hope that, with a view to the extension of geographical knowledge, and in order to satisfy rational curiosity on a subject of general interest, publicity will from time to time be given to the circumstances attending the new establishment, and to the progress of discovery in a quarter that has not hitherto been scientifically explored.