

Scientist Seeks Traces of Old Civilisation in North Queensland

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THE author resumes the series of articles on his three years among the native tribes of Cape York Peninsula, North Queensland, which began in "The Mail" some time ago.

In this article he describes the return to Lloyd Bay, where on the previous expedition, he had discovered a hero cult of Papuan origin, with masked "devil dancers" that had invaded Cape York Peninsula, bringing with them strange customs and beliefs that have reacted curiously upon the natives of this area of North Queensland.

This article tells of the making of camp, of flea plagues, of a "meat hunger" that would not be appeased, of a meal shared with a shark—"crumbs from the rich man's table"—and of a curious venture in poultry farming.

MANY months elapsed before it was possible to return to the field in North Queensland.

The significance of the masked dancers of the crocodile cult that we had encountered here on the previous expedition was now manifest, for it was evident that they were not indigenous, but that they were of Papuan origin.

The opportunity offered for a study of the reaction of the indigenous culture and social organisation under the influence of foreign invasion was also apparent.

I was anxious therefore to return to the area to complete this work before proceeding to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

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of anthropologists, claim that there is evidence that the distribution of cultures on the earth's surface is the result of "diffusion" from the single centre in which they were invented—in this case, chiefly from Egypt. They also claim that there is evidence in many parts of the world of the previous existence of an archaic civilisation—an earlier race of sun worshippers called by Perry the "Children of the Sun."

These people, Perry believes, set out upon a quest for gold and pearls, and were responsible for the mysterious megalithic monuments, such as those of Easter Island, that are scattered over the face of the earth.

Sir Elliot Smith and Perry have claimed that there is evidence in Australia of influence of this "archaic" civilisation and of the "heliolithic" culture which they believe to have had its origin in Egypt. Sir Elliot Smith has stated his belief that the mummification of the dead practised in Torres Straits and North Queensland, not only originated in Egypt, but that it shows evidences of the peculiar technique of embalming that was practised for the first time in the twenty-first dynasty.

It is certain, at any rate, that the mummification or the embalming process practised on Cape York Peninsula did not originate there; nevertheless, the claim of Sir Elliot Smith is bold, and needs all the ingenuity of its author to support it.

As my own previous work had pointed to the probability that this mummification had accompanied the cults of the wandering culture heroes that swept down from Papua through Torres Straits and into Queensland, and as Sir Elliot Smith has based his claims on its Egyptian origin chiefly upon certain technical aspects of embalming—notably upon the site of the incision for the removal of the viscera—I was anxious to return to this same area for a further period to seek out and examine any preserved bodies that might remain—a resolution that was to lead not only to interesting and unexpected discoveries, but also to some strange adventures.

IN order to complete the work on the east coast as speedily as possible, it was arranged that we should establish a base in the vicinity of Cape Direction and work to the south and north with a shallow draught motor launch. Early in April we sailed from Brisbane in a steamer that was to land us and our 23-ft. motor launch Twai at Cape Direction.

The journey northward was long and slow, but as the engine of the launch proved to be in a bad state of repair the time was fully employed in dismantling the engine. Adequate tools and spare parts were not available, and in spite of our efforts the engine broke down completely after landing our stores and gear near Lockhart River Mission Station.

Nothing remained but to send the boat back to Brisbane for an over-haul. Next day we stood on the

beach and saw her towed away to the steamer, our sole means of transport upon which all our plans for the season's work had depended gone.

But there was no time to be lost; several tons of stores and equipment lay on the beach, and in this area under the ranges of mountains fringing the coast rain falls at frequent intervals even during the south-east trade, the "dry" season.

The tent and fly were pitched to shelter most of the equipment, bunks were constructed on the fringe of a patch of jungle above spring tide level, and natives were employed to construct a wurlie over these and to thatch it with a heavy covering of tea-tree (*Melaleuca*) bark.

A TABLE and benches were built from planks, rough hewn with an axe under a spreading *Ficus* tree, and finally a photographic dark room, heavily thatched with blady grass, was added.

Rain fell at frequent intervals, and during May, June, and July, the height of the dry season, heavy showers fell almost every night. The humidity was intense, and heavy fungus growths covered boots and camera cases, while mildew grew all over the inside of the tent, so that it reeked with a musty odor.

Everything had to be kept off the ground on timbers, which, in their turn again were subject to the attacks of white ants, which would build tunnels several yards long in a single

nels several yards long in a single night to reach the cases and material that they destroyed.

To add to the discomfort of the camp, a succession of flea plagues broke out, and for a week at a time the camp was overrun.

Fleas swarmed in the tent and in every dry place; to enter the tent was an ordeal from which one emerged with legs swarming with fleas. The method of approach was to stand a few yards off, to make up one's mind what one was about, and to dash into the tent, stamping one's feet violently while seizing the object and making off.

In vain we conducted systematic "drives" to combat the fleas. We boiled water in kerosene tins and threw this about the camp, with phenyle and kerosene; sometimes we added dugong or engine oil; we moved camp periodically; we systematically burned rubbish and debris.

In desperation we turned our attention to the dogs and saturated their coats with dugong oil to kill the fleas, but our efforts proved unavailing.

And then they disappeared as suddenly and as inexplicably as they had come!

(OUR next care was for the petrol that we had brought for the launch. Exposure on the deck of the ship and the humid atmosphere had caused many of the tins to leak. It was too late to paint the tins, already corroded, but the medical supplies proved equal to the difficulty.

Fortunately we carried large quantities of adhesive tape. Selecting a hot day, we washed the whole of the tins with fresh water, dried them in the sun, and applied "patches" of medicated tape to the wantji (sores), as the natives who assisted persistently called the holes in the tins ("He got wantji, boss!")

Then we painted them all with red lead, especially over the tape, and stacked the whole dump some feet off the ground, covering it with bark.

(Next Week—"Three Years in the Old Stone Age.")



THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL race had its cradle in Egypt, according to the "diffusionist" school of anthropologists. Dr. Thomson is studying the customs of the Australian black so that they can be compared with the "diffusionist" theory. The natives in the picture are taking part in tribal rites.



TWO AUSTRALIAN NATIVES that have apparently developed an affinity for one another. This black man is not disturbed by the presence of the huge snake draped around his neck.





DONALD F. THOMSON returns to North Queensland to continue his study of the natives. He is shown dressed in shirt and shorts and ready for the rigors of life in an aboriginal camp.



AN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINE carrying home a kangaroo after a successful hunt.

