NORTHERN JUNGLES.

New Guinea Affinities.

In this article Mr. Donald F. Thomson, D.Sc., of the Melbourne University, continues the series of articles on his three years among the native tribes of Cape York Peninsula, North Queensland, which began in "The West Australian" some time ago. He describes the flora and fauna of the jungles.

THE first objective of our return to the eastern seaboard of Cape York Peninsula was the study of the mourning and burial customs of the area, which not only vary greatly even within this restricted territory, but which are of peculiar theoretical and cultural importance on account of the possible light that they shed upon the vexed question of the migrations of people.

The technique employed in mummification of the dead—in the process of embalming the body—and particularly the site of the incision, has been used by Professor Sir Eliot Smith and the "diffusionist" school of anthropologists to demonstrate that the embalming of the dead as practised in Northern Australia not only originated in Egypt, but that it showed evidence—which Sir Eliot regards as irrefutable—of a technique peculiar to one of the later dynastic periods.

The aboriginal does not as a rule bury his dead immediately. Death and mourning among primitive Australians are very different from these things as we know them. With one or two exceptions, death from natural causes is unknown—the death of an individual therefore is due to an act of hostility, and the group to which he belongs as well as his relations, suffer loss thereby. Most of the complicated mourning ceremonies serve this end, that they enable the relatives of the deceased, and the group to which he belongs, to give ritual expression to the loss that they have suffered, and also to enable a scapegoat to be found, generally, either by magical means or by the reading of portents. In this way, they are enabled to avenge a death and to appease their sense of loss and the damage to their group solidarity.

Tommy.

After nearly two months in camp we were eager to undertake the trek inland with pack horses. Tommy, as was his wont in settled camps, or when near his own people, was growing troublesome. Four years earlier Tommy had come to us with a firmly established reputation—of intertribal proportions—as a liar. Not for nothing had he come by his sobriquet, "Tommy the Liar"—"Like that from small boy; no matter he tell you good thing, you can believim," one old warrior had told me. But in those days

good thing, you can believim," one old warrior had told me. But in those days he was as a babe in arms, a sucking dove; he lacked that refinement, the finesse, that he was to acquire in his later years. But Tommy was a rough weather friend, at his best in times of stress; on a hard trek his virtues shone; in the idleness of a permanent camp his inventive genius had full play.

No matter how black the evidence against him, Tommy was never dismayed; Tommy did not believe in evidence! His only fault was his thoroughness; he would furnish at least six apparently perfectly sound and watertight alibis for each shortcoming! Tommy was one of those happy people who, caught redhanded, assumed an air of injured innocence. Once, when I had caught him red-handed, I exclaimed with admiration: "Oh, Tommy, you ARE a liar." "Me no lie, Boss," he cried in hurt tones.

At this time Tommy's principal duty was to watch the horses. A horse boy's job is to muster the team every morning and evening, take off the hobble strap from one leg and buckle it around the other, temporarily freeing the horses, and then drive them back to water, where they are hobbled again. In this way the mob is kept together, and any missing horses are quickly detected and a search made for them. We began to suspect that Tommy's daily muster was a very perfunctory business—that he went off with a fish spear instead of a stockwhip. At length my wife devised a means of outwitting Tommy, by discovering a sudden use for a few long hairs from the grey mare's tail. But we reckoned without the genius of Tommy. Towards evening he returned triumphant, proudly bearing the greater part of the grey mare's tail!

In the remote hills beyond the valley of the Lockhart River we learned of an approaching burial ceremony and the final disposal of a mummified body. Immediate preparations were made for a trek, for we knew that few mummies now remained, and here, at least, was the possibility of examining a "mummy" and of placing on record the details which might prove of so much interest and importance.

Enter "Yelephan."

But we were in need of more horses, and accordingly we sent Tommy inland to obtain one or more saddle horses. After an absence of three or four days he returned just as the brief dusk of the tropics was falling.

My wife and I were sitting close to our camp when Tommy rode up on a lanky horse. He was a big horse in his own right, but seen in the dusk, from our sitting position, he towered like a phantom beast above us. "My word, Tommy, that one no yarraman, that one elephant!" we exclaimed, and "The Elephant" he was named.

"Yelephan!" replied Tommy, and as "Yelephan" he finished his days with us. Curiously enough, the boys do not always recognise a horse by its own name; thus, we had in the team the "Buckjumper," so-called from his habit of throwing his pack load and an ally known to Tommy as "mate belong Buckjumper." More than one horse had his "mate belong," owing, perhaps, to the fact that Tommy found them together when mustering.

After Tommy's return we made ready for the inland journey, with pack-horses. On the first day we left camp at Bare Hill, near Cape Direction, in the morning, crossed the wide valley of the Lockhart River—travelling through miles of tall blady grass as high as the backs of the horses, and rippling in the south-east trade wind like an emerald sea. That night we reached the upper fresh water reaches of the river, and camped close to the dense tropical jungle that fringes it. The jungle fringing the Lockhart River is an oasis, and one of the finest jungles on Cape York Peninsula. A fresh stream ran swiftly over a sandy, gravelly bed; birds, many of them quite new and strange to us, were numerous and as scrub fowl and scrub turkey were plentiful, we camped for a day or two, and secured zoological specimens and data.

Pigeons, the exquisite little Green Pigeon, the Purple, and Rose-crowned Fruit Pigeons, and other splendid tropical species, were abundant, and in the early mornings the loud "Lullah! lullah! o-o-om!" of the Purple-breasted Pigeon or Wompoo, boomed through the scrubs. The Wompoo is known to the natives of this region as "Lullah"—an onomatopoeic word, like the native names of many birds. We had long been short of fresh meat, and reluctantly, we secured several pigeons for the pot. Most of these were gorged with fruits to such an extent that when they fell, fruit poured from their bills, and exuded from their throats.

Exotic Forms.

The strong New Guinea affinities of certain of the flora and fauna of North Queensland have often been remarked but nowhere is this more strongly shown than in the valleys of the Lockhart, Nesbitt and neighbouring rivers. During that first day's ride we encountered many exotic forms. In the swamps of the Lockhart Valley the true Pitcher Plant (Nepenthes) was abundant, and on the low gnarled Melaleuca trees the curious spiny "ant-house plant" (Myrmecodia) was seen in abundance—its great fleshy stems honeycombed with

[illegible] great fleshy stems honeycombed with the galleries in which dwelled colonies of ants. What purpose does this curious association of ant and plant serve? Does the plant really derive protection from would-be insect enemies that threaten to devour its succulent tissues? The plant itself gives us no clue; the ants discourage intimate investigation.

The Cuscus (Phalanger maculatus), frequently called "monkey opossum," which was abundant in the jungle or "scrub," where we had camped, is also a true New Guinea form, found in the jungles only, of a restricted area of Cape York Peninsula. It is a true marsupial—a creature of lemur-like aspect, its most striking character its huge golden eyes. The colouration of the Cuscus is remarkable, for there is a well-marked sexual dimorphism—the female is uniform grey, the male grey, blotched and mottled with white, which gives him at a distance a somewhat "mouldy" appearance.

In this jungle our sleep was disturbed at night by a small, active little mammal. On investigation it proved to be Melomys, the curious mosaic-tailed rat —so called on account of the tesselated or mosaic form of the scales of the tail.

Bird Life.

But the bird life was infinitely more strange and wonderful, many of the birds claiming closer kinship with the birds of New Guinea than of Australia. Not least remarkable were the parrots and cockatoos. The giant Palm Cockatoo—known to the natives of Kila—a formidable grey-black bird with red cheeks, armed with an inchedibly powerful bill that it employs for opening and extracting the kernal of the Pandanus or Screw Palm, was numerous on the Lockhart and neighbouring rivers.

In this area, too, the Great or Queensland Bower Bird, familiar elsewhere throughout the Peninsula, was replaced by the fawn-breasted species—in reality an invader from New Guinea. Just here, too, the natives have raised the Bower bird, Portjiwo, as he is called, to the level of a culture hero, and it was he—the Old Man Portjiwo—who, in the dream times ("the high and far off times") invented the initiation dances called "Okainta." An invader from foreign shores, he has himself become the Culture Hero of an invading Papuan cult of masked dancers.

Many years ago, the late Dr. W. MacGillivray, of Broken Hill, with Mr. W. McLanna, discovered two hitherto unrecorded and very gorgeous New Guinea parrots in the Pascoe River district. Nothing was known of their habits, even their nests and eggs are unknown, and they have long been regarded by ornithologists as very rare birds. It Was an unexpected delight to meet the splendid [illegible] an unexpected delight to meet the splendid Red-sided and the exquisitely beautiful Red-shouldered Parrots in abundance in this wonderful jungle.

Secret Burial Ground.

But time was short if we were to visit the secret burial ground of the Koko I'o people among the hills, and, after a brief stay, we reluctantly left this exquisite oasis. For the first few miles after leaving the valley of the Lockhart the little pad wound up the side of a steep hill, clothed for miles with the densest jungle I have ever seen—a jungle untouched and unspoiled by the hand of man. On the far side—on the western slopes—we emerged abruptly into the blinding sunshine, and thence travelled over barren, boulder-strewn hills for the remainder of that memorable journey. As the prevailing wind was from the south-east, we were now cut off by the mountains of the Lockhart River from the sea breese of the east coast, and the heat and humidity were intense. We were forced to travel only in the early morning and evenin and to rest the horses as much as possible during the intense heat of the day. two days later we reached a native camp on the dry bed of a river, among the low barren hills. We camped, and rested the horses, and I went down to reconnoitre.

Was there really a burial ground close by; was there a ceremony to take place soon; how would the natives, strangers to me, re-act when they knew the reason for our long trek? The prying eyes of the white man are not welcome by the natives near their old burial places.