

British New Guinea.

A general meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute was held at the Hotel Metropole, London, England, on April 11th, at which Mr. T. H. Hatton Richards, treasurer of New Guinea, read a paper on the affairs and general condition of that important part of the British Empire. Many of the points made were of more than ordinary interest. Following are some extracts:—

After touching upon the early history of the country, Mr. Hatton Richards said:—

"A great change has taken place in connection with New Guinea since the Royal Colonial Institute was last addressed on the subject by the Rev. James Chalmers in January, 1887. On that occasion the lecturer spoke of New Guinea; to-night I am going to speak of that portion over which the Queen's sovereignty has since been proclaimed, and which, as a result, is now known as British New Guinea.

In the Possession of British New Guinea the Administrator is assisted by Executive and Legislative Councils, nominated by the Crown. The number of members of each council is limited to five, exclusive of the Administrator. The appointments to these councils are for terms of six years from date of appointment.

The position of British New Guinea is somewhat exceptional. Certain Colonies of Australia pressed for annexation, and evinced their sincerity by agreeing to pay for the expense of a Government for ten years. As a return, those Colonies are consulted through Queensland in the administration of the Possession; while financially, their return consists of the local revenue of the country, and the refund of any unexpended portion of the £15,000 there may be at the end of the year. I might here mention that Western Australia also pays a small amount annually, although not bound to do so. The contribution, however, is really a continuation of the older agreement, in which she was a party, to pay the expenses of a Protectorate.

The seat of Government is at Port Moresby, and as it is, therefore, the principal point of the Possession, perhaps I may be permitted to give a short description of it. Its position is about 9° 27' min. S. The locality had been selected by Sir Peter Scratchley, chiefly, I believe, because it was the only place where any attempt at permanent civilisation had been made. The London Missionary Society had had their headquarters established there for some considerable time, while, as regards climate, speaking in comparison with other parts of the Possession, it may be regarded as fairly healthy. There is a tolerably good harbor, which is margined by surrounding hills. These hills are very irregular, covered for the most part with forest trees, which seem at once to remind the traveller of the Australian gum. At certain times of the year these hills are terribly barren, but during the wet season they become rather picturesque, for they add a green and refreshing landscape to the general contour of the scene. Government House is best seen from the harbour. It is a most unpretentious building, situated at an elevation of about 150 feet. The principal European settlement is to the right of the harbour on entering. The houses are built either of wood or corrugated iron, or both. The first thing that strikes the traveller as he approaches Port Moresby is the very mountainous aspect of the country. In the distance can be seen a high range of well defined mountains, seeming to assert the greatness—or, perhaps, I should say the vastness—of the comparatively unknown country. Jagged and notched in their topmost outline, they present a weird front to the person who beholds them for the first time. The headquarters of the Government being at Port Moresby, the next principal stations are those situated at the eastern and western ends of the Possession. In the former, a small is-

land called Samarai, and in the latter a place called Mabudauan, are the points from which the magistrates in charge of those districts do their work.

It may be appropriate here to draw attention to the magnitude of the Possession that has to be controlled. The area of the whole, as described by the Proclamation of Sovereignty, and which, of course, includes islands, is about 203,253 square miles. Of this, about 86,374 square miles form the mainland, leaving as a result an aqueous area, with numerous islands scattered about, of 115,879 square miles. Bearing in mind that the mainland is in parts very thickly populated, that the chief islands are equally so, and also the distances, very great in many cases, between the island and the mainland, or the islands themselves, you may possibly be able to form some vague idea of the vast extent of the Possession to be governed, and of some of the difficulties of administration, which are increased by certain exceptional local conditions. The great majority of the people have lived, and do live, in strange independence of one another. Different dialects, different habits and customs in detail, have separated one tribe from another, till they either live in enmity or fear. There are no recognized chiefs, as in other countries. Each district has to be dealt with separately, the people brought together themselves, and confidence in one another established. Such a country could not be governed from an office in Port Moresby, but requires constant travelling and supervision on the part of the Administrator, while it is not the work of a day or a year: it must be gradual. I think, however, there are very few places on the coast, from the British-Dutch boundary on the south and the British-German boundary on the north, where the natives do not know something about the Government. Their ideas and conception of it may vary according to the opportunities afforded to the Government of visiting certain parts more frequently and easily than others, but the great barrier of complete ignorance of our intentions may be said to be breaking, and is broken in many places. When this is all completed, it follows that it is easier to encourage settlement in those parts brought thoroughly under control. It is not only essential for a good result to the administration of such a country, but of benefit to the settler himself, who has the way prepared for him, and who has not to combat with difficult native questions, which will arise in such new countries, and which we could not so well deal with as an organized body having all through a consistent line of action.

In the tours of inspection undertaken for the purpose of bringing the whole Possession under the control alluded to, a vast amount of new ground has of necessity been broken, and much useful knowledge of the country and its inhabitants obtained. It is not my intention this evening to give you an account of any of the expeditions that have been made under the leadership of the Administrator, for when you remember that each small trip would give material for at least one paper of interest, you will see how impossible it would be to attempt anything of the kind, even supposing I were in a position to do so from actual experience, which I am not, as I have been in comparatively few expeditions. I may, however, remind you of the result of two or three. The Owen Stanley Range was ascended in 1889 by Sir William MacGregor, who, with less than six followers, reached the summit, the highest point attained being 13,121 feet. The Fly river in the west of the Possession was ascended for 610 miles, being some miles further than the distance attained by Signor D'Albertis in 1876. This river runs for some distance out of our territory into that of the Dutch, crossing the boundary about latitude 6° 59' S, and returning into our Possession about latitude 6° 20' S. A new and important river was discovered to the west of the Fly, and since called the "Morehead." Although the mouth is over 100 miles from that of the Fly, the course of the river is such that at the

head, which is 120 miles up, the traveler is only about thirty-five miles in a straight line from the Fly, 130 miles up, just about the position of the Fairfax group. Those instances, however, by no means represent one-sixth of the work done, which of course must comprise small efforts as well as big, while the smaller ones are by no means the least important, by reason of the objects in view at all times.

The Papuan race is not confined to New Guinea, but embraces other adjacent islands. At the same time, New Guinea may be said to be the home and centre of this fine people. There is, however, much diversity of manner and habits amongst them, so my remarks will be confined only to those with whom I have been brought into contact in my wanderings. The Papuan is of medium height and well built. The prevailing color is a dark chocolate inclining to black, but quite distinct from the negro. In some places, however, the color is not so dark as in others,—the celebrated Tugeri tribe, for instance, that we met inside the Dutch territory three years ago, were quite the lightest I have seen.

By nature the Papuans are first-rate agriculturists. They clear the ground, till, drain and fence it in a most excellent way. Their gardens are really their chief industry, and they are perfect in order and neatness. In the large gardens can be seen the storehouse in which yams, taro, sweet potatoes, etc., are placed as they are dug.

The native idea of architecture is somewhat primitive in general, but not so in detail. Wherever it is decided to lay out a village no obstacles are allowed, not even that of water. All the houses are built on piles varying six to ten feet in height from the surface of ground or water. As a rule on the coast a village will be found wherever coconuts will grow, and to the traveller these trees are therefore often a great guide, for where he sees them he may expect to come across natives and find fresh water.

The character of the Papuans is infinitely better than is generally supposed. They have a keen sense of justice, and possess good traits in their disposition, which tend to make them a comparatively easy people to get on with, if they are approached in the right spirit. Amongst themselves they are very affectionate. I have seen some very heartrending instances of this. Most decidedly they are not blood-thirsty, and the thrilling tales one hears of cannibalism should be received with great caution; while one should also be slow to place credence in tales of so called savagery, without knowing what has happened in the past (perhaps years ago) to lead up to what might appear without the knowledge of both sides of the story, to be acts of inhumanity. The Government have found the natives to be useful workers. The constabulary force in the Possession is being formed out of their numbers, and they appear to respect the trust reposed in them, while in moments of difficulty or danger they have proved to behave admirably.

The climate of British New Guinea is moist, enervating, and must be regarded as unhealthy, and the early hardships so often attendant on a new country have certainly not tended to make it less so to those who have had to endure them. Malarial fever is the principal and most troublesome ailment. It may be possible to fight against it for sometime, but it will come sooner or later. Its attacks are often sudden, without any premonitory symptoms, while it will often lie dormant in the system, and not appear till one has left the country. Those who travel about, or have travelled, in the country suffer most. A lengthened residence does not seem to acclimatise one. The man who has been ten or fifteen years in the country is just as liable to suffer from it as the man who has been the same number of days, weeks, or months. Albeit the death rate from fever is extremely low. Possibly, however, its worst feature is that there seems to be no finality to