

Summer Continues

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Chicago Literary Club

Summer: defined as the “second season”, falling between spring and autumn; “the warmest season” which, as defined, is not confined to specific months of the year. So how do we define lands in which there are no seasonal changes—those on our Earth clustered along the equator? The definition “the lands of continuous summer” may well be most appropriate.

New Guinea comes to my mind. Most likely because my father was deployed there during “the War” (which now must be specified as WWII) and which I was most fortunate to visit, subconsciously “closing the circle”.

“In addition to our other difficulties, there was New Guinea itself, as tough and tenacious an enemy as the Japanese” – General Douglas MacArthur.

“Heaven is Java, hell is Burma; but no one returns alive from New Guinea.” – saying popular among Japanese soldiers.

Where does one begin with New Guinea? It’s the second largest island on earth, after Greenland. Currently it’s comprised of two separate portions: Irian Jaya—the Western half of the island, a province of Indonesia; and Papua New Guinea, the Eastern half of the island, now independent. But prior to its independence in 1975, it was administered by Australia with the influence of English common law. Prior to that the northern portion was German and the southern portion was English. After WWI Australia seized the German territory and in 1921 the League of Nations gave Australia trusteeship of New Guinea

It is thought that the first Europeans to sight New Guinea were probably Portugese and Spanish navigators in the early part to the 16th century: the word Papua was after a Malay word for the frizzled quality of the Melanesian people’s hair; New Guinea came because of a perceived resemblance between the island’s inhabitants and those found on the African Guinea coast.

In New Guinea seasons don't change. Most of the world had no idea that anyone lived in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea until the 1930s when the highlands were "discovered" by miners who were going upstream in search of gold.

Initially only a handful of miners were working in the New Guinea gold fields beginning in 1921 but the real rush began in 1926 with gold being found at Edie Creek, above Wau, a city located in the east of the island, near "the guinea's tail". The story goes that when the initial explorers, in following the river upstream, crested the first mountains they saw a vast green land with hundreds of campfire smoke curls - and very primitive people who then - and now - shared essentially no common languages and indulged in tribal warfare.

It should be noted that there are 852 known languages in New Guinea. The general theory is that language is power and is used to retain closely guarded clan secrets. English is the language secondary to Australian governance and Pidgin has also become a common language. For example—the Pidgin word for helicopter is "mixmaster bilong Jesus".

Prior to the influx of miners into the Highlands there had been missionaries, though they were mostly along the coasts. With the opening of the highlands the missionaries became a presence. Much of the education is provided by church institutions including 500 schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. In addition to other major tertiary institutions PNG has six universities.

Unfortunately, the missionaries and miners also introduced firearms. The aforementioned tribal warfare which had used primitive weapons became far more lethal. While being in the area of tribal warfare may have been unwise, now it's far more dangerous. Travel is restricted in areas where tribal warfare occurs - as our group discovered upon having to delay our scheduled departure to Mount Hagan where we were to witness a sing - sing.

As an aside, the day before our scheduled departure a group of birdwatchers was at the local airstrip when someone snatched some camera equipment and made a dash for it. Not the wisest of moves - the local entertainment is to go down to watch the planes land and depart - and everybody knows everybody else. And in the New Guinea highlands there is an entity known as “payback”. Need I say more?

The missionaries also tried to emphasize the positives of the tribes and, in an attempt to replace tribal warfare, organized competitions of dancing called sing-sings at which the tribes gathered from all over the highlands, each with its own dress, music and dances. Unfortunately, that approach didn’t work since the losers just attacked the winners. The problem was solved by awarding prizes to everyone! It was amazing to see and hear literally hundreds of dancing, singing Papuans celebrating their heritages.

On a humorous note—you’ve all seen photographs of the mudmen, their bodies caked with white mud with semispherical heads placed directly on shoulders, long bamboo “nails” at least as long as the hands to which they’re attached, nearly nude. The story behind the mudmen is that a tribe from a village located in the Eastern Highlands had lost several tribal wars. The warriors were forced to flee into the Asaro River. They waited until dusk before attempting to escape. Unbeknownst to them the enemy was still present; when the enemy saw them rise from the muddy banks covered in mud they were thought to be spirits from which the enemy fled in fear and, upon returning to their village, held a special ceremony to ward off evil spirits. Faces were unable to be covered because the mud from the Asaro River was thought to be poisonous; Masks were fashioned, some from pebbles, some from wooden frames over which mud was fashioned into fearsome faces with ears—long and short, horns, lopsided mouths, accompanied by carved, pointed bamboo worn on their fingers. Thought to be spirits they then would terrorize villages from other tribes and grew very wealthy - until somebody caught a mudman going to the bathroom and realized that they were human!

When the initial part of the festival was over and the afternoon dance had not yet begun, I saw the mudmen sprawled on the grass, their “heads” on the grass beside them and their “nails” next to the heads, drinking Coke out of cans and smoking cigarettes! It was quite a sight!

The mountainous terrain of the highlands as well as the impenetrable jungle have heavily limited transport, thus air travel is the single most important way for human and high-density freight to get from point A to point B. Several of the air services are owned and operated by the churches.

While I was in New Guinea one of the places we visited buried their dead above ground. One of the village leaders spoke with me - we were likely about the same age. His English was excellent. (It is again noted that Australia governed Papua New Guinea, providing language, laws and structure until PNG independence, thus English is the common language.) I mentioned that my father had been in New Guinea during the war—His immediate response was “Oh.”, clearly assuming my father had perished there. I explained that my father had survived and returned - thus, me! And then he told me that his father had told him of the “silver birds” flying overhead that were seen during the war.

When I read of MacArthur’s New Guinea campaign I was struck by how much he depended upon air support as well as by how the Japanese struggled to prevent the loss of their airfields. In short, MacArthur went around the Japanese as much as he could. But he still had to stop the Japanese from crossing the Owen Stanley range, and taking the aerodrome and capital of Port Moresby. In essence it was a war of more than one front both of which were fought on brutal terrain, as horrible and unforgiving as the humanoid enemy.

In addition to the human enemies, both Allied as well as Japanese troops suffered from a host of tropical diseases. Malaria was the most debilitating but there was also dengue, dysentery, scrub typhus and others.

Of malaria, we're all familiar to a certain extent. Carried by a mosquito vector - Genus *Anopheles*, most frequent species *gambiae* - it's a parasite—genus *Plasmodium*—which requires a blood meal on the part of the mosquito vector to complete its life cycle which involves both human beings as well as monkeys.

Antimalarials do exist. But as each targets a different part of the life cycle, resistance is common. The best prevention remains transmission interruption—repellents, permethrin-permeated bed nets, mosquito eradication.,

There are four species of malaria; the fatal variety is *falciparum*. However, the other three species are also manifested by severe fevers and shaking chills which are incapacitating. DDT was introduced during WWII. Unfortunately, widespread use resulted in resistance as well as an unanticipated side effect when DDT leached into water and was ingested by birds with the subsequent weakening of eggshells which shattered before the chicks could be hatched.

Dengue is also transmitted by mosquitos; its etiologic agent is a one of four closely related viruses of the family Arbovirus, now reclassified as *Flavivirus*. The vector mosquito is genus *Aedes* and two species which carry it are *albopictus* and *aegypti*. The *Aedes* mosquito is very resilient and attempts to eradicate it have not been particularly successful.

Dengue is also known as “breakbone fever” and can range in severity from sub-clinical infection to fever, headache, nausea and vomiting, to dengue hemorrhagic fever in which vascular permeability leads to an extravasation (meaning outside the vascular system) and accumulation of fluid which can lead to circulatory failure and shock. In addition the patient with hemorrhagic fever has low platelets and hemorrhagic manifestations (bleeding nose, gums, possible “internal bleeding”) The severity of the illness is dependent upon different variants of the causative virus. As dengue is caused by a virus there is no medication for cure but there is a vaccine; However, it's only partially effective because of a phenomenon called “antibody - dependent - enhancer” which is rarely found in vivo except in the case of the dengue virus.

Despite the equatorial location of New Guinea, it's surprising how cold the highlands get at night—and it's not all that warm during the day either—The clothing of the people is minimal and they sleep around fires. Still, as there are 12-hour days and nights the plants grow to enormous size, the moths are fabulous! And Cicadas are the size of hummingbirds. The dogs love them, crunching them down! Bird life abounds—glorious colours, song, and wonderful feathers—the Huli wigmen use feathers to make fanciful wigs and headgear, paint their faces and upper bodies with bright paints and have wonderful dances.

The Huli live in the Tari Highlands which consist of heavily cultivated valleys in the most remote part of the highlands. This is the most densely populated area of the country. The Huli compose the largest ethnic group with a population of somewhere between 300,000 and 400,000 people. Life is still lived in a primitive manner with very strong tribal and clan loyalties. Pigs and gardening remain a very important part of life - and pig are essential.

In New Guinea the rooting of the pigs is mandatory in the maintenance of the mounds of sweet potatoes which are such a staple of the diet in the Highlands. Even the tiny piglets make huge muddy areas! In New Guinea the pig is more than pork. The pig is a quasi - family member, a source of food, a gift to propitiate the spirit world. Festivals at which large numbers of pigs are consumed pay off obligations, gain prestige, celebrate a battle won. Pigs have been the most prized possessions of Papuans for centuries. Bamboo necklaces are used to keep track of the number of pigs owned, pigs given away. The longer the necklace the wealthier the man wearing it; pigs are treated essentially as money. A family ideally has three houses: one for the men, one for the women, and one for the pigs. If able to afford only two houses the pigs live with the women.

Unfortunately, infected pigs were introduced in 1969 into Dutch New Guinea from Bali as a gift from Suharto—bringing with them both trichinosis as well as cysticercosis caused by *Taenia solium*, the pork tapeworm, which had been endemic in Bali for more than 60 years—but because the Balinese are fastidiously clean the disease was not widely spread. The tribesmen in the Highlands had Stone Age toilet habits and with fecal spread as well

as with eating the pork the disease became rampant. Human beings serve as intermediate hosts. If the pig ingests the eggs passed in stools of infected humans the eggs hatch and the embryos migrate from the blood into the tissue forming cystic lesions which, when ingested in undercooked meat, repeat the cycle. Cystecerci in the brain cause personality changes and seizures. Why not cook pork so as to eliminate the parasite? When a child is born a pig is slaughtered and eaten at once. The tribesmen know that the cysts, called “seeds”, cause illness but the traditions and customs continue.

The rooting of the pigs keeps the soil loose and those of us who have grown sweet potatoes know that they are planted in ridges or, as in New Guinea, in mounds about three feet high, hemispherical gardens of loose soil in which the sweet potatoes grow and are harvested, the mound raked down and another relatively easily formed as the soil is loose. Planting in this manner makes the crop easily accessible for harvesting.

The men and women live separately. They have separate gardens as well as houses because the men are afraid to eat food grown and cooked by women. The bride goes to the women’s house of the husband’s family while the man learns magic spells to protect himself from her. The women spend their time working in the gardens including tending pigs which are tied to their ankles.

At about age 8 the boys who had been living with their mothers go to live with their fathers from whom they learn skills like hunting with bows and arrows, how to build mud walls and how to make houses.

The Huli men are best known for their custom of wearing decorative woven wigs which are decorated with bundles of multicoloured feathers and flowers. These are specially made by a unique clan known as the Huli Wigmen who attend wig schools and live together in isolation from the remainder of the community.

When boys are 14 to 15 years of age they go to wig school and don’t return home at all until they graduate, sometimes staying for up to 10 years. The family pays the wigmaster 200 Kinas (about US \$61.75) or a pig and

the student remain about 18 months to grow one wig. If they want to grow another they stay longer and pay again. Not everyone is accepted as a student.

No one is allowed into the wig schools other than the students and the master. In the account of the wig school which I read the master is the son of a wig master who passed the responsibility to him—included in this responsibility is that the wigmaster needs to have powers and to be able to cast spells.

Only young and virginal males can enter wig school. While in attendance the students learn the fundamentals and rules of traditional Huli costumes from growing their hair to collecting feathers and making armbands. They follow a diet where certain foods are not allowed and, in addition, adopt a special sleeping position perched on one elbow with the neck resting on a wooden log. They also have to keep their hair wet at least 3 times daily, it being a tradition to sing while using fern leaves to sprinkle water onto their big, bouncy hairdos.

After growing their hair for 18 months they cut their hair and hand it to a wig specialist who sews and weaves the hair into wigs. Most wigmen have more than one wig but all wigs must be grown before the man gets married. Some wigs are daily wigs while others are worn only on special ceremonial occasions

Once woven into immaculate wigs the wig specialist takes them into town and sells them. Many Huli men who don't grow their own hair will buy them for festivals and other major events. A daily wig can be sold for as much as 600 Kinas (US\$185.25) while a ceremonial wig can sell for as much as 1500 Kinas (US\$463.12) The money goes toward paying for the bride's dowry, as marriage is sought after graduation.

The isolation required of wig school students is such that they don't receive other education and speak only Huli. Because people prefer to go to public schools the numbers of students seeking wig school training is falling.

While in the Highlands, our group was privileged to see more than one "concert" of Huli men wearing their fanciful wigs, much face and body paint and dancing to their drums. The care with which the paints were applied

is fascinating. And, of course, one of the dancers brought his small son who imitated his dad, dancing and, playing on his miniature drum!

By contrast our visit to the lower Sepik River was yet another world apart. The Sepik is the longest river in Papua New Guinea and the third largest by volume. It arises in the Victor Emmanuel Range of the Central highlands, flows northwestward and crosses over the border into the Indonesian portion of the island then turns east, receiving numerous tributaries before entering the Bismarck Sea through a delta about 700 miles long and via a mouth more than 100 miles wide. As it flows mainly through the former German portion of the island it was formerly known as Kaiserin Augusta.

It forms the core of one of the largest and most intact freshwater basins in the Asia - Pacific region and has been compared to the Amazon and the Nile. Thus far it remains relatively unspoiled, the river serving as a vital source of food, water, transportation, and community identity. The Sepik basin holds some of the rarest known plant and animal species on the planet including 2 species of crocodile, one salt water (but able to live in fresh water) and one freshwater, the smaller of the two.

Crocodile: Greek kroko meaning pebble, describing their skins, and deilos, which can be defined as “fearful” It can also be defined as “worm”. Pebbly - skinned fearful worm. And thoughts shift to Fafner, one of Wagner’s giants (The Ring), who transformed himself into a dragon and was thereafter referred to as “das Wurm” —W - U - R - M. Not all that far - fetched. Dragon. Crocodile...

The New Guinea crocodile is a small species living only on the island of New Guinea and is comprised of two isolated populations to the north and south of the mountain ridge which runs along the center of the island. The habitat is mostly freshwater swamps and lakes. It is most active at night, feeding on fish and other small animals. Its skin is valuable; in the 1950s and 1960s the northern population was hunted to the point that extinction was feared. Protective legislation was put into place in about 1970. Also, about that time hatchlings and eggs were

collected annually to be raised on ranches. Interestingly, in 1995 the largest ranch on the island began to concentrate on raising the saltwater crocodile.

The saltwater crocodile has a range extending from the Eastern edge of India, includes the southern part of Southeast Asia, the Philippines, all of Indonesia, Borneo, New Guinea and the Northern edges of Australia. It is the largest of all living reptiles and the largest riparian predator in the world. Males can reach sizes of up to 20 feet in length, weighing 1000 to 1200 kg. (Females are much smaller and usually don't surpass 9.8 feet in length) They usually reside in saline and brackish mangrove swamps, estuaries, deltas, lagoons and the lower stretches of rivers. The salt water crocodile is a large and opportunistic hyper-carnivorous apex predator. For definitional purposes—an apex predator is regarded as being at the top of the food chain, upon which no other animals prey. Most prey are ambushed and then drowned or swallowed whole. The saltwater crocodile is exceedingly aggressive and has a long history of attacking humans who unknowingly venture into its territory. The best policy is to completely avoid its habitat whenever possible.

Crocodiles figure prominently in the legends and rites of passage of various Sepik tribes. Though the stories may vary from village to village the commonality is in belief in ancestral ties to crocodiles and ritual scarring of initiated men so that their skins resemble crocodile skin. The cultures are traditionally male - dominated and the men still congregate in intricately carved “spirit houses” to debate village matters. Some of the people believe that certain parts of the land carry taboos because they are regarded as the dwelling places of spirits. Despite slight lifestyle changes as a result of outside influences most traditional beliefs continue to be valued.

Along the rivers most people live in small communities where they practice subsistence farming and depend upon the forests to provide their food. The land is passed down through generations and is a source of identity and spiritual connection as well as survival. Ninety - seven percent of the land in Papua New Guinea is under legally recognized customary - land title which means that the country's indigenous people have rightful ownership of the lands that they occupy.

The entire lower basin of the river is sparsely populated; there are no settlements of great size. The isolation from external influences has given rise to an extensive and original artistic tradition. The Sepik area is known for its wood carving; it includes ornamentation of household and cult objects, weapons, musical instruments, houses—high - gabled with decorated house posts, and canoe prows. A hooked (or beaked) elongated nose is a characteristic found in Sepik carvings.

Until now the Sepik river basin has avoided the fates of other areas of PNG largely because of the region's designated protected areas as well as the implementation of sustainable economic practices of its people. An area of 850 square miles located in the Hunstein Range Highlands in the upper Sepik has been declared a wildlife management area; Two adjoining areas of 140 and 42 square miles have since been set aside as protected areas. An additional area of the middle and upper reaches of the Sepik river basin is being considered for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List as a mixed natural and cultural heritage site.

In addition to visiting villages along the river we had a fascinating and extensive trip through the wetlands—the amazing fauna and flora are impossible to describe—the beauty and spirituality permeated everything.

The flora and fauna of New Guinea are more closely related to that of Australia than elsewhere. The northern edge of New Guinea sits at the northern edge of the Australia Plate where it abuts the Pacific Plate. The island separated from the Australian mainland when the area known as the Torres Strait flooded about 5000 BCE.

Papua New Guinea itself consists of a “mainland” and about 600 offshore islands. Its lands are lush and green, wet and humid, filled with songs, rustlings, colour, and a joyful beauty which is like nowhere else. With no seasonal weather changes, New Guinea is truly “the land of continuous summer.”

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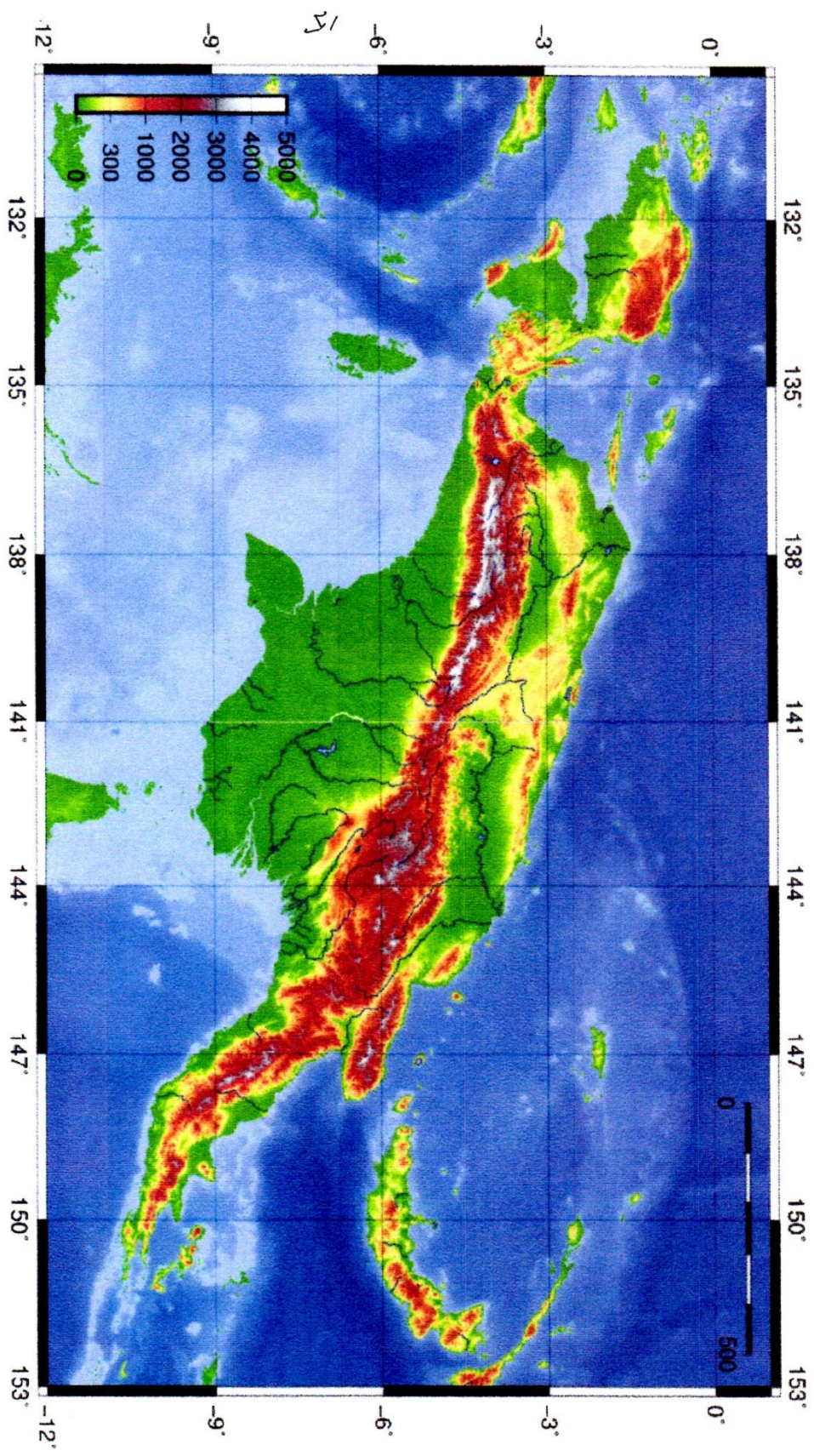
Addendum

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Uncle Harry

Noel Coward

My family has traditions
I've heard them a thousand times
My relatives were not excessively bright
They love to go off on missions
To rather peculiar climes
And lead the wretched heathens to the light
A few of them got beaten up
In course of these rampages
My dear Aunt Maud got eaten up
While singing "Rock of Ages."
These family expeditions
Admittedly are a bore
But there is just one uncle
That I positively adore

Poor Uncle Harry
Wanted to be a missionary
So he took a ship and sailed away
This visionary
Hotly pursued by dear Aunt Mary
Found a South Sea Isle on which to stay
The natives greeted them kindly and invited them to dine
On yams and clams and human hams and vintage coconut wine
The taste of which was filthy, but the after-effects divine

Poor Uncle Harry
Got a bit gay and longed to tarry
This, Aunt Mary couldn't quite allow
She lectured him severely on a number of church affairs
But when she'd gone to bed he made a getaway down the stairs
For he longed to find the answer to a few of the maiden's prayers
Uncle Harry's not a missionary now

Poor Uncle Harry
After a chat with dear Aunt Mary
Thought the time had come to make a row
He lined up all the older girls in one of the local sheds
And while he was reviling them, and tearing himself to shreds
They took their Mother Hubbards off and tied them around their heads
Uncle Harry's not a missionary now—

He's awfully happy—
But he's certainly not a missionary now!

Now Uncle was just a 'seeker'
A 'dreamer' sincerely blest
Of this there couldn't be a shadow of doubt
The fact that his flesh was weaker
Than even Aunt Mary guessed
Took even her some time to figure out
In all those languid latitudes
The atmosphere's exotic
To take up moral attitudes
Would be too idiotic
Though nobody could be meeker
Than Uncle had been before
I bet today he's giving way
At practically every pore!

Poor Uncle Harry
Having become a missionary
Found the natives' morals rather crude
He and Aunt Mary
Quickly imposed an arbitrary
Ban upon them shopping in the nude
They all considered this silly and they didn't take it well
They burned his boots and several suits and wrecked the Mission Hotel
They also burnt his mackintosh, which made a disgusting smell

Poor Uncle Harry
After some words with dear Aunt Mary
Called upon the chiefs for a pow-wow
They didn't brandish knives at him, they really were awfully sweet
They made concerted dives at him and offered him things to eat
But when they threw their wives at him he had to admit defeat
Uncle Harry's not a missionary now

Poor dear Aunt Mary
Though it were revolutionary
Thought her time had come to take a bow
Poor Uncle Harry looked at her, in whom he had placed his trust
His very last illusion broke and crumbled away to dust
For she'd placed a flower behind her ear and frankly...exposed... her bust

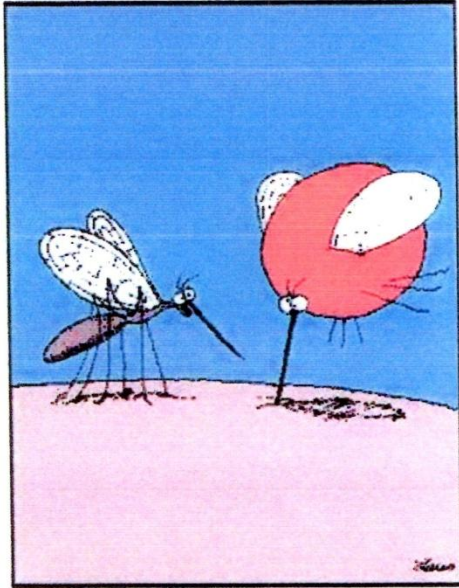
Uncle Harry's not a missionary now—
He's left the island—
But he's certainly not a missionary now

The Crocodile

Lewis Carroll, 1832 - 1898

How doth the little crocodile
 Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
 On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
 How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
 With gently smiling jaws!



"Pull out, Betty! Pull out! . . . You've hit an artery!"





Mountain Kingfisher



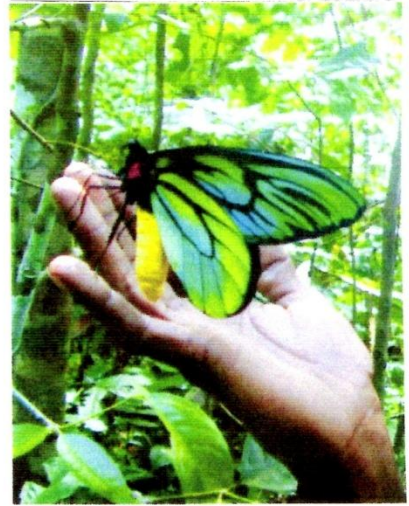
Raggiana Bird of Paradise



Brown Sicklebeak



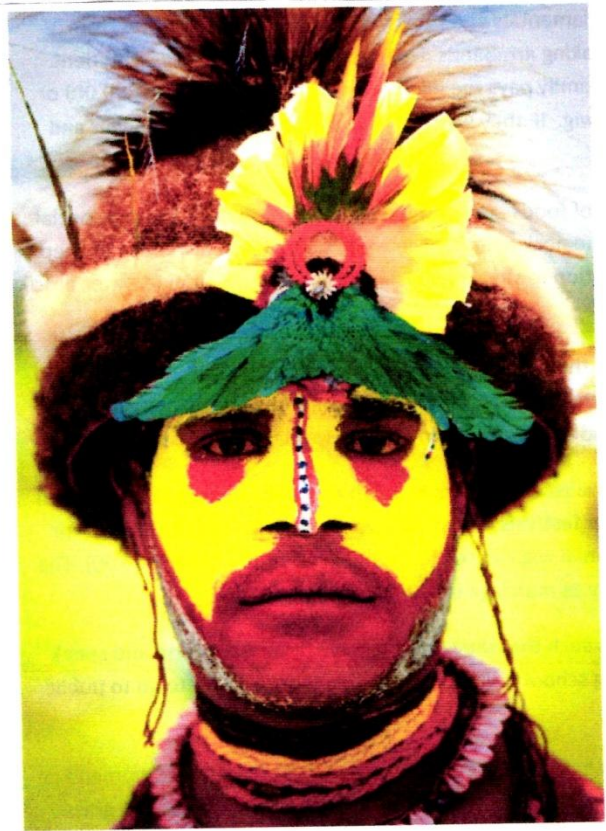
Wahnes's parotia



Cicadas



Wilson's Bird of Paradise



Huli
GARDENING



SING-SING





MUDMEN



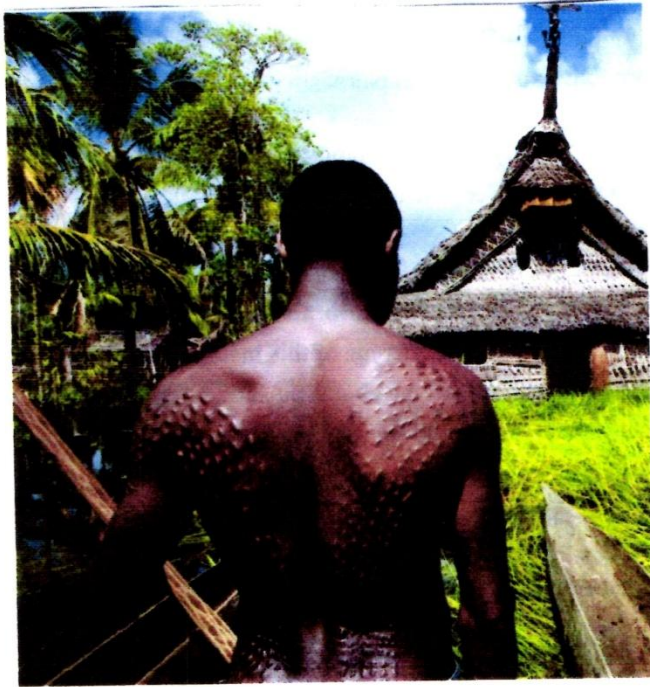


MUDMEN



Sepik wetlands





SEPIK



New Guinea Crocodile



Salt Water Crocodile



Range of New Guinea Crocodile



Range of Salt Water Crocodile

SEPIK



Crocodile festival

