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THE ISLAND OF YAP AND ITS PEOPLE

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An interesting account of a visit to the much-discussed island in the South Seas, which Japan now rules—Stories of O'Keefe and his life among the natives—Curious community houses.

[ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR]

ONE might count upon the fingers the place names which now find more frequent mention in American news items than that of the thirty square miles of tropical jungle hidden away on one of the forgotten byways of the Pacific which goes by the name of Yap, Map or Wap. Five times each year the world reaches out to it a slim finger when the Chikuzen Maru touches at its port of Tomil on her way from Japan to the Pelew Islands. The importance of Yap in the world's affairs, and its dominant position in the news of the period, it owes almost exclusively to the fact that it is the junction point of the oceanic cable lines which run to Manila (by way of Guam), to Shanghai and to Menado on the Island of Celebes. As this nerve centre in the international cable system, it figured in the discussions of the Peace Conference at Paris and remained a subject of international difference until the United States and Japan finally reached an agreement on it during the early weeks of the arms conference.

The Island of Yap is on the extreme western margin of that broad band of widely scattered volcanic and coral islands which lies not far south of the route from Honolulu to Manila and is known as the Carolines; a belt which is extended to the eastward in the Marshalls, both groups being now in the possession of Japan as a conse-

quence of the allocations of the Peace Conference.

Like Ponape and Kusai in the Eastern Carolines, and the archipelago of Truk near the centre of the group, Yap is of volcanic origin—a double dome of lava partially dissected by stream erosion, and, like them, given its present form as a result of the progressive settlement of the sea floor on which it rests. As the island has subsided the coral reef, which once closely hugged the shore, has become separated from it by a lagoon which communicates with the open sea through several channels, only one of which is navigable for modern vessels. Within the lagoon the coral growth still goes on and is gradually filling it, here with a broad area of reef, there with the scattered coral heads which rise abruptly to near the surface from depths of a number of fathoms.

The northeastern half of the island has its shores deeply embayed where the lower reaches of the river valleys have been flooded during the process of subsidence. One of these embayments of the eastern side of the island penetrates far inland and is the harbor of Tomil, which, in spite of a rather narrow entrance, a cross-tide near its mouth, and an exposure to easterly winds, is one of the best in this part of the Pacific.

A striking object lesson upon one of the perils to which ships are ex-

posed in this part of the world—during the rainy season—is furnished by the wreck of the *Kokura Maru* of 3,000 tons burden, which occurred in December, 1920, in the harbor of Tomil. As the ship was leaving the harbor she was suddenly struck, when in the narrowest part of the channel, by one of those tropical rain squalls which, like a child's fickle temper, come without warning and are as quickly gone. All navigation marks were immediately blotted out in the heavy downpour, and the ship was set down upon the reef of the western wall by the strong cross-tide, and there its bones remain, a grim warning to all vessels which enter the port. The number of vessels calling at Yap is extremely small, and the United States gunboat *Bittern*, which came from Manila to take me aboard for a cruise of geological research, was the first American ship to enter the port in ten years, the last having been the *Supply* in 1911.

The rain squalls with their gusts of wind have, however, nothing in common with the fierce typhoon which is the grim despoiler of these fair islands. Last November a year ago Yap was visited by one of these hurricanes which wrecked most of the native houses, completely ruined the cocoanut crop, and left the islanders in an impoverished condition. In the southern third of the island, which is low and without protection from the hills, I passed through village after village in which everything had been carried away or overturned. The tall tree columns of the native clubhouses alone remained standing as reminders of the helplessness of the native in the face of these visitations of nature when in her implacable moods.

YAP'S MOST FAMOUS MAN

Two islands within the harbor of Yap, between the anchorage and the landing, are full of memories of that rough but kindly empire-builder, the Irish-American David D. O'Keefe,

the most successful man this part of the Pacific has ever developed. When he disappeared in 1901 his property was reported to be valued at some millions of German marks, mainly real estate in Hongkong and Yap, and cocoanut groves on many coral islands of the Western Pacific.

O'Keefe was the type of man who in Sarawak would have been *Rajah*, as was Brooke; but here there was already the established civil government of Spain. From the natives he bought the copra (dried cocoanut meat), transported it to Hongkong on his schooner, and returned laden with the goods of which they stood in need. The small army of natives which moved at his command, and on whom he used his fists freely whenever occasion demanded, had been recruited not alone from Yap, but from those isolated islands far to the southwestward—Sonsorol, Warren Hastings, Lord North and St. David's—islands which are still described in the pilot books of navigators as inhabited by natives that are fierce and wild and on no account to be trusted.

Many stories are told of O'Keefe's prowess, how single-handed he arrested a native chieftain noted as a desperate man and a murderer, for which exploit he was officially thanked by the Spanish Government; how when shipwrecked on the Pelew Islands and about to be murdered he was saved by his native wife and other native women throwing themselves about him. It is known that he knocked down his manager and nearly killed him by a blow on the temple and that after trial by the German authorities he was sentenced to two months' imprisonment. It was while out on bail that he disappeared, and though no proofs of his death have ever been supplied, it is known that he sailed out of Hongkong in his schooner, the *Santa Cruz*, with two of his sons and ran into a typhoon. This was in 1901, when he was 72 years of age. His widow, a native woman, still lives on the little Island

of Tarang, in the harbor of Yap, where O'Keefe had located his trading station; and one of his daughters, Mrs. Alfred Scott, has her home across the channel on the Island of Dunig, somewhat nearer the landing at Colony. Mrs. Scott inherits many of the strong traits of her father,* and speaks a fluent and, for this part of the world, a rather distinguished English. O'Keefe was a native of Savannah, Ga., and deserted a wife and daughter when he took up his residence in the Pacific.

HABITS OF THE NATIVES

The natives of Yap have advanced in civilization somewhat less

*According to a recent cable dispatch from Yap, this daughter of half-native parentage is now managing the large cocoanut groves and shipping interests left by her father, and they are flourishing under her direction; she has the only grand piano in the island. Mrs. Scott's husband, a trader, died in 1918, and since then she has run the business single handed. Though the Japanese flag flies over Yap, and a Japanese Governor makes its laws, Mrs. Scott is said to be "the real boss of the island."—Editor.

than their neighbors in the other Caroline islands lying to the eastward, and they are for that reason so much the more interesting to study. They are of muscular development, with a dark brown skin and curly black hair, the old men frequently wearing beards. The only clothing of the men is the narrow breech cloth, usually red, and the women and girls wear as their only garment a short skirt of grass or leaves, which may be replaced by a woven fabric of excellent workmanship. The love of ornamentation, which is highly developed in these natives, shows itself particularly in the use of combs by the men, these combs being of many forms and generally constructed out of the wood of the white mangrove. Perhaps the commonest form, and certainly the most artistic of them, resembles a fish's tail and projects forward from the forehead for a distance of ten inches or a foot. The favorite earring, worn in one ear only,



Home of Mrs. Alfred Scott on Dunig Island in Tomil Harbor. In the foreground are Mrs. Scott and her little boy, the chief petty officer of the Steamship Bittern, and four of Mrs. Scott's native servants



A group of native women standing in front of the Pa-bai at Tomil with the navigating officer of the Bittern. Note the enormous cylinder of stone money at the right

is made from the pink shell lining which is in use for money, but it is attached to the ear by a very small perforation, so that it does not produce such disfigurement as one sees in the ears of the Mortlock islanders to the eastward.

Both sexes chew the betel or areca nut almost constantly and without removing the bark. Lime obtained by burning the material of the coral reefs is sifted over the nut from a sifter made of a bamboo section, and the nut is wrapped in a leaf of pepper before it is put into the mouth. Natives are seldom seen without their bag of nuts and leaves and the bamboo sifter. Because of this practice of betel chewing their gums and lips are red and swollen and their teeth blackened. But for this disfigurement of their mouths many of the women would be pronounced distinctly good-looking.

The men of Yap are excellent canoemen and at home in the water,

though perhaps inferior in this respect to the natives of Ponape. About the ships in the harbor, if a line which is thrown falls short, it is never pulled in for a second throw. A native is immediately in the water and back again upon the ship before the line could be drawn in for recoiling. When navigating the lagoons in a canoe, it has more than once happened on a single trip that my canoemen have paddled, sailed, poled, waded on the reef, and lifted the canoe, as wind and depth of water have changed.

COMMUNITY HOUSES

Their canoes, their bamboo rafts, and the cleverly constructed homes and clubhouses the natives of Yap put together without the use of anything resembling a nail. Everything is made fast by cords, and it is in part because of this fact that the devastation wrought by the typhoons is so complete. The design, workmanship,

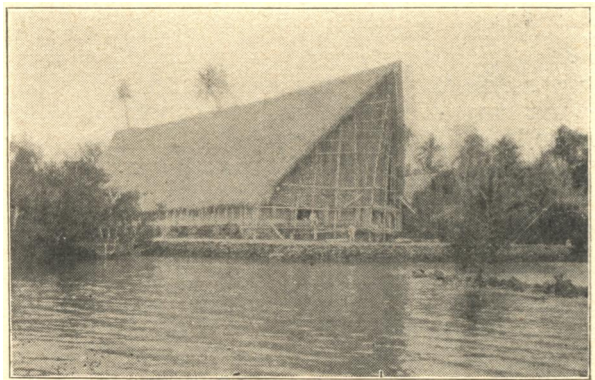


A bachelors' clubhouse, or Fa-lu, occupied only by young men of Yap. It is built without a nail anywhere in the structure

and artistic decoration of the clubhouses entitle these natives to a higher place in the scale of civilization than would be accorded them on the basis of their personal appearance. The community houses are of two types, the *fa-lu*, or bachelors' clubhouse, and the larger and more elaborately decorated *pa-bai*, which, though built especially for the men, is open to the women as well.

These community houses, in external appearance particularly, bear some resemblance to the native houses in Sumatra, having outwardly projecting peaks with gables which also project along the medial plane. They are decorated on the exterior, sometimes by painted logs which project horizontally like exaggerated gargoyles,

sometimes by great colored shells pendent from the peak of the roof. Within, these structures are dark, being lighted only from the low side and end openings, but the great peeled log pillars which support the roof are so placed as to yield a central nave with transepts. Above the high



Community house, or Pa-bai, at the village of Rull, Yap Island. Native houses of this type are occupied by both men and women



Bomb-proof structure built by the Germans near the old Spanish fort on Yap Island. The man in the foreground is a native guide

central nave one can make out in the dim light the squared braces where connections are made to the roof, and these are covered with cord, which is tied in most artistic, interlacing patterns.

All about the *pa-bais* and the *fa-lus*, and in lesser degree about the houses of kings and chieftains, are to be seen the great money wheels of aragonite

which these hardy voyagers or their ancestors have brought on their rafts two hundred miles across the open sea from the Pelew Islands to the southwest. As some of these wheels are fully seven feet in diameter and their weight is measured in tons, their use as money must be looked upon rather as a bank deposit not easily convertible during a panic, and far better to be

reckoned as prestige. In the Pelew Islands, where the wheels were quarried out of an elevated and profoundly altered reef-limestone, a considerable number of larger wheels are still to be seen lying in the shallow water of Malakal Harbor near the trading post. These wheels are exposed at low tide, and none of them is under twelve feet in diameter. An attempt which I made to raise one from its bed and transport it to America was without success because none of our boats



Cable station at Yap, the centre of an international dispute that has finally been adjusted after two years of diplomatic discussion

was large enough to bring it out to the Bittern.

In addition to their stone money the Yap islanders have a shell money which consists of fragments of the colored lining of the beautiful shells brought from Ponape, and a chief's son who served as my canoeman wore some fifteen dollars' worth about his neck. In point of fact, money is used very little, for the natives have not risen above the stage of barter. A pair of dirty overalls, a discarded undershirt, a box of matches, or a few cigarettes—these were the articles most frequently bartered by the sailors of the Bittern for the fruit, coconuts, canoe models or other articles which the natives brought out to the ship in their canoes.

The native villages are replete with interest, and if the visitor desires photographs it is not difficult to secure groups to pose for him. The best ordered of these villages, and the one showing the greatest degree of prosperity, is that of Tomil, on the eastern shore of the harbor. This village is governed by King Tamolin, a native of much ability, who enjoys the distinction of having been O'Keefe's first mate on the Santa Cruz. His breast is tattooed with the flags of the different nations, the Stars and Stripes in greatest prominence, and he speaks English fluently and with distinction, though he must have found little enough opportunity to practice it in recent years. Mrs. Scott, O'Keefe's daughter, paid a high tribute to the fidelity and efficiency of King Tamolin, and she related of him a story which brings out strikingly the weak qualities which were so strangely joined to the stronger traits in her father. On one of his voyages O'Keefe's schooner was caught in a terrific typhoon, and as he saw no possibility of coming out alive, he ordered up all the liquor on board and drank himself and his crew into insensibility. Awakening from this stupor the following day and finding the ship intact, he called Tamolin and asked him what had happened.

The mate replied, "The ship was saved because with my men I did not drink with you, and we worked the ship through the typhoon."

IMPROVEMENTS BY GERMANS

During their occupancy of the islands the Germans carried out extensive public works. An excellent road was built entirely around the island and a canal was dug across a narrow isthmus so as to extend Tomil Harbor and divide the eastern part of the island from the western. This canal permits the passage of canoes from Colony, the port village, to the northern Islands of Map and Rumong. A wireless station, which had been built by the Germans for communication with the other islands in the Caroline group and by relays with the outside world, is another important service which the Germans have to their credit. With the outbreak of the World War a British fleet appeared at Yap and by bombardment destroyed the wireless plant to sever the island's connection with the outside world. The concrete bases for the wireless masts are all that now remain of the German plant at Yap, but a new one has been erected at a different point by the Japanese Government.

The German warship Planet, noted as the surveying vessel which sounded the greatest depth of the ocean—the so-called "Planet Deep" east of the Philippine Islands—was anchored in the harbor when the British fleet appeared in the offing. She was sunk by her Captain to avoid capture, but was later salvaged by the Japanese when they came into possession of the islands.

Owing to O'Keefe's powerful influence, the natives of the island are extremely friendly to Americans. Members of our party were always warmly welcomed in the villages, and King Tamolin expressed to us his regret that so many of his people were away from the village at the time we called. If we would come

again he would see that every one was at home and would make holiday with dancing in our honor. We sailed away on the Bittern loaded with presents of fruit, with chickens and a fat pig for our larder. We have retained a most friendly feeling for the native islanders, as we have for the Japanese officials, who did

everything in their power to promote the geological investigation which was the purpose of my visit. The Japanese Civil Governor was seriously ill, but he got up from his bed in order to receive us and made every provision possible by guides, canoes and natives for rendering access to the places I desired to visit.

PACIFIC CABLES AND THE ARMS CONFERENCE

THE inadequacy of communication between the United States and the Far East was emphasized by the difficulties encountered by the Chinese and Japanese in relaying news of the arms conference to their home lands. Thirteen cables connect the United States with Europe; only one with the Orient, and that one cable is often out of order for long periods, and is wholly inadequate to handle any large volume of news such as that emanating from the conference.

The seriousness of the situation was pointed out recently by V. S. McClatchy, editor of *The Sacramento Bee*, in an article in *The Editor and Publisher*. Besides the one cable, the only other means of communication is by wireless, and there is only one private radio firm to serve all the Pacific nations. The wireless facilities of the United States Navy have been given a limited extension to relieve the situation, but the results have shown how inadequate are all the communications taken together. Though Honolulu received promptly full reports of the opening of the Washington conference through navy wireless, China and Japan received some of the first day's proceedings four days late; and afterward the pressure on the inadequate facilities became so great that only very short special messages were sent by cable and by privately-owned radio at "urgent rate" (over \$3 a word).

One consequence of these abridged messages was a grave misunderstanding as to what had actually been done by the conference powers. The danger of this was seen in China, where thousands rioted after a truncated message had announced that the Japanese and Chinese delegates would settle the Shantung controversy by direct negotiations. Had the message included the fact that these negotiations had been brought about by the good offices of Secretary Hughes and Mr. Balfour, this riot would probably not have occurred. Similarly the Japanese were left for days in the belief that only France had agreed to relinquish her Chinese leaseholds, the message having failed to state that the other chief nations had also made offers.

At present the navy radio remains the vital link in the news chain—all too weak—bridging the United States and the Orient. If that link breaks, the situation must inevitably become worse. Congress granted the navy authority to use its wireless facilities for news transmission over the Pacific at a low word rate, in June, 1900. That authority will expire June 5, 1922. Only the navy service has made possible the sending of regular daily reports under normal conditions. The sentiment in Congress regarding such a renewal has not yet been definitely gauged.