

THE FUTURE

THE future offers divergent paths to the native peoples of the Pacific and in neither case will the route they follow be determined by their own choosing. Ever since the arrival of Europeans, over three centuries ago in some areas, and only in the last generation in others, the destiny of the natives has been in the control of those who have come to dominate the islands with new concepts of the purposes of life and labor, new gadgets, new diseases and new religions. Native reaction has varied. In some areas they welcomed the newcomers, in others they resisted. In either case the result was frequently the same: expropriation, exploitation, execration and extinction. The Tasmanians succumbed quickly. The Australians survive in unwanted areas, but even there they are doomed. The Polynesians and Micronesians have been on the verge of extinction in some islands, but in others their remnant populations have finally adjusted themselves to the new conditions and are now increasing.

The future of the Micronesians is uncertain. In the more productive islands they have already been replaced. The security they enjoyed in the isolated barren coral islands vanished with the coming of trans-Pacific air routes, Japanese garrisons, American military campaigns and strategic defenses in the Atomic Age. Many islands have no importance except to the natives, and in them they will be unmolested; but the basic inter-island community of interests has been destroyed and the native groups in the tiny isolated islands can neither perpetuate the dynamic qualities of their culture which prevailed when all the islands were parts of an integrated system, nor adjust themselves from a distance to the vastly different new culture which sustains itself from the outside world and to which they can contribute none of their own cultural attainments.

The future of the Polynesians is not encouraging. The Hawaiians and Maori will disappear into the larger populations which are engulfing them, but at least they have contributed much to the local cultural patterns, and these influences apparently will remain long after the physical

types have gone. The Samoans are rapidly merging their culture with European civilization, but are setting their own pace and following their own inclinations, a healthy cultural procedure resulting from the vigor of native institutions, a desire to modernize, and the lack of an overwhelming number of Europeans. The native Kingdom of Tonga also has been successful in adjusting the old to the new, and there are other examples. In other islands, however, native populations are so reduced and have become so dependent on the coconut plantations that aboriginal culture is no longer integrated. The development of synthetic substitutes for copra is threatening their opportunity to participate in modern world economy. Polynesia has no mineral resources. Few islands can hope that air travel will bring a tourist trade.

In Indonesia the situation is different. The Malaysians, already accustomed by their own complex civilization to the type of economy suited to the modern world, have increased their population at such an astonishing rate that density in Java is greater than in any other area of equal size in the world. The great wealth of the East Indies seems inexhaustible. Java, with its rapidly growing population, is probably nearing agricultural maximum in so far as an exportable surplus of rice is concerned, but industrialization is growing. Sumatra has a relatively sparse population, a labor shortage and almost endless territories available for plantations. The ability of the great islands and the Malay Peninsula to supply the world with ever-increasing quantities of rubber, sugar, vegetable oils and innumerable other products, guarantees the economic future of the region. In addition, there are the great tin deposits of the Malay Peninsula and the rich oil wells of Borneo. What political changes may occur it remains to be seen, but there can be no doubt that a new Malaysian civilization, in which the science and technology of the West have been added to the artistic, social, philosophical and religious heritage of the East, is emerging to a new position of prominence.

The future of the Melanesians has not yet been determined. In the southern islands their fate has been similar to that of the Polynesians, but in the great islands of New Guinea, New Britain and New Ireland and in the Solomons, European penetration has come more recently, has been more limited and in most of the interior districts has hardly begun. Many of the Melanesians have not taken kindly to the intruders, and their resistance has been greatly aided by the prevalence of malaria,

which probably has been more effective than their weapons in discouraging greater exploitation. Nevertheless, the economic development of the region was increasing rapidly just before the war, and now that malaria can be more effectively controlled it can be expected that penetration will be accelerated.

Melanesia, like the East Indies, has much to offer the world. In New Guinea are gold, silver, copper, platinum, osmiridium, iron, zinc, sulphur, gelena, graphite and coal. New Caledonia, where little native culture remains, has major deposits of nickle and chrome and also provides iron, manganese, mercury, cobalt, antimony, cinnabar, gold, silver, copper, lead and some coal. In the Solomon Islands are gold, copper, zinc, sulphur, gypsum, alum and opals. In the aggregate, Melanesia already supplies 13% of the world's copra, 12% of its nickle, 11% of its chrome, 8% of its phosphates. Minor products include cocoa, rubber, lumber, coffee, shell and pearls. Except in the southern islands, only a fraction of one percent of the cultivable land was controlled by whites before the war; hence with wise governmental regulations the opportunity for native participation in the exploitation of their lands can be protected. The Australian, British and Dutch Governments have recognized their responsibilities. The wisdom of their policies during the next few decades may have a most important bearing on the future of Melanesian culture—whether it will disintegrate like native cultures to the south, east and north, or retain its individuality and adjust itself to modern conditions as has happened in Malaysia.

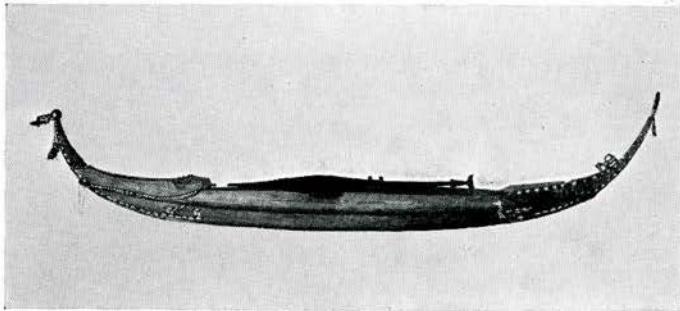


Fig. 35. Canoe model, Solomon Islands. (length 9' 1")