

## NEW IRELAND MASKS

THERE are in the collections of the University Museum numerous objects which illustrate very fairly the life and manners of the natives of the chain of islands lying northeast of New Guinea, the two largest of which, named for a time New Pomerania and New Mecklenburg, are now once more known by their former names, New Britain and New Ireland respectively.

In the northwestern half of New Ireland there is a men's secret society which concerns itself with ceremonies connected with a cult of the dead. A great festival is held every year during which a series of dances in the nature of dramatic performances take place in the period between the end of May and the beginning of July. Masks are worn by the dancers, as well as by others whose presence is necessary at the ceremonies, but who take no part in the dancing itself. The masks and other carvings, all intended to commemorate revered ancestors, are kept, between festivals, in great secrecy in houses which women and children are strictly forbidden to approach. When the dance drama is about to begin, and the sacred carvings are brought out on to the festival grounds, there is a loud wailing of the assembled people, and the names of the deceased who are commemorated in the carvings are cried aloud amid laments and sobs. The women, who at ordinary times must not look upon the carvings, tear their hair, utter loud cries, "and behave as if they were frantic with pain."

Five classes of carvings are exhibited on these occasions. Three of these classes are masks, but only one, the *tatanua*, sometimes called, from their general appearance, helmet-masks, is worn by dancers. One of these is shown in Plate X. Masks like this, according to a competent observer, who lived among the Papuo-Melanesians of New Ireland, express the popular conception of the classic form of manly beauty: the broad, prominent nose, holed ear-lobes, stretched and pendulous, "large mouth with healthy bite."

The peculiar helmet-like appearance of the head portion of the mask is due to an attempt to represent a mourning coiffure, now no longer worn. It was the custom for the male relatives of the deceased, to let the hair grow long, bleach it with lime, and dye it yellow. When

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PLATE X.



MOURNING MASK, NEW IRELAND.



the time of the annual memorial ceremonies came, the sides of the head were shaved, the rest of the hair being left long to form a sort of mane reaching from the middle of the forehead to the nape of the neck. The shaven sides of the head were then smeared with a thick paste of lime in which were stuck various substances by way of ornament. If a man was not fortunate enough to measure up to the classic standard, or did not feel inclined to undertake the labor and care connected with the preparation and maintenance of the mourning coiffure, he made himself a *tatanua* in which he tried to express all the attributes of virile charm which he felt lacking in his own person or was too lazy to heighten and embellish by the means prescribed.

The dance mask shown in Plate X is typical. The face, seen in profile, is almost rectangular and small in comparison with the imposing "helmet." The forehead is not large but protruding, the nose broad and strongly aquiline, the mouth extends almost literally from ear to ear. The formidable teeth are picked out in dark blue and white. The absence of chin and the treatment of the mouth in general seems to imply a wish to suggest the combination of animal attributes regarded as admirable with humanity. The aperture of the nostril is very large, as also is the eye in the form of a long half ellipse, the iris being represented by the translucent shell of a mussel, *Turbo pethiolatus*, commonly used for this purpose in that part of the world. An oblong panel, slightly raised, bounds the hinder edge of the jaw. This is treated ornamentally as a representation of the holed and elongated ear, an essential feature of the conception of human beauty. On the lobe (and again on the forehead) an eye appears as part of the decoration, in conformity with the tendency so frequently shown in primitive representations of the human form to repeat striking or otherwise significant natural details out of their proper position as part of the general scheme conceived as a decorative plan. The upper part of this panel contains a simple leaf or twig ornament. The half ellipse which represents the true eye is balanced by a similar form, inverted, placed well forward in the bold salient of the nose, and marking the curve of the nostril. The ornament filling this latter space may be compared with that fringing the triangle which represents the ear proper, and with the feathers placed vertically at each side of the mask in Plate XI. The outline of the nostril is further marked by a wider sweeping curve in flat low relief which closes the exaggerated aperture of the nostril



towards the cheek, and changes its direction at the other end to follow the outline of the septum of the nose to its junction with the lip.

The mask is richly colored. Red for the bands which cross the forehead diagonally and horizontally, for the ear, for the stripe along the nose, for the lips. The rest of the upper face is darkblue, as is the middle portion of the ear, the incised ornament in the upper part of the latter, the iris of the eye on the ear-lobe, and that in the middle of the diagonal red band on the forehead. The borders between the parts colored red and blue respectively are marked by white lines. The panel on the cheek is white with the lines of the decoration in red and blue.

The bark fiber which forms the crest of the "helmet" is mainly yellow with the darker portion a reddish brown. The lime-encrusted panel at the side is white with two light blue streaks. The whorl is formed by an agglomeration of maroon colored burrs imbedded in the lime.

Coarse bast cloth fringes the opening which admits the head of the person wearing the mask.

With their heads completely concealed in these masks, and wearing a costume made of leaves, the celebrants perform a pantomimic dance before the club house. Their movements are accompanied by the singing of the onlookers and the beating of a wooden drum.

The five classes of masks and other wood carvings employed in these ceremonies do not seem to be divided always by clear lines of demarcation. Some examples present features which make it not always quite easy to assign them definitely to their proper class. But there is not much doubt that Plate XI is a *kepong*. These are worn by the male relatives of the deceased at the time of the memorial celebrations. The wearers go from house to house through the village, and at each house receive a piece of shell money as a contribution towards defraying the necessary expenses of the festival.

This mask represents the head of a cock holding in its bill a half swallowed fish. The wattles of the bird have suggested a decorative treatment similar to that given to the ears in the other example. This is extended upwards in the form of a carved representation of a feather borrowed from the other end of the fowl—at each side of the head, supporting a serpent in a characteristic wriggling posture. The coloring is in black, white, and red. The part of the mask intended to fit over the wearer's head is covered

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PLATE XI.



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MEMORIAL MASK, NEW IRELAND.

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with what seem to be blossoms somewhat resembling edelweiss fastened to a coarse bast cloth foundation to imitate feathers. These extend forward between the vertical feathers, and on each side of the comb, down between the eyes to the base of the bill. Here again the serviceable mussel shell comes into use for the eyes. The rounded panels which contain these are bounded by a well marked ridge, and this is further emphasized by strips of bast cloth stained red drawn around the ridge.

Every native of New Ireland has a bird as *manu*, which, to judge from somewhat incomplete accounts, must be of the nature of a totem. "A man and a woman," we are told, "who have the same *manu*, must not marry. . . . Only such natives as have different *manu* may marry, and the issue of this pair always inherit the *manu* of the mother."

The *manu* are always represented in the memorial wood carvings. These benevolent spirits protect men from harm. Other creatures which appear in the carvings stand for evil spirits with whom the *manu* are always in conflict. Snakes and lizards are mentioned as among the most dangerous of maleficent powers.

H. U. H.