

ETHNOLOGY

Study Islander Ideas

Bismarck Archipelago group are not so superstitious. Not "animists," but believe evil spirits take up residence in a particular spot until killed. "Kot" can be exorcised.

► NATIVES of the Bismarck Archipelago, South Sea island group at present occupied by Japan, are not the simple, superstitious folk they are often credited with being, declares Rev. Joseph Meier, M.S.C., of Sacred Heart Monastery, Bernharts, Pa., who once lived among them as a missionary. In the anthropological journal, *Primitive Man* (July-October), Father Meier tells of some of their ideas about the spirit world.

They do believe in spirits, Father Meier states, but they definitely do not think that every tree, rock, mountain and other natural object has a spirit in it. That is, they are not "animists". An evil spirit (called a "kot") may take up residence in a particular spot, but can be driven out or even killed.

Father Meier tells how such a "kot" was once exorcised with so prosaic a means as a gunshot, from the weapon of a companion on an expedition.

He and his companion, a lay brother from the mission, were going up a trail together with a party of natives. At one point, the natives began to make a detour because, they explained, a "kot" had taken up residence in a certain cave where there was a well, and had killed a woman going there to get water.

Father Meier told the natives he would have his companion expel the "kot" with his gun. Partly reassured, they followed—but he noticed that the party got thinner and thinner. They had all dropped out and were hiding behind trees. At last he and the lay brother were quite alone.

"I told my companion to shoot into the cavern. He did so, and a loud detonation followed which all the hiding natives could hear. Immediately after the shot, I called as loud as I could, 'Come on, boys, now. The well is clear and so is the path. Don't be afraid. You see, nothing has happened to me or my companion. The "kot" is gone.'

"The natives now approached from all sides. A cloud of smoke and a penetrating smell of powder were issuing from the cavern. Obviously the 'kot' was not only shot but smoked out of the

cavern and driven out by the strange odor. Some loose stones, too, had fallen from the top and sides of the cavern into the water and this was another unmistakable sign that the 'kot' had fled. All previous awe of the natives for that well was now charmed away."

The natives of the islands, Father Meier says, have a rather good knowledge of human anatomy. This he attributes in part to their former cannibalistic practices. They had the curiosity to examine their victims while they were cutting them up for cooking. They even have a knowledge of comparative anatomy, studying the internal organs of animals killed for food and comparing them with their own.

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PLANT PATHOLOGY

Beetle Carriers of Fungus Active; No Aid for Elms

► A REAL threat from a foreign enemy that invaded our shores some years ago and is now pretty well entrenched is the danger to the elms in ever-widening radius around New York City from the fungus plague that has been misnamed Dutch elm disease. It didn't come from the Netherlands but from Central Europe.

Due to war-time economies in appropriations, and in particular to the dissolution of the C.C.C. and drastic cuts in the number of W.P.A. workers, it is not possible for public agencies to do any work within the area known to be infested. All that is being done this summer is scouting along the edges of the infested region, to find any new spreads of the disease.

The beetles that disseminate the fungus are breeding, flying and getting into new trees now, and they will be at their most active during all of August. Since federal aid in the elm disease campaign is lacking, local communities and private individuals who value their elms will have to look out for themselves this season.

Science News Letter, August 22, 1942

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Th-9