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Intellectual Life.

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DUK DUK *and other* CUSTOMS as forms of EXPRESSION of the
MELANESIANS' INTELLECTUAL LIFE. By GRAF V. PFEIL.

WHEN after a lengthy intercourse with the Kanaka of that part of Melanesia which to-day we call the Bismarck Archipelago, the European has learned to some extent to know and to understand the habits of the natives among whom he lives, he is particularly struck by one feature which is so prominent that in a great measure it forms the key-note of that very peculiar composition which we call the native character. It is the strongly apparent desire towards physical and psychical seclusion. Where the native has been left entirely, or nearly so, to himself; where he has not been obliged to yield to the European's coercive influence, he will try his utmost to confine his intercourse to his own family and to the very next villages, with whose inhabitants he is probably connected by ties of blood. Any person from a village removed beyond the small district which the Kanaka looks upon as his home he considers a stranger, and consequently an enemy. This feeling might be justified if extended towards the intruding white man, but is difficult to understand when entertained towards nearly all individuals of the same race, provided the distance which separates their respective villages exceed that which can be accomplished in an easy ramble. It is difficult to say whether fear is the *root* of this strange disposition, or whether the continued practice of seclusion has bred up in the Kanaka that constant suspicious fear which never for a minute permits him to lose control over himself. It is probable that both tendencies are innate to the Kanaka, and that his character as we now observe it is merely the result of their combined effect prolonged through ages.

We can clearly distinguish a psychical and physical direction in this tendency towards seclusion, the extreme end of each being strongly marked. More difficult would it be to trace the line from which these two branches take their departure.

The Kanaka who is not yet influenced by civilisation hates strangers, in whom he sees only enemies. No wonder he tries to have as little communication with them as possible. The habit of cannibalism, which is still practised to a great extent in this part of the world, may be explained as an emphasis on their abhorrence of the stranger, whom they wish to exterminate. This habit may also be considered the extreme point of physical seclusion. Towards the black it is still kept up in its aggressive

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form, in so far that no Kanaka may, without risk of life, attempt to visit the district of a tribe with which his own is not on distinctly friendly terms. Before the power of the white man had become sufficiently established, that aggressive inclination was also directed against him, and many white men became its victims. Since the Kanaka has been taught that the white intruder becomes the more disagreeable the more he is repulsed, he has contented himself with bearing his presence as a necessary evil, which presents as extenuating circumstance the introduction of a number of articles which, though not strictly necessary in themselves, are yet agreeable additions to life's comfort. If thus we may consider that, so far as our influence reaches, we have in some measure at least been able to diminish the Kanaka's physical seclusion, we must confess that it has up till now been perfectly impossible to remove the barrier which he has erected between his inner self and those who surround him. How little progress we have made in this direction may be gleaned from the fact that, in spite of the strong materialistic tendency of the Kanaka, we have not yet been able to teach him to look upon any of the productions of our manufacturing industry as a necessity. He likes our hatchets, our *lavalava*, wire, etc. He would, however, gladly dispense with any of those articles, even with matches, if through this sacrifice he could rid himself of the presence of the hated white man. There is only one thing the loss of which would draw a tear from the shallow well of his eyes—American tobacco. Alcohol and sugar possess no allurements for him; only the narcotic weed seems to possess the charm to soothe the savage Kanaka's breast. We have many instances to prove this. If we look at other parts of the world which have only been opened to trade within memory of man we find that clothing of some sort has been adopted by the savages, if not from want of it or from a sense of decency, so at least from a desire of ornament. In the Archipelago we compel the native to cover his nakedness, and force him, in a way, to become the purchaser of our cotton manufactures. When we visit him in his village on the coast, or among the mountains, we find that he has put his loin-cloth aside and resumed his accustomed nakedness. When labourers return to their homes they bring with them clothes, hatchets, and other goods they have received for the money due to them as wages. The boxes containing these articles are immediately plundered by the men's relatives or co-villagers: the articles are worn for a while as grotesque ornament, and then thrown aside, with exception of the hatchets, the superiority of which over the old stone or shell tool has become generally known and acknowledged.

This fact, that our trading goods have not been able to fetter the Kanaka's avarice further than they have, may be looked upon as a proof of both the physical and psychical seclusion, in so far, as the desire to possess these goods has not led to a more general intercourse between the two races, which in its turn might lead to a better mutual understanding. I have alluded to the difficulty we find in pointing to the spot where the physical and psychical branches of the Kanaka's desire for seclusion part asunder, but have always thought that this peculiar passive resistance to a new shape of wealth was a good markstone between the two extremes, one of which, as we have seen, finds its expression in the disgusting habit of cannibalism. As a further illustration of the extent to which the Kanaka carries his physical seclusion, I may state that that part of the Gazelle-peninsula which is known to us, though only thinly peopled, is divided in no less than twenty districts, in each of which another dialect of the same language is spoken, all of which differ so much that, while the inhabitants of two neighbouring districts may still converse together, those of localities further removed from each other have difficulty in making themselves understood when they happen to meet.

Far more difficult to define, but also more interesting to study, is the Kanaka's psychical seclusion. It might be argued that the racial differences are so great that a real understanding between the Kanaka and the European cannot be arrived at. If that were the case, the character of the African negro would or ought to remain as unintelligible to us as that of the Kanaka. We find, however, that we can easily read the negro when once we have gained his confidence, which the Kanaka seems entirely unable to bestow. His distrust, suspicion, and fear is not alone directed towards the white, but also against his own kindred; and the loud, joyous communicativeness which is an agreeable distinguishing feature in the negro character, is utterly wanting in that of the Kanaka. Their councils are held in the darkest, remotest part of the forest; and even here their conversation is carried on in an undertone, and suspended the instant a newcomer appears. Their festivities, though noisy enough, are void of the sound of genuine mirth; and innate fear of some dark, ever-present, invisible danger never permits the Kanaka to lose control over himself for one instant, or to yield to the promptings of softer emotions, which he has perhaps long forgotten to harbour. His untutored mind is unable to give shape to his sinister apprehension, or, better, to reason that supposed danger out of existence; and his imagination, always more active than his reflection, fills the world with invisible beings gifted with the power and the will to do him harm.

His materialistic turn of mind interprets all supposed actions of the spirits as the expression of a desire to be fulfilled by him; and as he is unable to distinguish between cause and effect, nearly every event of which the origin is not at once apparent, is attributed to the agency of a spirit, and looked upon as a communication from them. He hears their voice in the sough of the wind, in the thundering breakers of the sea, in the rustling of the falling leaf; and the frequent shocks of earthquake, which indicate the ever diminishing throes of Nature's mightiest manifestation, are to him but expressions of discontent of some aggressively-inclined spirits. These require continual propitiation, not that they may do good, but that they may leave evil undone. When a Kanaka hears a noise he cannot at once interpret, he knows that a spirit is passing by. Looking in his supposed direction he says "*Ukakup*," "Are you bringing anything?" This expression conveys at the same time an invitation to stay and to partake of what is going to be brought or what may already be present. His imagination deceives him into hearing an answer—"Maie," "Yes, indeed"; upon which he replies "*Ule*," "Come." We cannot wonder, after the foregoing, when we discover the endeavour on part of the Kanaka to surround most of his actions with a degree of secrecy, and when we find that he possesses customs shrouded in a mysteriousness which the Kanaka himself can or will not explain, and which must remain totally unintelligible to the European. One of these customs which the visitor in these parts often finds an opportunity to witness, and of which a part has often been described, is the Duk Duk. It is well known as a masked dance; but to my knowledge the various ramifications of this peculiar institution, together with the Eineth and Marawot, have not yet found very careful attention. We may not be far wrong if we assume that in the beginning the Duk Duk ceremony was nothing but another expression of the Kanaka's seclusive inclinations and of the worship of deceased ancestors. A few persons clubbed together and assumed a mask to frighten others from entering their territory and witnessing their proceedings. When there were no more strangers to frighten, the club members found that their affected secrecy tended to inspire awe into the members of their own family and tribe, which perhaps had grown numerous enough to permit a renewed seclusion, in so far as only certain individuals were allowed to become members of the club. The awe which the club inspired probably invested its members with a degree of authority which came to be coveted, so that applications for admission became frequent. The strong materialistic instinct of the Kanaka was not slow to turn this fact to account, and

admission was only granted to those who could afford to pay handsomely for the privilege. When once it was discovered that the club might be made a source of emolument, it would be deeply wronging the Kanaka character to think that he would have confined himself to the collecting of the comparatively small entrance fee of new members when new and effective methods could be devised by which every member of the club might draw a comfortable little income without being under the unpleasant necessity of doing more work than is absolutely indispensable, even for the laziest Kanaka.

Only men were admitted into the club, and it was thus easy to blackmail the women of the tribe, who, by the customs of the people, enjoy full possession of their own earnings. Being harder workers than the men they soon acquire property; and as there is no legitimate way of turning this stream of increasing prosperity into the men's pockets, the Duk Duk offers a very good means of preventing unfair accumulation of wealth in the hands of the women. To increase the club's authority and give effect to its blackmailing system it had to be shrouded with a new veil of mystic ceremonies. Women were thus forbidden to come anywhere near the spot where the Duk Duk members assemble. If an unfortunate woman happened to see the Duk Duk, *i.e.* the wearers of the mask, she was fined a certain quantity of *dewarra*. At all times the Duk Duk would suddenly appear, mostly, however, during the harvest season, because then the women had to be at work in the fields, and going to and fro, and they were then also mostly well supplied with *dewarra*, the proceeds of the sale of their agricultural productions. It would have been a source of grave suspicion had the blackmail system been directed against women only. To extend it also over men became easy enough, when the tribe had grown so numerous that not all the men could be members of the club, or when the members had so increased in number that new admissions would have unpleasantly reduced their income. Perhaps the natural seclusive tendency also came into play again. Thus also men, not members, were made tributary; but as it proved more difficult to wrest *dewarra* from them they were let off with a series of blows which, however well laid on, were nothing compared to the loss of even a small quantity of the worshipped shell coin. Thus in combining the effects of the Kanaka's natural bent for physical and intellectual solitude and his strong materialistic disposition, we explain easily the two Duk Duk characteristics, which at once strike the beholder—the fear of the women and the beating of the men.

It is but natural that when once the Duk Duk had gained a

certain amount of influence or even power, some individuals, in the first instance probably members of the Duk Duk, afterwards also not members, should have tried to make that power subservient to their own interests. At first the Duk Duk blackmailed those who were enemies to members of the club; later on those whose enemies paid for having them robbed, and gradually the Duk Duk assumed the character of a tribunal, not in the sense that by his verdict he had to establish right and wrong, but as a power with sufficient influence to enjoin peace on contending parties.

If thus the Duk Duk had gradually risen into a position which it required tact and shrewdness to maintain, it became evident that not every member could be allowed to wield its power indiscriminately in his own interest. It became necessary to place that influence into one hand, which, though perhaps corrupt, upheld at least the prestige of the club. It was not necessarily, but most likely, the inventor of the club or his descendant who was invested with the prerogative to call out the Duk Duk, a privilege which he succeeded in reserving for himself and his descendants after him. To-day only certain individuals are entitled to calling the Duk Duk, and we have thus amongst a perfectly savage race a peculiar instance of protection of intellectual property and of a well accentuated entail.

The Duk Duk, which appears with a certain regularity but only with the full moon, skips about for three days, while the lifetime of the Duk Duk which has been called up on a special occasion seems to be limited to a few hours.

Apart from the utilitarian purposes which the Duk Duk has to serve, it is the means of satisfying the metaphysical desire which, as we have seen, is so strongly developed in the Kanaka. The members of the Duk Duk celebrate certain feasts of very mysterious character, and it is not yet quite clear how they are connected with the Duk Duk, how they originated, and what they portend. One of these feasts, though in some way connected with the Duk Duk, is quite an independent institution, and is called *Eineth*. At certain seasons in the year—the intervals seem to be irregular—a number of people, members of the Duk Duk, gather in a remote part of the forest at the call of the person who is entitled to call up the Duk Duk, and who is on this account called its owner.

In the dense bush they build huts, which they surround with a railing or fence of reeds so closely joined that it is difficult to peep through the chinks. The huts are built square, and the walls plastered with clay and whitewashed. On the

white ground of these walls the artist of the tribe paints most curious figures. One of them resembles a crocodile on high legs, with the tail rolled up like a hawser; the other reminds the European spectator of a monkey, a very striking circumstance and proof of a highly developed imagination on part of the Kanaka, because no monkey exists in that part of the world of which the Kanaka can possibly have any knowledge.

A third figure resembles the casuary, a bird with which the natives are familiar. On some of the largest trees outside of the fence other figures are drawn. One represents a stinging rayfish in the act of biting into a human arm. Some more arms and snakes are painted on another tree, and on a third we find two very curious shapeless figures, which represent two evil spirits: they are called *Turangan* and *Marengare*. Who and what these spirits are and what they do the Kanaka will not, or cannot, explain. They merely say that they are spirits of departed people. This is another of many proofs that the Kanakas believe in an existence after death, but would also prove again their sinister disposition, which leads them to think that even people whom they knew during their lifetime, with whom they were on friendly terms or even related, assume the shape of an enemy so soon as they leave their human friends and enter into the ranks of spirits. This fenced-in group of huts is accessible only to members of the Duk Duk. Anybody happening upon it unawares is fined heavily, and as a direction in which the "*Torainu*" lies is well known, nobody ventures thither. The festivities celebrated here are of a very peculiar character. I do not think that any European would be admitted to a really important one, and only the members are informed of the day fixed for any festivity. I only once succeeded in bribing an influential man to procure admittance for me, and should possibly not have succeeded then had not my official position added weight to my *dewarra*-supported request. I feel convinced that even then I was only permitted to witness a minor affair. About twenty men squatted on the ground in a semicircle with their faces turned towards the painted houses. All were silent; and my guide, subduing his own voice to a whisper, enjoined silence on me. He then sat down before the other members with his back turned towards them. After a while a basket containing all kinds of victuals was placed before him, the leader of the feast. He rose murmuring a few incomprehensible words over the contents of the basket, and stepping towards the other men, who now also had risen, he held certain kinds of food up to the mouth and nose of each individual, accompanying the action with some more words in an inaudible voice. He then replaced the food

in the basket. When he had finished the round, the basket was taken away, and all the guests sat down again. The silent meeting was then continued for an indefinite period. From that moment, to each of those present that kind of food is rendered *tambu* (that is, forbidden) which had been held up to his mouth. The *tambu* lasts perhaps for a month, perhaps even a year, and it is not alone food which is thus *tambued*, but also other objects—certain actions, or even words. Thus it may be made *tambu* to wear a certain kind of ornament, to sleep inside a house, or to pronounce certain words or names. It is remarkable that the latter habit forms a curious parallel to the custom called *Alonipa* of the Zulus. During this period of *tambu* the participators are subject to a certain control. After certain irregular intervals—which seem to be connected with the phases of the moon—they meet again at the “*Toraiu*,” from which they march in a procession all round the neighbourhood. Without any kind of dress—instead of which they assume a grotesque war-paint—we discover in it the snake designs drawn on the trees before the “*Toraiu*”—they walk in Indian file. Under the right armpit they wear a plaited mat bag, from which a reed with a bushy whisp projects upwards and backwards. After a certain number of steps they all simultaneously slap their naked thighs, producing a noise audible at some distance. The whole ceremony described as the *Eineth* cannot be explained upon the basis of the Kanaka’s materialism; but if the people attach any special significance to the *Eineth*, which is doubtful, they can certainly not clearly define it. The great repugnance they show to giving any information, and the difficulty the European experiences to witness these ceremonies regularly, renders it no easy task to explain the origin of the custom. We can, however, not go very far wrong if we seek an explanation in the character of the Kanaka, in which fear and distrust are coupled with gross materialism. It is, therefore, not at all unlikely that, as the Duk Duk is a means of extracting material advantages from mankind, the *Eineth* is a method of propitiating the spirits to avert evil. Another most remarkable feast is the *Marawot*. That the Kanakas attach most importance to it may be gathered from the fact that it is celebrated only at very long intervals. In 1889 it was for the first time beheld by Europeans. Kanakas who otherwise would scarcely care to meet give up all hostile feeling for the time, and at the *Marawot* an *omnium gatherum* takes place which shows that, although the desire for seclusion is an obstacle to all traffic, there are yet ties between the people that prove their consanguinity. From the scant information it was possible to collect it would seem that no

single individual can arrange a *Marawot* feast, but that the consent of not a few people is necessary. This information is supported by the fact of the rare repetition of the performance. To direct a number of diverging ideas into one focus is probably no easier task among reserved and distrustful Kanakas than it is among equally distrustful but more affable Europeans.

For the *Marawot* the people build a platform of bamboo, raised about 50 to 60 feet above the ground. The whole structure is covered with green foliage and wreaths, so that it almost gives the impression of an old ivy-clad tower; gorgeously coloured crotons give liveliness to the sombre green. The platform is about 15 feet square and projects on all sides over the under-structure. On it a certain number of young men have to perform a sort of war-dance with spears and other arms. The structure, which is only held together by means of ligatures made of the bark of trees, possesses little stability, and sways with every motion of the dancers and before every puff of wind. It is, therefore, not easy to perform the dance on the platform, which is not provided with any kind of railing. To ensure success and to prevent accidents a great many rehearsals are necessary, during which the dancers grow accustomed to the uncomfortable motion and the giddy height, and learn to move freely without betraying outward signs of discomfort. The dancers and their weapons are richly decorated with gaily coloured feathers of the various parrots and cockatoos which abound in the country. The only *Marawot* which was ever witnessed by Europeans was held in Matupit, a small island in Blanche Bay. It lasted three days, and there were perhaps 300 to 400 spectators from various parts of the Gazelle-peninsula and the Duke of York group. The bamboo structure was left standing; and if anyone thought it just possible that bamboos might get loose, and, dropping from such a height, endanger the lives of passers-by, he was at liberty to remove the thing; but these are minor considerations with the Kanaka, and the work was left to the Europeans.

It is at present perfectly impossible to trace the origin of these customs or to interpret them in any plausible way. They have, however, all one thing in common—they have to be paid for by the uninitiated; they are shrouded with mystery, which is only revealed to those who become members by paying a certain entrance fee, and they enrich the members, particularly the leaders of the feast. The entrance fee varies between 50 to 100 fathoms of *dewarra*, which is equal to £5 10s., or about the annual subscription to a good English club. I have already shown that these customs diverged into a speculative direction only when they had become sufficiently established to be sur-

rounded with a halo of authority. It would therefore be wrong to suppose that merely the view of possible emolument led to their establishment.

Respecting the direct gain of those who give the feast another difficult question presents itself: Who gains, and how is a profit obtained? The chiefs admit that they profit by a feast of that kind, yet they have to advance the *dewarra* necessary to defray the first heavy expenses. It is said that each visitor has to pay a certain quantity of *dewarra*; but how can that be controlled considering that no Kanaka will pay for a thing he can have for nothing? To see the dance he need only climb a cocoanut-tree, and his food he brings with him. Yet it is quite unlikely that any Kanaka would incur the expense of such a feast without a fair chance of profit. There remains only one possible method—the *tambu*. We have seen that the Duk Duk and the *Eineth* could pronounce certain things to be *tambu* for a given time. At the end of that time it has to be bought off with *dewarra*. In case of mourning—where the *tambu* falls on all the members of the family—the woman who is the nearest relative to the deceased pays a piece of *dewarra* to the next male relative, who passes it on diminished by a portion (which he keeps for himself) to the next male, and so on till a very small part reaches the last relative. This is repeated for every object which has been *tambued*. In this manner, again, the women have to produce the *dewarra*, which enriches the men. A similar rule is perhaps observed at these feasts. Most likely a number of *tambus* are pronounced, and they have to be bought off. Now the question arises: Is the *tambu* laid on the men alone? Who, then, produces the *dewarra*, and how does the club or the chief make their profit? If the *tambu* is laid on the women also, why do they come to visit the performance, knowing, as they must do, that all the expense falls on them? It is clear that we do not as yet possess all the facts concerning these curious customs, and that it will require careful study to collect them, a task rendered particularly difficult through the reticence the Kanaka observes in conversation about these matters. But when we shall have solved the *dewarra* question we shall probably find that it represents only the speculative phase of a custom of which the key is to be looked for in that part of the Kanaka character which it is his constant effort to hide from the inquisitive glance of the European and from which springs the root of his manifest desire for seclusion.

The existence of all the customs we have described under the heading of Duk Duk is doomed. The awe which they formerly inspired has considerably faded before the European's contemptuous derision. The chiefs feel their power slip from their

hands, and hasten to turn into solid wealth a prerogative which, if they tried to preserve it, might vanish altogether. They sell the right of raising the Duk Duk to the tribes further inland, where the thick bush shields it from the European's withering eye, and where critical reflection lies as yet latent in the mind of the unsophisticated savage. They receive good sums from the new purchasers, and besides reserve to themselves the right of levying fines in case all the intricate rules are not strictly observed, thus ensuring to themselves a fair income until such time when white man's irresistible advance will necessitate a renewed removal in regions still more remote.

That time is not far distant. The expansion of the white races over the globe is a necessity which will slowly perhaps, but surely, break down all the barriers raised by climate and ruggedness to retard his progress in these islands. No time ought to be lost, therefore, to collect all possible information about customs of a race which is one of the very few still living in the stone period.

The plough of civilisation, in turning up hitherto virgin soil to prepare it for the seed of European culture, is sure to root up many weeds which, though noxious in the new field, were, if useless, at least ornamental. And as the zoologist reconstructs curious animals from the remains found in the layers of the crust of the earth, and through them is enabled to trace the origin of the living species of animals, so is the study of habits and customs of pristine races necessary to trace the development and history of our own.

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