

THE COLONIZATION OF PRIMITIVE PEOPLES WITH SPECIAL
CONSIDERATION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE SELUNG.

by

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Ethnology is a science which has for its object the study of the peoples of this earth. It goes without saying that it is devoted above all to a study of the so-called primitive peoples, or rather, to peoples living in a state of nature. For these alone are able, at least to a certain extent, to clear up the obscurity of the history of the development of the human race, its associations and its migrations; for we here still find remnants of otherwise long since past ages. Hence we ethnologists see with regret that, in consequence of the penetration of European-American civilisation, these peoples are everywhere about to become extinct. Just to pick out one example, the fate of the Indians in America has become a byword.

In Africa, the oldest strata of human civilisation, even the highly civilised, have become either quite eradicated, or heavily decimated. I myself was in West Africa in the year 1930 in search of the Kassanga, a people about whom only the first Portuguese discoverers in the 17th century give any account. At that time they were a powerful nation and one could estimate at over 30,000 the number of their warriors. The district is still to-day called Kassamanco after their great King Kassa. After many months of search we found at last a few dilapidated huts, which were inhabited by 204 demoralised, half-civilised natives. It was all that was left of the once powerful tribe.

On the gigantic Australian continent, which to-day is inhabited by only about six million odd people, but which, without any special

improvement, could easily provide living room for far over thirty millions, the case is much sadder still. Of the many hundred thousand, perhaps even million members of the black population, whom the first discoverers found, only a little more than a few thousand are left.

In Tasmania the original inhabitants disappeared within a few decades so quickly and thoroughly that the Museum in Sydney to-day cannot so much as show a complete collection of the relics of the material culture of these natives. The British part of the Solomons is inhabited to-day by about 80,000 natives. A few decades ago, however, this number was many times as great. These sad examples may be continued in an endless succession.

A few months ago a thoughtless official said to me: We should extirpate all the peoples living in a state of nature, in order to make more room for us. These words are characteristic of a wide-spread erroneous idea. The extinction of the peoples living in a state of nature would mean not only an irretrievable loss to science, but also, irrespective of ethical motives, bring about serious economic injury to the colonists.

How are these peoples now to remain protected and preserved, and what rôle in this process falls to the science of ethnology?

In every colonisation the following fundamental rule is observed, namely, that every specialisation⁽¹⁾ has been at the expense of the capacity for adaptation. This holds good not only for ontogenesis,⁽²⁾ but also for phylogenesis.⁽³⁾ Hence if the environment of such a people were suddenly, either in a natural or artificial way, to be changed, it dies out without the cause becoming evident. In such cases one finds generally only a slight resistance against certain diseases, which to other peoples are not at all dangerous. This law of the failing capacity for adaptation, besides, holds good only for certain groups of peoples. It holds not only for all primitive peoples, such as hunters and gatherers, but also for peoples of a higher sphere of

(1) Biology.—Adaptation in the structure of an entire organism for life in particular surroundings, or for particular habits.

(2) —the history of the individual, development of a organised being as distinguished from phylogenesis.

(3) —a biological term applied to the evolution or genealogical history of a race or tribe.

civilisation, and above all for nomadic cattle-rearers, who in the course of time have extensively adapted themselves to nature and with whom one cannot, therefore, without serious injury, forcibly bridge over between to-day and to-morrow what would require thousands of years in their development. It does not hold good, however, for peoples of higher culture as, for instance, Indians, Tamils, Burmese, Siamese, Chinese, Japanese, etc. The relinquishment of the old culture and their assimilation of European-American forms of civilisation have brought on no such consequences with these peoples, because they have already extensively made themselves independent of nature in the course of a natural development, as it were, without losing their capacity for adaptation.

That it is, however, also possible to colonise specialised peoples without destroying them, Sweden offers an excellent example by way of evidence.

A few decades ago the Swedish Government was of the opinion that it was their mission to civilise and to settle the people of Lapland, who were leading a nomadic life with enormous herds of reindeers in northern Sweden. The Laplanders were with some difficulty prevailed upon to settle down, and the children were sent with the Swedish children to the village schools. These schools had the disadvantage that the children were excluded, just in the most impressionable age, from every task which devolved upon them as future breeders of reindeers. They learnt, it is true, a good many things, the knowledge of which is quite advantageous in Europe: they did not learn, however, to look after reindeers nor to throw a lasso, and they acquired no knowledge about the breeding of reindeers or anything else belonging to the life of a nomad. Many got accustomed to the settlements to such a degree and picked up in their intercourse with the settlers so much of the nature of the peasants, that they lost the desire to know anything more of the life of a reindeer and gave up their racial character. In spite of that it was not possible for them to adapt themselves suddenly to the new relationship and they died by the hundreds of tuberculosis, a disease from which they had remained fully spared during their wandering life.

And the reindeers, for the breeding of which a nomadic existence is presupposed, went astray and fell a victim in great numbers to the wolves and bears. Wide lands, which in consequence of their north-

ern situation or height lay outside arable limits, thus lost their unique inhabitants and the Swedish Government had soon to admit, that the farming of reindeers was the only possible way of using the waste land to the best advantage economically. From that consideration the policy with regard to the Laplanders was radically changed. Ethnologists established the conditions and presuppositions of life among the Laplanders, the settlement was forbidden and in the year 1925 new school regulations for the Laplanders were drawn up, which have become a foundation for the preservation of a nomadic race. The nomadic schools of Sweden, established on the basis of these regulations, can immediately be taken as a model. They are fully adapted to the life of the Laplanders. The children learn, besides reading, writing, calculating and domestic duties, everything that they must subsequently know as breeders of reindeers. Wherever any families of Laplanders camp for a long time, so-called "abode-schools" are erected. Besides, there are also the proper travelling schools, in which the instruction is given in tents and which change their stopping places continually with the wandering of big families. Carefully trained women teachers, who are always of Laplander origin, give lessons in seminaries of their own; for parents and children bestow only on a member of their own people the confidence that is so necessary for beneficial work. Besides, Swedes could hardly endure in the long run the primitive life of a peat cottage or a wandering tent.

In the "abode-schools" the children are put under the care of one of their own "housekeepers," whilst the parents move further into the mountains with their herds. The parents are glad that the children need not join in some of these hard wanderings and that they are in good keeping.

At the same time the Government has created an organisation in order to render possible for the Laplanders the fullest utilisation of the reindeers. To-day the Laplanders pay their taxes to the Government in reindeers and the skin and meat of many thousands of reindeers are exported to all parts of the world. The number of reindeers in Sweden has again multiplied in these few years, and the state of health and the standard of living of the Laplanders have vastly improved.

Such experiences have caused the English to employ professional ethnologists in certain colonies, who observe the Government's

measures with regard to the natives and give advice as to their expediency. By this means excellent results have been obtained.

I myself had the opportunity of observing a most interesting experiment in Papua under British-Australian suzerainty. Sir Hubert Murray, the Governor, desired to preserve the environment of the Motu, a race of the Melanesian coast. He tried to insert them, together with their environment, into a European-American sphere of civilisation. For this purpose he was induced to issue a regulation, which prohibited the natives from wearing European clothes and forbade the traders to provide them with European means of subsistence and comfort. This called forth a storm of indignation amongst traders as well as missionaries: the former were of the opinion that such regulations would ruin their business, whilst the latter asserted that the very scanty dress of the natives was immoral. Sir Hubert Murray, however, remained firm and up to to-day one can indeed see in Port Moresby, the chief town of Papua, by the side of the elegant automobiles of the white residents, the members of the Motu race wandering about the streets naked except for a tiny loin-cloth.

Perhaps it will now be asked, what is the use then of colonisation? The colonist needs markets for the sale of goods and it cannot be his mission to keep the people to be colonised from buying his wares. On the south coast of New Guinea the circumstances are quite different. The land is very sparsely settled, and an extraordinarily fertile soil renders possible the cultivation of all tropical, and in the mountains, of many useful European plants. The tropical damp climate, however, hinders members of the white race from doing physical work to any great extent. Sir Hubert Murray has now altogether renounced the creation of a market for the sale of goods, but in its place has preserved for the land the labour which it absolutely needed for the carrying on of its plantations. For, as a matter of fact, it may be asserted that in Papua the number of the Motu, if it has not actually increased, has at least not decreased. And if one considers the catastrophic extinction of all the older races of people in the South Seas and in the rest of Guinea, this should already be appreciated as a success.

I should like now to give an account of my observations concerning a people, whom the Siamese call Tshaonam, the Burmese, Selon or Selung, and the Malays, Orang Laut or Orang Louta; but they call

themselves Moken, and I shall therefore retain this name in my discussion of them.

Accompanied by my wife, my mission was to investigate ethnologically the Moken and to clear up the conflicting statements in the literature concerning their origin and migration. We visited for this purpose a great many islands, made an exhaustive study of the Moken and their language, investigated them psychologically according to the tests of development worked out by the Bühler Institute in Vienna and ensured a complete museum collection, illustrating their material culture. I should like now to single out from this study certain points which appear to me to be of special importance for the problem broached at the beginning of this paper.

The Moken inhabit the islands of the Mergui Archipelago, islands of the west coast of the Peninsula of Siam, and of the Malay Peninsula. Their number in Burma is given in the census of India of the year 1901 as 1,325, and in the census of 1911, as 1,984. The number in Siam is estimated by Credner at a few hundred. No estimate from the Malay Peninsula is known to me.

From old literature and from reports of English officials it is known that the Moken had to suffer from slave-hunts, which were organised chiefly by Malays, in the most breezy manner. Robbing the Moken seemed to be partly life's business, partly downright sport. An attempt at colonisation by the English was after a short time given up on account of its complete failure. An attempt on the part of the mission under the leadership of White, who brought over to Moulmein a few Moken in order to learn their language, also failed altogether. So it happens that even to-day the overwhelming part of the Mergui Archipelago is not administered by the British Government and numerous islands have not been once mapped out. In Government circles there is a general disinterestedness, which by reason of the experiences just described seems quite comprehensible. A high Government official once said to me: Why should I trouble myself with the Moken? Often have I tried to approach these people, but they have always run away from me.

On the other hand I was surprised at the great number of expensively furnished villas of the traders in Mergui, who owe their great wealth to the sea-products collected by the Moken. Herein appeared to me to lie a certain discrepancy with the experiences of the Government circles just described.

We equipped ourselves in Mergui, hired a motor sailing-boat and visited different islands, but soon, however, convinced ourselves that the statements about the difficulty of an approach were not exaggerated. Although we were accompanied by a Moken in the service of a Chinese trader, who served us as interpreter, we did not succeed in approaching the inmates of the various Moken vessels, which we several times sighted. In every case the natives took to flight and disappeared into the wide mangrove swamps. When we once, however, surprised twelve boats on the beach, which had no time to flee, the inmates left their boats in the lurch, seized their children and as much household-stuff as they could carry on the shoulders and disappeared into the thick jungle. Attempts for hours to get them to come back with the help of our interpreter remained quite ineffectual.

We determined, therefore, to try our luck with the help of one of the Malay traders who buy the sea-products collected by the Moken. On Lampi Island we at last succeeded in getting to know one of them.

There were there about a hundred and twenty Moken—the inmates of twenty-one boats who, as was their custom, had erected just before the rainy season temporary huts on the beach. The trader bought from them tin ore, which they extracted in the most primitive manner not far from the beach and in the shallows bordering the shore, and other products of the sea, which he received in exchange for opium and provisions, chiefly rice and sugar. With the help of this Malay it was now possible for us to convince the Moken of our harmlessness. When I had succeeded in curing a series of illnesses, the confidence of the Moken was obtained and soon, upon excursions extending further and further, we could seek out a greater number of temporary settlements and wandering groups and stay among them, without their ever thinking of taking to flight. Now on the basis of personal observation we could make the following statements. The insecurity with regard to their rights, by which the Moken, according to ancient records used to be threatened, has hardly changed even to-day. The reports of robberies from the fishermen, even to the theft of women and children, by Malays, Chinese and Burmese, were numerous. The singular fact that the Moken never defend themselves, and from olden times have possessed no defensive—not to mention offensive—weapons but seek their salvation

solely in flight, facilitates for the aggressors their rapacious activity and makes the Moken a coveted prey, to whom no mercy is shown. To our repeated questions why they did not bring these facts to the knowledge of the Anglo-Indian Government, who would certainly make amends, we received from the Moken the stereotyped answer: they would only put us in prison or sell us as slaves. Surprised, we investigated further how the people came to entertain this certainly unjust idea and it turned out that it was the traders who, through the spreading of such false rumours, were thus successfully preventing the Government from shaking their privileged position.

In explanation of this privileged position I must, to be sure, enter into particulars with regard to the foundation of this quite singular trade. Each trader first of all exerts himself to the extent of "marrying" a Moken maid whom he treats well and whom he trains as a sort of decoy-bird for the rest of her tribe, as the family-ties are the strongest ties of the Moken. Then he accustoms his new relatives to the pleasure of opium, which is not smoked but eaten, and tells them afterwards that they would die, if they were to try to free themselves from the vice. The Moken are very easily influenced. If one of them cannot obtain the drug and feels the clinical symptoms of deprivation, he begins already to think that he must die.

As soon as the Moken are accustomed to the pleasure of opium, they are defrauded by the trader in an absolutely incredible manner. Officially the Moken working for the trader as divers and collectors of birds-nests receive one rupee—about two Austrian shillings—a day. By far the greater part of the wages, however, is as a rule paid out in opium, for which the traders calculate ten to fifteen times the price which they themselves have to pay as duty in the opium shops licensed by the Government. Since, moreover, the Moken know no higher numerals, no calculating and no standard of values, it is easy for the traders to get into their hands really extraordinarily valuable products such as pearls and amber for a minute fraction of their value. The sources of the riches of the Mergui traders began to become clear to us.

We were further able to establish why the spreading of cholera is not unjustly attributed to the Moken. That is to say, when members of a community are taken ill with an epidemic such as cholera or small-pox, they, being animists, think that only speedy flight can protect them from the wrath of the gods who have been insulted.

The corpses are thrown in all haste on the beach, often in the neighbourhood of the rare fresh-water springs, and in wild flight the natives disperse over the whole region, taking with them the sick and thus preparing further death and destruction.

Moreover we were able to establish that the number of the Moken given in the census is not in accordance with the facts. This is probably because the Moken successfully concealed themselves from the census officials in their hiding places, into which the motor vessels of the Government could not follow them. I think that in Burmese territory alone one must reckon over 5,000 inhabitants. Still less can I believe in the increase of the population, as it appears from a comparison of the two numbers of the census. All signs point on the contrary to a decrease in the population. Already the last cholera epidemic alone claimed numerous victims and, in surveying the family history of our protégés, we met again and again with the stereotyped statement: Died a short time ago of cholera or fever. And the sight of many fresh skeletons on the burial grounds (the Moken even to-day still make use of platforms on remote islands to deposit their dead) makes this supposition appear to be the right one. This is all the more noteworthy as the vitality, the number of children and the state of health of the Moken in general are all that one could wish. Besides cholera and small-pox they have to suffer chiefly from scabies, ringworm, hook-worm and, not least, malaria. Now and then tropical ulcers, yaws and venereal diseases play a rôle, and other generally prevalent diseases, over which European medicine has now fully gained control. Even the most dangerous contagious diseases can be almost eliminated without difficulty by means of prophylactic inoculation.

It is furthermore important to recognise that the Moken, although they are dependent on the products of the sea, have no knowledge of highly developed fishery. Fishing-traps and fishing-fences are just as unknown to them as fish-hooks and every method of fish-preserving. They catch a small number of fish with harpoons or dive after them with fish-spears; for the rest, the various snails and mussels, which they collect during the ebbtide, and the tubers of roots and fruits of the forest form their chief source of nourishment.

The social organization is built upon the authority of a father. The unit is the big family, which for the time being lives in a boat. The inmates of from five to ten boats form a community. Only before

the beginning of the Monsoon storms do they unite into bigger groups in order to erect temporary huts on bays protected from the storm, which after a few months are again mostly abandoned. Each big family lives in such a hut for a time.

The personal liberty of the individual is extensively guaranteed. Some old people, especially the Shamans,⁽⁴⁾ enjoy a special popularity and considerable authority.

From the psychological examinations there was revealed an early and sound development of the sensitive faculty, an excellent control of the body as well as outstanding social qualities: on the other hand an inferior ability to learn, which is based in no wise on the failing of the imitative instinct, which on the contrary is well formed, but rather on their weak retentive power, which also comprises the lingual retentive power. The faculty to prove oneself practical almost completely failed, but not the perseverance to accomplish. Likewise the revelation of intellect and indeed the understanding of the association of sense and form, as in the use of tools, failed almost entirely. From further investigation there resulted the interesting fact that the majority of the Moken of both sexes were not able to pass the qualification test for admission to the schools. And the work done by the women was somewhat below that of the men. That means, in other words, that a great part of the Moken do not reach that qualification standard, which is presumed of a six year old European child attending the first class of a public elementary school.

From these ethnological and psychological facts we can clearly deduce the kind of colonisation which, for the Moken alone, appears to be appropriate and possible.

1. It would be well to leave out of consideration every attempt at a permanent settlement. For the giving of any instruction, regard should be paid to the wanderings of the Moken, which are dependent on the season.

2. As the Moken are amenable to treatment by European doctors and gladly submit to it, one should first consider the way to treat them. To begin with, those places where a primitive tin-mining

(4) Shamanism—Primarily, the primitive religion of the Ural-altaic peoples of Northern Asia and Europe, in which the unseen world of gods, demons and ancestral spirits is conceived to be responsive only to the Shamans, mediumistic magicians. Hence also, any similar religion, especially that of some American Indians, where the medicine-man performs the same function.

industry offers an easy approach to the Moken, should be made easy of access. In these places, also, measures could be taken against the false rumours spread by the traders. According to our experiences there is no difficulty in winning over the Shamans or chieftains, as soon as they see that the European doctor is able to cure diseases against which they themselves stand defenceless.

To carry out the work, a moderately sized motor boat with good medical equipment would suffice for the present. In a comparatively short time a number of assistants would be found amongst the Moken themselves, and it would not be long before the Moken would have lost their absolutely morbid fear of Government officials.

3. The sale of opium by the traders to the Moken should be entirely forbidden and the treatment of addicts should be introduced, which, owing to the fact that these people are easily influenced, should not be difficult. I, myself, made an interesting experiment. I asked one of the worst addicts of the Moken whether he wished to be free of his vice. When he joyfully answered in the affirmative, I gave him pastiles of common soda and described to him exactly how he had to reduce the daily dose of his opium. I warned him not to take any more of his drug, as my medicine might otherwise kill him. As a result the man entirely got rid of his bad habit of eating opium in an astonishingly short time and, so long as I could observe, suffered no relapse at all.

The sale of opium should be allowed only direct from Government agencies and only to such opium addicts as are to be found in the registers. The delivery of opium would have to be discontinued in the course of the year, as otherwise up till then the organisation for sale, mentioned below in section 5, would replace the depleted supplies.

4. As seen from the above psychological investigations, it would be quite futile to attempt to bring up and instruct the Moken according to European fashion. It would be, however, quite possible and advisable to teach the Moken how to improve their methods of fishing. The setting up of wheels and traps, they could easily learn, as well as the manufacture, and use of fishing-nets. It would be most desirable to teach the Moken further the manufacture of fish and shrimp pastes, as well as the preserving of fish by smoking and drying.

5. At the same time an organisation under Government control should superintend the sale of the products of the Moken. The carrying out of this work with the active participation of the Moken

would be all the more easy as the social organisation as well as the social qualities of the Moken are on the whole very conducive to the success of such an organisation.

The disposal of goods would offer no difficulties, as for almost all the products, such as edible birds-nests, pearls, amber, fish-pastes and dried fish the demand to-day greatly exceeds the supply.

Moreover it should be the object of the sales organisation to recover the loss which the British-Indian Government has suffered through the suppression of the revenue derived from the trade concessions in sea-products.

6. The last, and, if I may say so, obvious obligation would be the granting of State protection for the life and property of the Moken. The results of these efforts would be:—

a. The preservation of the inhabitants of an otherwise almost uninhabited, and for other peoples uninhabitable, territory.

b. The keeping within bounds of the severely endemic cholera epidemics in the neighbouring Burmese and Siamese frontier-territories.

c. The utilisation of sea-products, for the acquisition of which the Moken as no other people appear peculiarly fitted in consequence of their physical and psychical disposition.

To sum up, the economic yields of a territory now almost worthless would be very considerably increased and at the same time the original inhabitants would experience a substantial improvement of their circumstances within the bounds of ethnological possibilities. The gain consequently would be for the good of the colonising as well as of the colonised peoples,—a principle, the observance of which alone not only justifies colonisation morally, but also guarantees its duration!

