New Caledonia

F[rançois) Leconte

"Notice sur la Nouvelle Calédonie: les mœurs et les usages de ses habitants."

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"An Account of New Caledonia: on the Mores and the Customs of its Inhabitants."

F. Leconte (sea captain).

[Editor's Introduction to be supplied]

One is indebted to Monsieur le [sic] Leconte, former commander of the corvette *La Seine*, for hitherto unknown details about New Caledonia, about this speck in Oceania where the human species in its primitive state offers the most astonishing spectacle of the savage nature, fighting against the first efforts of civilizing and religious conversion; this inspired a superhuman courage in our Catholic missionaries.

[The Account]

New Caledonia is one of the largest islands in the Great Ocean: it is situated between 20º10' and 22º26' latitude south and 161º35' and 164º35' longitude east from the Paris meridian. Its length is about 180 miles or 60 *lieues marines* [60 leagues, i.e., some.300 kilometers] and its average width is about 15-18 leagues. It forms a

striking contrast to all the lands and islands near it in New Holland, with its rather uniform and insignificant heights; the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands, which are of low elevation; and the Polynesian islands which, with a few exceptions, are generally very low lying. By contrast, the highest of New Caledonia's mountains, I think, reach up to 1,000 metres; it is certainly hilly, uneven and very rugged, and can be seen when the sea is calm from a distance of 50-60 miles (18-20 leagues). This island is almost entirely surrounded by coral reefs, which extend on the east and the west out to sea in some places 3-4 leagues across. To the northwest they spread far beyond the island for around 50 leagues as far as 17º55' latitude and 160º20' longitude while to the southeast they extend even past the Isle of Pines, that is to 22º40' latitude south and 65º longitude east.

New Caledonia was discovered by Captain Cook, who navigated beyond the eastern part of the Isle of Pines, outside the reefs. He dropped anchor near the most northern point of that reef, in a relatively bad mooring spot and exposed to the northwest winds. Though doing so only very rarely, these winds can blow with great violence there. He called this place Balade, a name which is still used for it, even though the natives use it for a village further away. He did not stay long enough **[812]** or his interactions with the natives were not consistent enough, for he says nothing substantial about the customs of these islanders, etc.[1]

Monsieur de la Pérouse was supposed to visit New Caledonia.[2] Therefore Admiral d'Entrecasteaux went with two frigates to search for him. In the course of this voyage, he must have run alongside the island's [New Caledonia's] dangerous shores. He entered its waters on two occasions: the first time he navigated beyond the island on the western side; starting from the Island of Pines, he found a continuous reef that he traced from on board, and which is marked on a peculiar map of New Caledonia made following this trip, and contended that this reef extended a lot further to the northwest than Captain Cook had said. Later, after visiting the Navigator and Friendly Islands [Tonga], he returned to continue anew his searches in the vicinity of

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New Caledonia. He crossed the New Hebrides, and, after discovering the islets of Beaupré [named after Monsieur Beautemps-Beaupré] in the Loyalty Islands, he came to the northern tip of New Caledonia, searched and found the port of Balade where Cook had moored. He asked Monsieur Beau temps-Beaufort, a navy hydrographer, and currently the chief engineer and a member of the Institute de France to draw an accurate map of the region.[3] But Beautemps-Beaupré made only an approximate plotting of the neighbouring reefs; it might have been better for him to abstain from doing so, because this has been the cause of grave errors by subsequent navigators to these regions. The captain of one of the frigates, Monsieur Huon de Kermadec, died at Balade. As it was known that the natives were cannibals, in order to conceal the body from their voracity, they buried it/his body secretly on little sandy island covered by a few shrubs and named Boudioné. From that time on two or three English navigators, without a [formal] mission. have appeared on the shores of New Caledonia; but they have given contradictory reports. One of them did discover in the middle of reefs in the region West-South-West a port which he called Saint-Vincent.

Since the 1815 peace treaty between the European powers many voyages of circumnavigation have been attempted and accomplished. [Although] almost all places in the Great Ocean have been [dis]covered/travelled to and visited, [yet] New Caledonia has always been excluded. It appears that its vicinity/surrounding areas have been consistently considered as some of the most dangerous. As for the French navigators, [i.e.] Messieurs de Freycinet, Duperrey, Dumont-Durville, Le Goarant, Dupetit-Thouars, Laplace and Vaillant, none of them has even caught a glimpse of it. Monsieur Dumont-Durville passed not **[813]** far it, from off the Loyalty Islands [which are] separated [from New Caledonia] by a canal some 16 to 20 leagues, which he called Chabroic, Halgan, etc. He drew up a quite precise map of the principal positions and bearings of the coastline; but it would have been better if he had skirted the islands.[4]

From Nou-Hiva [Loyalty Islands] Vice-Admiral Dupetit-Thouars ordered Julien

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de la Ferrière, the navy captain commanding [*Le*/le] *Bucèphale*, to transport Bishop d'Amata, two missionaries and a few [Marist] Brothers to New Caledonia.[5] They arrived in December 1843 and disembarked at the port of Balade. Since then the corvettes *Le Rhin* and *l'Héroine* have visited this place, and not without danger, because the latter ship thought they were lost like *La Seine* when they came up – through the reefs in passage different to the one of Balade.[6]

New Caledonia has all the characteristics of a primitive/original/ancient land; no trace of any volcano appears to exist. The terrain forms regular layers at a slight angle with the horizon. The ground, very uneven, as I have already said, is covered generally by blocks and fragments of quartz, extremely white pieces of rock crystals; sometimes one finds limestone through which one notices beautiful white marble. The first layers of soil are sandy, of a dark red colour, filled with little fragments of mica; here and there one finds talc as well as jasper of a quite beautiful green; sometimes, but much less often, one finds soil of a silvery grey, compact but very crumbly. One encounters some mineral crystallizations of iron, copper and lead, as well as slate pits and a **[814]** very schistous soil which makes one believe that it would also be possible to find coal here.

The island is partly covered with thick forests which extend up to the mountain tops; the trees (and all vegetation in general) belong to large varieties of species but are not as spectacular as some explorers would want us to believe. One can find there reunited species from New Holland and the Polynesian islands. Not all trees can be used in construction. Wood worms routinely attack all the trees with the exception of ironwood. Some trees have fragrant wood, like the sandalwood, which is quite common, others have fragrant leaves. Amongst the latter one could mention especially the Ranph tree, known under a different name in the East Indies and named *nhéaouli* by the New Caledonians. One finds it everywhere from the coast to the tops of the mountains. Some other trees provide an abundance of resinous gum which, when burnt, emanate a scent almost as pleasant as incense. A species of fir, known in

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New Holland as Norfolk Pine, is also present in the mountains and in forests. The coconut palm is very common near the seashores and could increase its numbers endlessly. I have seen quite a large number of breadfruit tree (*arbres à pin*) in the mountain gorges but they are fruitless; missionaries have told me that the situation is different on the southern parts of the island where their fruits are quite common. One can also come across a wild fig tree with very small fruits but I have not seen any because I was there out of season. I found though that the flavour of its buds is similar to our European figs. Banana trees are everywhere, although not much cultivated; the natives are very fond of its fruit even though they rarely get to eat them when they are ripe because they are stolen when still green. Sugar cane is seen everywhere near the dwellings. Again, it is almost always eaten too soon. The most carefully cultivated plants are several species of yam and the taro. In the mountains and forests one finds a licorice-like plant with a trailing root considered edible by the locals; the *maranta-indica*, a tuberous root from which starch can be extracted and which is also known as *arrowroot*; wild scorzonera (or black salsify) and the nightshade (*morelle* [*Solanum nigrum*] **[815]** which can be used, as in America and India, to make *"brèdes"*, a kind of soup greatly appreciated by our Creoles from Bourbon island [today's Réunion island].

The mountains, valleys and plains not overrun by forests are covered with tall grasses very similar to the Guinea grass; there are some aromatic species, one of them used successfully by the doctor on *La Seine* to treat diarrhoea and dysentery.

The animal kingdom is very poorly represented. Before captain Cook's visit, no quadruped had been seen there. He [captain Cook] left behind, intentionally or by chance, some cats who had a small number of offsprings in the wild and who all looked extremely skinny. Since the establishment of the missionaries among the *Pouma* tribe, rats and mice have taken up residence there and, like everywhere else where they settled, they threaten to become a real nuisance. Lizards are widely spread but they are small. There are neither land tortoises nor frogs or toads or any annular reptiles. The scorpion is very common but does not appear to be dangerous, and no more thn a few species of spiders would deserve studying.

In the hot rainy season, characterized by heavy rains, mosquitoes and (gnats = *maragouin*) are ubiquitous even in the mountains, causing great inconvenience for the inhabitants, who keep them away with the smoke from big fires lit outside their huts. Butterflies are quite numerous yet without much variety. One finds a few species of Coleoptera though they are in small numbers, except for the ladybugs which are very common and a nuisance for the emerging seeds. I found everywhere a type of small ant with a golden abdomen.

I do not know what a taxidermist could collect in New Caledonia. I can affirm, though, that bird species are not varied and only in relatively small numbers. I believe that the most numerous are birds of prey: some eagles, kites and especially a sort of tercel. They live on lizards and at the expense of other fauna whose numbers they reduce even more. It is true to say or at least I have been assured that they never hatch more than two or three eggs. Among the most common birds, one notices two species of pigeons [**816**], several varieties of turtle-doves, one of them one of a green colour called “golden rump”; the purple swamp hen (*poule sultane*) [*Porphyris porphyris*] encountered in the mangroves along the shorelines; a few types of ducks and teals; a kingfisher; here and there quails in the high grasses; tiny sparrows with the head and breast red; and a relatively large number of swallows which do not resemble the European ones neither in their beak (which is considerably larger) nor in the size of their mouth (which is smaller). There are some other small species which all seemed to be insect-eaters. From time to time one comes across a sort of raven or crow with beautiful blue-black feathers. Sometimes crossing the woods sends flocks of colourful parrots and parakeets flying off. Finally I may say that, in the course of my numerous journeys, I have not seen any other country as wooded as this with fewer birds. I could not include under this category the large bats known as flying-foxes or vampires; those of New Caledonia have a wing -pan of more than two feet; at night one finds them everywhere; they spend the day hanging from the branches of bushy trees.

The madreporic reefs surrounding the island are covered with bi- and uni-valved shells. With few exceptions, they seemed to me identical to those one can gather in

the Polynesian islands, though I believe that among the terrestrial and river-side shells some are perhaps unknown.

In the places most protected by the wind, the fish are plentiful and one can catch a lot of them; the species are very varied in form and colour. I think that there would be more to collect and study in here than in the rest of the island's fauna. In small rivers and creeks that flow into the sea there are fish I have never seen before. During my stay in and around Baiao, where the missionaries live, I saw no carp, trout or pike. I am sure that there are small numbers of eels and crayfish in the area. There are certain species of deep-sea fish that are very poisonous and one could not eat them with impunity; the natives know them. One must refrain from eating some of the red ones and another one which looks like a [**817**] sardine and which travels in big schools. Like almost everywhere else, the mullet are abundant and very good.

New Caledonia's climate is very moderate, given its latitude. According to the missionaries, who have lived at Baiao for nearly three years, it would appear that the temperature does not reach more than 27°-28°C under a northern declination of the sun [when the earth exposes more the southern hemisphere to light from the sun]., The heat is very bearable and the nights are fresh, even cold.

The winds from east-south-east are predominant all year around; often they are very cool. During the night, on the western coast, they tend to blow towards east-north-east. When the breezes are weak, at night, the night changes direction to north-east and to the north. Then the clouds cover the mountains and the rains come: they are rare but very heavy.[7] Sometimes thunder rumbles but this is not a daily event, as one also notices in similar regions, and only rarely are there electrical storms. During new and full moon, in the hot rainy season, winds will sometimes blow violently from the north-west to the south-east but rarely for more than 48 hours and are followed by clear skies with winds from the general predominant direction。

New Caledonia is inhabited by humans, like all the islands of the Great Ocean. Where do the inhabitants come from? This is a question I am not bold enough to formulate an answer. I can only state that these people have occupied the island since

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a time lost in their collective memory. These men have the skin as black as most Africans that we refer to as negro. Many of them have frizzy, woolly hair; they have relatively bushy beards and hairy bodies, yet they do not have the negroes' thick lips. The shape of their face is more Malay-looking than African; the same applies to their cheekbones. They have big mouths and in general beautiful teeth. Their stature is normally below average; men would seem ugly if one had not seen the women, who, considering our idea of beauty, are as ugly as one can imagine. Some people claim that New Caledonians [**818**] originate from New Holland, although this seems to me improbable, taking into account the general direction of the winds. Might they have come from New Guinea or the Solomons? In those places, betel chewing is very common, as is on Borneo and other islands of the Great Asian Archipelago; and yet mastication is actually not known on New Caledonia. It seems to me that we have here a fairly primitive race with its distinctive character; what I will say later on about these islanders' customs and their main practices will enable everyone to come to their own conclusions.

There is an obvious racial mixture at present, and here is my explanation. In a time which already seems removed from the present, which, from what I could find out, does not go back further than half a century, a chief from Uvea (Wallis) was chased away from the island together with a certain number of other Uveans. Travelling on dugouts and carried by the prevailing winds, they reached an island on the Loyalty archipelago, called Halgan on the maps of captain Dumont-d'Urville. They named it Uvea, from the name of their motherland. This continues to be the name under which New Caledonians know it. The descendants of these adventurers, who mixed with the natives of this small island, make frequent excursions to New Caledonia, calling it Opao. The most convenient contact point is Hienguène, a place situated 50 miles from the northernmost tip of New Caledonia, and the distance from Uvea would be about 48 miles (16 leagues). This is an easy journey in dugouts because the winds are favourable most of the time. They make their return journey when the winds die down and shift towards the north. Uveans have today a village at Hienguène which has at least 8-900 people; they have of course close relations with

the New Caledonians living around this area on the coast and even with those further away, as I will have the oportunity to mention later.

When Monseigneur Duarre, bishop of Amata, disembarked together with Fathers Viard and Rougeiron [in 1843], they settled near a little village named Mahamata, which is on the shoreline opposite an anchorage known as the port of Balad. In exchange for some gifts of little value, the chief, named Payama, who had received them well, conceded to them a small piece of land at the entrance in the forest, where, with the help of the captain of the *Bucéphale*, they constructed a small hut from wood cut in the [**819**] vicinity, dug a superficial well which provided them with drinkable water, cultivated a small garden and raised also some chickens. They were assisted by two brothers from their congregation, young, devoted, intelligent and quite good workers. Le *Bucéphale* set sail in the first days of January 1844, leaving some provisions for the new colonists, who remained abandoned to fend for themselves amongst a population of savages, who were so-to-speak in the "natural" state and whose language, customs and habits they did not know. Father Viard, who had spent some time on Tonga-Tabou [=Tongatapu],[8] where they spoke a language very similar to that on Wallis, could make himself understood, even though not perfectly, through the intermediary of some Uveans who had accompanied people from Hienguène to visit the "foreigners". The natives felt instinctively that they were dealing with beings superior to them who could be useful to them. The few things that the missionaries possessed appeared extraordinary to them and became the object of their desire. Their incredible superstitiousness came to the aid of the good fathers, who promptly noticed that they had such an auspicious help to use andmake themselves feared, and thus to gain influence over the savages.

I do not intend to write a history of the mission; this will certainly be done by those entitled to do it. My intention is to provide some information about the people of new Caledonia, and the best way to achieve that would be to place the reader, as much as possible, in their midst. I am therefore constrained to follow the missionaries in their first activities. They remarked from the beginning that even though the

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natives were not evil, they were cannibals and as a result quite ferocious. They saw that they were dealing with impressionable people, driven by their first instincts, but at the same time forgetful and irresponsible, as stupid, poor and wretched as one could imagine. Given the situation the natives were in, it was impossible to introduce them to religious ideas; before that the missionaries had to open them up towards civilization. Once they understood that, all their efforts were spent to achieve this goal by teaching them by personal example about love for one's fellow man, love for work, respect for property. They did not have any other method as they had not yet been initiated into a language with rules they could not guess. [**820**] They applied themselves to a study filled with difficulties. Monseigneur (**NOT NOW BISHOP? See earlier)** d'Amata, as well as the fathers, dedicated themselves to hard work, such as digging the earth, cutting wood, sawing it, etc. Payama, though actually a chief of little importance, partly protected them in their first steps.

Hardly had three months passed since the departure of the *Bucéphale* when, after the hot rainy season, because of the humidity combined with the activity of the insects, the wood used in the hut's construction, which had been harvested locally, was riddled with wood worms and rotten and the building fell into ruin. It had been set up in a forest full of lianas and thick undergrowth. The islanders, pushed by evil impulses, also came prowling in the neighbourhood with the intention to loot; several times they tried to burn down that poor hut thatched with dry grass by thrusting kindled embers. The missionaries' position was untenable. A change of residence was necessary. Any harvest was becoming impossible in the future. The Pouma tribe, who had settled on this part of the island, had often been devastated by neighbouring tribes. If at first this tribe's chief did not count on the missionaries to defend them personally, they believed, and the fathers had already been able to convey to them this idea that such vessels as the *Bucéphale* would not only defend the missionaries, but also the villagers in the vicinity. All these gentlemen [the missionaries] had to do was to choose the location which suited them best. They decided on a spot near the village of Baiao, where Bauéone, the chief of the Pouma tribe, lived. In exchange for a few objects, a spacious area watered by a quite rapid stream coming down from the

mountains was conceded or sold by the chief. The new building, made of stone, was built on a hill, almost isolated, a mile from the coast and three miles south-east from Mahamata, the missionaries' first residence. At high tide the stream is navigable for boats and pirogues right up to the foot of the hill, making for an easy connection to the sea. When they were in the middle of their construction project, [however], a deep poverty hit the missionaries. They had eaten all their own provisions. The local inhabitants did not have enough for themselves, and, what is more, they were only willing to give anything in return for presents, [**821**] and there was nothing left to offer which would have pleased them. Sacerdotal ornaments were broken into pieces to remove fringes and embroideries which contained a considerable amount of little white glass beads that the savages liked very much and considered as great riches. For a long time the missionaries used them to buy coconut, yams and taro; in the mornings Frs Viard and Rougeiron, who already spoke enough of the Pouma language to make themselves understood, were travelling to villages, some of them quite remote, trying to obtain some provisions. And yet this little group often found themselves in the mornings unsure if they would have anything to eat before nightfall. This difficult period lasted a long time, almost 20 months, until the arrival of the corvette *Le Rhin* in August 1845. This ship brought provisions, some very useful objects and trading goods. The corvette *L'Héroïne* came soon after, as well as a schooner belonging to the missions of Central Oceania. An English trading boat also arrived, by chance. These vessels allowed Monseigneur d'Amata to enter in contact with Sydney in New Holland, and so the mission became richly provisioned, had some animals and obtained valuable equipment. Some changes took place among the missionaries: Fr. Viard, called to the episcopate, departed, while Frs. Grange and Montrosier arrived.[9] The mission had now a reasonable abode; they built a small church, cleared well irrigated lands, cultivated a large garden, attracted people who not long before were begging, fed natives as pay for work done, which attracted them in great numbers to the large scale projects undertaken. The mission needed ironwood, the only wood available and suitable for construction, as their practical

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experience had proven. They had to go searching for trees very far away and then to haul it to their settlement.

I myself arrived in New Caledonia a year after *Le Rhin*. I remained there more than two months and, being shipwrecked, I became the guest of Monseigneur d'Amata, this respectable prelate becoming one of my best friends. I saw him as well as his missionaries at work. Being in their company and discussing with them I learned what I know about New Caledonia. If sometimes I was able to make my own observations, it was because they [**822**] had pointed me in the right direction. So a great part of what I am going to say comes from them and often I will repeat after them.[10]

The people of New Caledonia form a large number of tribes who live in majority close to the sea. The few of the tribes who are in the mountains are the least numerous and the most wretched. The customs and traditions are almost identical for all the tribes but most of them speak their own language. Only the tribe chiefs can understand one another through the idiom of the *Hupay* [trade language] that the Uveans (which I mentioned before) speak, and which is used more and more every day, as it facilitates communication. The missionaries who have spent time either in Tonga or Wallis have therefore a big advantage over their brothers, as they can make themselves understood almost everywhere on the island even before studying the language of the tribe they come in contact with the most.[11]

The most northern tribes - those with whom Monseigneur d'Amata deals more frequently - are Pouma, Bombé, Mouélébé, Arama and Hienguène. The natives visiting from other parts are labelled with a term similar to “foreigner.” They come here more often since they found out that the pieces of red fabric that they had the opportunity to see in the hands of some savages have been brought in by the Europeans living in the north of the island and who have also become for them an object of curiosity. All these tribes are almost continuously at war with one another pillaging and ravaging each other's lands (*se font presque constamment la guerre*

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pour se piller et se ravager mutuellement).[12]

The approximative number of population for the five tribes mentioned before would be: Pouma, 2500 souls; Bombé, 3000; Mouélébé, 5000; Hienguène, 8000 and Arama, 3000. And knowing that those situated more to the south are at least as large, one can say with a small margin of error that the total population of the island is no less than 50000 individuals. And everything leads one to believe that it was a lot larger.

Before the settling of the missionaries with the *Pouma* tribe and the shipwreck of the corvette *La Seine*, which brought on the island [**823**] a crew of more than 200 men, very few New Caledonians had any dealings with Europeans, some had not even seen any. Since the famous navigators Cook and d'Entrecasteaux, explorers have carefully avoided the vicinity of an island surrounded by dangers and which was not expected to produce anything from a commercial point of view. What is more, the inhabitants' ferocity was exaggerated. Small English vessels from Sydney went sometimes to the port of Saint Vincent, which I mentioned before and which is situated in the south-west of the island, to buy sandalwood and sell old barrels. But for a long time no vessel had appeared in the north before the arrival of the *Bucéphale* in Balad and the English schooner *Marianne Watson*, commanded by a captain Richard, in Hienguène.[13] The latter has since returned to also deal in sandalwood. Only a few years before an American vessel, perhaps a whaling ship, appeared at the entrance of Puebo Bay, at the same place where *La Seine* has run aground. The sea was very calm, the natives went aboard with a large number of pirogues and tried to seize it. But it struck them back with some vicious cannons and musketry. One of the chiefs was killed and the savages run away helter-skelter. They still remember this disaster which remains incomprehensible in their minds. That is why news of the arrival of the *Bucéphale* spred quickly in part of the island and they were very aware of its power. Since then, during my stay in Sydney, I found out that the captain of the American vessel in question made an exaggerated report of the

[12] See quotation by Douglas for art title
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event that happened to him along the New Caledonian coasts; and the bad reputation of the poor savages grew even more, as much on account of their acts of piracy as on account of their ferocity. And that is why it proved very difficult to find in New Holland a ship to come and pick us up.[14]

The New Caledonians have not kept any old traditions (*n'ont conservé aucune tradition un peu ancienne*). Some habitual practices prove however, without a doubt, in spite of the total absence of civilization, that this island has been inhabited by this race of people for centuries. For them, their island is their whole universe, that is why they do not give it a name. All that exists relates to them. The sun, the moon and the stars are only small objects created by the *Dhianoua*s (word in Pouma language, translated by the missionaries as [**824**] *génie* (spirit), to serve them and to give them light day and night. The few animals they know, such as fish and birds, are there to serve as food; the same for the fruits and roots. The Uveans have started coming on the island recently, well after the arrival of their ancestors the Wallis; they were of Polynesian race,[15] who mixed naturally with those coming from their little island, with a skin as black as that of New Caledonians and who are as savage as them, using pirogues almost identical. When they showed up, the New Caledonians were not surprised and were not interested to find out about their origins; not speaking the same language, they were not surprised even by the Uveans' idiom.

These people have no notion of Divinity (*la divinité*): they never thought about a God as Creator; but, as almost all other peoples, the New Caledonians attribute everything bad happening to them to beings superior to them, to charms and evil spells. That is why they have a huge number of superstitions corresponding to opinions accepted and with a large audience in their midst. Their main idea resembles somehow to the immortality of the soul; they believe that after death the mental part take a material form similar to the one left behind and goes to Bonalabi*o* (little island nine miles away from the Pouma tribe) without using pirogues. These new beings enter through a hole in a rock in the dwelling of a *Dhianoua*, where they find lots of

[14] Book on reluctance re ferocity>
[15] True?

food. Yams, taros and ripe bananas abound in there; there are even riches and pieces of red fabric; they are supposed to be forever happy and content in this place; but, as the stealing instinct follows them wherever they go, they start pillaging while the *Dhianoua* pretends to be asleep. At that moment he wakes up, follows them, beats them and kills them; and from the form that resembled their living bodies, their souls become only shadows who could not die again and who spend their time travelling through villages, talking with old women so that they can uncover who have stolen yam and taro. For this reason, New Caledonians avoid travelling at night, being very scared of spectres and ghosts. When the wind blows violently through the trees, moving the leaves and [**825**] whistling, they think that a *Dhianoua* is taking a stroll. These *Dhianoua*s in whose dwellings the souls go to find shelter live in different locations for people from the other parts of the [great] island, for the majority do no know the Boualabio Island in particular.

In agreement with their beliefs, the arrival of the Europeans on their island did not provoke any deep astonishment for these islanders; these completely foreign-looking men, with different faces, different skin, but with a physical presence like themselves, were in their minds the result of the metamorphosis of their deceased parents and friends. Naturally, they surrounded and crowded around the explorers, trying to find on their pale faces the features and the physiognomy of people that they knew and perhaps loved; in spite of the fact that in recent years they had more opportunities to see Europeans, even in quite large numbers, as in the unfortunate circumstance that brought me in their midst, our obvious superiority reinforces this idea, especially when it comes to commanders, officers, and especially missionaries, who surprise them every day with new and unexpected things and who have gained by these means a big influence through the fear they inspire, even though they have always done only good deeds for them. It is this opinion, which they have very often innocently given credence to, that sheltered the missionaries, at least at the beginning, from aggression. The purity of the missionaries' lifestyle, their full attire they always wear led the natives to wonder if they had a sex and this excited their curiosity in the

extreme, a fact that I could notice even during my stay there.[16] As vessels are visible from a great distance on the horizon, and that they look like dots touching the sky, New Caledonians believe that we come from there and that the stars visible at night, as well as the clouds covering them sometimes, are at our disposal, or at least that of our big leaders.[17].

The population of New Caledonia can be divided into two categories: the chiefs of all the classes, a kind of very numerous nobility, and the *jamboïtes* or serfs,[18] over whom those of the first group, especially the most upper classes, have right of life or death. Every little village or hamlet has several small chiefs; each tribe has several big chiefs, of which a main one [**826**] who has the title of *Théa* and to whom all the others obey: these chiefs have the power to make war or peace; they impose food taxes and sometimes, unfortunately too often, they kill *jamboïtes* or have them killed to feed on.

Only the males can govern, and the oldest son of the *théa* succeeds him; in the case when this chief only has daughters, he adopts someone's son, most often the son of a small chief, who then inherits all the rights of his adoptive father after his death. He does not have the right, though, to marry his benefactor's daughter. Father Rougeiron, the missionary who speaks the language best and who is very popular with the natives, cannot confirm this last rule. But everything the missionaries have seen makes one believe that, according to their customs, the adopted son cannot marry his adoptive sister, for they do not allow marriage between close relatives, with the exception of their sisters-in-law, for the eldest daughter in the family marries every time when her husband comes close to dying without leaving her any children. The eldest daughter of a *Théa* is considered as a big chief herself and has the tile of *Cabo* in all the tribes; if she chooses to marry a *jamboïtes*, her children do not share at all in the nobility of their mother. In the absence of an adoptive son, the younger sons succeed to their elder brother in governing the tribe. The *Théa* are always named with the name of their ancestor; this way the name of the father and the grandfather is

16

17 Parallel wahgi

18 This is an old French word for ‘mere chips [of wood]’ and not an indigenous word; cf A. Furetiere, *Dictionnaire*

never lost, no more than the nobility, which does not happen in the younger branches. The collateral branches are called *Mouéaou*, but with every generation, they lose a degree of nobility and, after the sixth, these families enter the ranks of commoners, but those who are still rich form alliances with noble women can avoid being classed as *jamboïtes*.

The biggest problems are solved at the council, where the elders of the nobility are invited. Sometimes, when there is a common enemy, the great chiefs of neighbouring tribes are also invited. When the *Théa* dies and his successor is too young, one of the old chiefs of the tribe, the most influential, becomes his guardian and governs in his name; he can, at the majority of the *Théa*, which is not precisely set, keep a great influence and continue to lead the tribe in some ways [**827**] but is never usurped. The traditions regarding the nobility are established by habit/use (*habitude*) and the people accepts without a murmur the biggest humiliations from their village chief.

The New Caledonians have all as much land as they can cultivate, and the chief of the village decides what happens to the rest of it as he sees fit. The reputation of a man from the nobility depends of the extent of the cultivated fields he has. They name as a big chief the man who has many lots of land cultivated and who has large coconut palm plantations. The transactions done between owners are sacred, although they are only verbal agreements; in most cases, they take place in front of witnesses. The bishop d'Amata is today a big chief, as he possesses quite large plots of land that he bought from *théas* from Pouma, Moulebé and Hienguène, in Baïao as well as in Québo and Hienguène, properties over which the missionaries' right is incontestable.

LUCY DAVY STARTS The cultivated parcels are small and do not match the needs of the population, however insignificant that was; they are always located close to villages and huts. The crops are not varied; they consist, as I mentioned before, of sugar cane, yam and taro.

The sugar cane, which is perfectly suited, is cultivated in small quantities in moist soil, very close to the house. They eat it before is fully grown. It is a food

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Universel, etc. Rotterdam, 1690, vol. 2p. 296

offered by the owner as a refreshment to visiting friends and to passers-by as a sign of extreme politesse.[19]

Several species of yam are cultivated. The natives prepare large raised garden beds; they partition the land and then, with great skill, they turn it almost to dust using big pointed sticks; afterwards, they bury the upper part of old tubers they have saved at a depth of about 30 centimeters and a distance of about 1 metre between them. When growing starts and the first shoots come out of the ground, they weed and hoe, then place big stalks to support the rambling, tendrilled stems [**828**] of this plant. The tubers are unearthed approximately eight months after planting; by this stage they are sometimes enormous. This plant is quite well known so I will not describe it.

Taro is also a root shaped like a large turnip; its flavour when cooked is sweeter than the yam; it is moister and is generally considered tastier. It is also very nourishing and, unlike the yam, it can reach the edible stage at all times throughout the year. It is a water/aquatic plant, with big, beautiful green leaves, similar to that of a waterlily. It can only be grown in moist, marshy areas. If New Caledonians show a remarkable talent at growing yams, they are surpassing themselves when it comes to taro, which they grow not only in the moist plains but also very close to villages, in the most salubrious places, on the slopes of hills and in the burnt plains, dried by the sun, often sandy. The quick streams coming down from the mountains which are never dry are used and even diverted from their course; these savages understand better than anyone water irrigation; it is astonishing, as one approaches a village, to see these calm rivulets surrounding it and often circulating between the raised garden beds of yams. The taros raise their large, beautiful leaves floating above the streams in which they are planted; they cover little spaces carefully moistened. When the natives want to plant taro, before eating it, they cut the plant a little bit above the ring/annulus and once the scrap is put back in the earth it is not long before new leaves start sprouting and two or three tubers form which can be eaten in three or four months.

[19] Not just politeness. Civility and astute!

On the whole island there are traces of yam growing in the large garden beds, covered with bushes and tall grass. These crops have spread everywhere. Before we reach any conclusion on this matter, I can say with certainty that cultivating yams drains the soil; and that, because the production diminishes sensibly in only a few years, the natives move their residence in a neighbouring place, still uncultivated and not yet exhausted.

Heading?

How is it that this poverty-stricken people [**829**] who are not evil or lazy by nature, and who live in a wonderful climate on most fertile soil, have arrived at a stage where they are unable to cultivate the bare necessities; where they die, so to speak, of hunger; where they abandon themselves to acts of cannibalism and as a consequence to excesses of ferocity?

The earliest beginnings of this society were bad: civilization was brought to a halt by acquired customs and habits that are antisocial. By studying these manners and customs we can grasp an idea of the premature decay of this small group of humans. Let us hope for its regeneration; may virtuous men devoted to philanthropic work enlighten this poor people and provide for them whatever could make them good and happy. As for us, fortune seekers, let us keep away from these shores, where, besides our evil passions, we will bring the powerful means of destruction we possess, our intemperance and the shameful vices of our advanced civilization.[20]

To come to a better knowledge of the poor Caledonian, let us follow him step-by-step through his life, his private habits, his rare joys, his hatreds and desire for revenge. We will enter his hut, sit by his fire.

If what I write concerned a more civilized people, I would deal with what I have to say in various sections with headings. I will go on, as seems best, giving free rein to my recollections, trying not to repeat myself, which could however happen from time to time. Little anecdotes, the story of some of the events I witnessed, will help me to achieve my aim.

The New Caledonians go about almost naked; the men do not even use that

[20] Discuss noble savage aspect

small undergarment which modesty, so to speak, would dictate to human beings. They do not cover their nudity, choosing instead to ornate it in such a way that, if they were completely naked, they would be a step closer to decency.[21] At first view their appearance is repellent, and it takes some time to become used to see an outfit which our language could not explain or describe using polite vocabulary. They are fond of wearing a cylindrical cap made of a fabric which, for them, is very sophisticated **[830]** and which they dye black. Only a few of them are fortunate enough to be able to acquire such a refined article, especially when they can add a few eagle or crow feathers to it. The height of happiness for them is achieved if they can have a cap like this [decorated] with a piece of red material.[22]

The women are more decent in their nudity. From the time they are nubile, they make use of a sort of belt, a fringe of about 15 cms in length, sometimes 4 or 5 ms wide. They wind this around their hips, overlapping layer upon layer, and because of the width, it forms a large pad. This small garment is more successful in achieving its purpose than its length might lead one to believe. The chiefs' wives and the women who are more flirtatious wear an accessory called *theo-hène*, a long fringe, quite thick, about 30 cm in width, like an apron which they attach at the upper part of the *theo-hène*, so that it hides their posterior, and reaches below the knees. The garment is made of split rushes of a natural yellow colour.

Both sexes often have pierced ears. Normally they do this at the time of their parents' death. In the holes they place pieces of coconut leaf which create an elastic ring which forces gradually the enlargement of the lobe so that it becomes a band of flesh. The holes can be up to 4 or 5 cm in diameter.

All the men have beards of varying thickness; they shave with newly broken pieces of quartz. Like the most civilized Europeans, they shape their beards in various ways, some wear it long under the chin, others have large moustaches and huge sideburns; even the imperial style catches their fancy. Their hair is often curly like sheep's wool and is never worn very long.

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They know about tattooing, but it is limited to just a few strange lines on the face, the arms or on other parts of the body. It is not clearly visible because their skin is so black. They ornate their bodies also by making small round burns which, as they heal, look like some prominent pimples. They are set [**831**] symmetrically on their arms, as well as on their chests and stomachs, in the same places as we would put buttons on our clothing. One thing which gives them special pleasure and makes them straighten up as if aware of the fact that they make others envious, is to blacken their faces symmetrically using a nut that they burnt, giving them a fatty substance, black and very shiny. They use this too to draw wide bands which go from each shoulder to the middle of the stomach.

Just like the men and women, the children like wearing bracelets. They make them of shells (cone-shaped [a mollusc]); when polished, these shells form a large ring through which they can barely slip their hands. Sometimes these bracelets are cut and can be opened with a hinge, making them easier to wear. They all wear necklaces, though this is more commonly reserved for women and children. The most sought-after, real luxury items by their standard, are made of beads the size of small rifle bullets, in beautiful green jasper. Necklaces of white shells are also highly sought after. Since the arrival of Europeans, they prize large beads of blue glass. In the end, men and women are willing to wear around their necks anything even slightly shiny or which is a novelty. While we were at Baiao, the missionaries had several sheets of tin among their supplies, and the coppersmith on the *Seine* used it to make several useful objects. The privileged savages, that is to say those who were our friends, often stood around this workman who worked outside near the house. They snatched up the scraps and hung them around their necks, or if they were long enough, they bent them round their arms like a bracelet.

Generally their buildings form small villages. They are not grouped together, since, as has already been mentioned, each New Caledonian lives very close to or in the middle of the small area of land which he cultivates. Each dwelling is made up of one or more huts, depending on the rank and fortune of the individual. The chiefs' abodes are surrounded by a small hedge about 4 to 5 feet high, made of stakes,

through which they weave dried coconut leaves. Their huts are all the same, with very little difference in size; usually they are set on a small mound raised between a metre and 50 cms [**832**] above the ground. Sometimes the mound is made of small stones. To build the hut, the natives bury a piece of straight wood in the middle of the mound. The wood is about 10 to 12 metres high, and around it they draw a circle of 6 to 8 metres in diameter. Around the circumference they place posts quite close together and no more than 1.2 or 1.25 metres [high]. They create a wall by interweaving them with large pieces of the bark of *néaouli;* [23] above this they set a conical roof of an elongated shape, made of bamboo poles covered with long. dried grass. The top of it is formed by the upper end of the wooden post in the centre of the hut. These huts have always only one opening, set in the wall, and thus is only about one metre high. It is no more than 60 or 65 centimetres wide. The chiefs set up on either side of this door a roughly carved piece of wood, sometimes painted red. The central support pole is often also adorned with a grotesque figure.[24] On top of that you can sometimes see a human skull. In the chiefs' households, the wives have a separate hut. People place in one corner the few utensils they own, as well as what they call their wealth. They lie down pell-mell, spread out around the main room of the building. They cover the ground with dry straw, which they replace from time to time. The rich people and the women lie on mats made of roughly woven stuff which the women also use to wrap around them when the nights are cool. Throughout the night, when the mosquitoes are bothering them, they keep a small fire alight near the door, in front of it and outside. Cooking is done outside; the fire is set between a few large stones. They cook the yams and taro in the ashes, but they prefer to use large earthenware pots, called *ta*, spherical in shape, and with a mouth 12 to 15 centimetres wide. They place the *ta* on the stones of the fireplace, with the mouth angled away at 60°. Cooking is done easily, with no need of a cover, since the vapours condense in the upper part of the vessel.

When the weather is fine, the men spend almost the entire day sitting in the

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[24] Parallels. Ilahits. Moru Manus etc

shade near a hut or under a tree. They sleep or talk to each other.

As these people move houses often, one can see **[833]** almost everywhere on the island small circular mounds on which they build their huts, and which are without a doubt the foundations of abandoned huts.

Even though they are not as advanced as the Polynesians in the art of navigation, New Caledonians are certainly no strangers to it. Since almost all of them are shore-dwellers, they had to visit the reefs close to the island to get shellfish which they eat in large quantities. They realized that communication with the neighbouring tribes was easier at the time of particular winds if they travelled by sea instead of using paths which were often very steep and difficult. There was perhaps also the fact that the early inhabitants, who, from whatever direction they were coming, were using pirogues which they continued to build. Thus the custom was transmitted from one generation to another. They construct their pirogues in various sizes, some very simple ones with gimbals [universal joint], others double, and they guide them with paddles or sails. They are built roughly: there is no elegance or lightness about their shapes like the ones from the Hamoa islands, from Hapay or Viti.[25] They are made of one piece, dug out using fire or small stone axes. This requires a lot of time and patience from the makers. As there are no large trees, even the largest canoes are not big, and can carry only a small number of people. Because of the poor quality of the wood used, they do not last long. The natives often go fishing outside the reefs using the largest of them to which they add triangular sails. These are made of dried grasses, or tree bark filaments woven into mats. These pirogues reach quite a high speed when they run before the wind and the wind is strong but they cannot hold their course at all, and [people] always wait favourable winds to make their short journeys.

To form the double pirogues, they use the largest ones; the two must be of the same size, unlike the ones found in Central Oceania. They are tied together by crossheads fastened with cords and separated from each other by a space of about a metre; on this space they set a fairly solid scaffold or platform on which twelve to twenty people could stand with their provisions of coconuts, yams and taro. These

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[834] pirogues have sails similar to the smaller vessels. When they come back to land, they are pulled up on the beach and covered with leafy branches to protect them from the sun.

The New Caledonians, including children of both sexes, can all swim very well and are good divers, plunging often to great depths for shells.

As I have already mentioned, these natives are not evil minded. I would go so far as to add the extraordinary fact, that they are neither hateful nor vindictive. However, they are very impressionable, and yield to their first impulses readily, whether they are good or bad. Their actions of one day will bear no resemblance to what they did the day before. They forget a wrong they have done as easily as they forget a wrong done to them. They are covetous and thieving by nature, and their plundering often brings about a retaliation carried to the point of ferocity. Also wars among them arise from one day to the next and are frequent. These conflicts are not all of the same type: often they occur between neighbours of the same village, sometimes between two villages; the worst are those between tribes. In the first two situations mentioned, they are matters of a moment only; often there are wounded, but fatalities are rare. The aggressor with his relatives and neighbours goes out against the village or household of his enemy, destroying and looting the plantations, sometimes burning huts, unless driven back. Whatever the damages or injury caused by these brawls, the quarrel is soon forgotten. But the inter-tribal wars are very different: at the call of the *thea*, the entire tribe marches off. Whole villages are left to invalids and children. Usually the two parties involved do not go out against each other, but one takes the offensive, while the other defends itself on the border or in a village close to its frontier. Generally the chiefs of the villages most exposed to the enemy invasions are the greatest warriors.

The weapons used by these people are by and large those used by the other savages: the club or truncheon which they shape in different ways. This weapon is made only of iron wood which is hard and very heavy. They also use the javelin or assegai, light and very sharp, sometimes with a serrated edge.[26] It has a length of

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between 1.45 and 2 metres. **[835]** The natives can throw it from very far away with considerable skill.

The most dangerous weapon used with surprising skill is the slingshot. The stones used are shaped beforehand and held in a little bag, which holds about a dozen in all and which is tied around the hip. The stones are basalt, oval shape, slightly pointed at the ends, the size of a pigeon egg. The number of New Caledonians with scars made by these stones is astonishing.

They also use bow and arrow, but this weapon is not authorized and they seem to look down on it.

During the wars, when a fight has finished, woe betide the tribe which loses. They have no recourse but flight, for the victor gives no quarter. Anyone found is bludgeoned or slaughtered, and often eaten, especially if it is a chief. The bones are used to decorate the huts, and the skulls are placed on the top of high poles beside the house of the chief or of the victor. It would be disgusting to go into detail about their ghastly war trophies. In these wars they show no respect: the vanquished tribe is completely invaded, huts burned, coconut trees cut down, banana trees, yams, taro and sugar cane uprooted. Just before the start of a battle, the tribe under attack swiftly place anything of value in their pirogues and these boats await the outcome at sea. In the big wars, as well as in the lesser conflicts alluded to earlier, women go with the fighters to carry off the enemy's crops, coming home loaded with yams, taro and bundles of sugar cane. To make war, the chiefs raise levies in provisions on the households.

A tribe which has been devastated will of course fear another war, since the victor will begin again on the slightest pretext, now that he is feeling powerful. Before the missionaries arrived on the island, there were wars every four or five years between the *Mouelebe* and *Pouma* tribes. The former, with a much larger population than the latter, are naturally the stronger, **[836]** and for a long time had not experienced a single invasion. There are also large coconut plantations, and the plantations are in good shape. The *Pouma* area was devastated: there were few coconut trees, thinly scattered near the villages, and the people would not plant new

ones since they are convinced that they would be destroyed before they could produce fruit. Since Monseigneur d'Amata's settlement exists in Baiao, it has been very respected by its neighbours; no war has been waged against this poor tribe which gets as close as possible to Baiao, where the people are safer than they have ever been.

Whenever our missionary gentlemen hear of war preparations or of some disagreement between neighbours or among members of a family, they set themselves to work, and up till now they have always managed to avert violence and attacks, even those which had already begun.

As soon as a woman has given birth, news of this happy event is sent to relatives and friends, all of whom hurry to visit the newborn. They never go empty-handed, everybody brings whatever food they can. When everyone has arrived, they prepare the feast of yams, sugar cane and taro. Some cook the food and make other preparations, while others take hot ashes that they spread on the ground and roll the child on them. They press their hands down on the child's forehead so that it will be narrow, since this is considered beautiful, as is a pug nose, so they try to flatten it. Afterwards they discuss the name to be given the child; almost always it is that of a relative, or that of a friend; and sometimes it refers to something which they like, as long as the child is not a firstborn. There are no surnames, but as New Caledonians receive several names at birth, they have a very precise way to refer to any of them.

These islanders love their little children, and it not unusual to see the father carrying a cradle on his back, just as often as one sees a mother doing it. The cradle consists of woven bark shaped almost like a chair or basket. The chair on which the child is laid has a low edging which keeps it from falling. They wrap it, or cover it, with a little mat. When the women go out to find food in the mountains **[837]** or on the reefs, they often leave a child in the hut in the care of the father, or they lie it on a mat on which they swing it to get it to sleep or to keep it from crying, especially when it is hungry. If this does not succeed in settling the child to stop it from crying, they throw cold water on its head.

Once the children are weaned and begin crawling around, they stop almost

completely taking care of it and they are left alone in the huts. Parents do not conceal any activity from their children, and thus they develop a complete knowledge of everything and are precocious libertines.

One quite extraordinary detail, and which is particular to this people, is their practice of circumcision, unlike their neighbours from New Holland, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Where did they acquire this custom? Obviously the missionaries conclude from this that they belong to Jacob's race; a lot could be said on this subject, maybe without ever reaching any definite conclusion.[27] Later on, the people of this area will be better known and studied, particularly those from the New Hebrides, about whom as yet there are no known comments. The peoples who live in the Great Asian or the Indian archipelago, whether Muslims or not, all chew betel nut. This occurs in New Guinea and in the Solomons. But it is quite unknown in New Caledonia and in the New Hebrides, as I think I have already said. How did circumcision appear there alone? Does it date from a period when Asia had not yet begun using betel nut? But the reality is that children in New Caledonia are circumcised between the ages of eleven and twelve,[28] when they are reaching puberty. This operation is done with a sharp shell, especially a vulva from a small pearl oyster. Or else they use a freshly broken shard of quartz. When this involves the son of a minor chief or of an ordinary man, all the friends and neighbours are informed, and they usually send presents in kind to the child's parents. When the son of a major chief is involved, it becomes a great ceremony, and all friendly tribes are invited, and there are often many visitors. The tchegine or taboo which the chief had placed on the coconut trees and cultivated fields is lifted everywhere. With this crowd **[838]** gathered, sugar cane, yams and taro disappear in the few days of celebration. The friends of the circumcised blacken their bodies, and run around in all directions like madmen, attacking everyone with slingshots and blunt lances. Often, almost always there are victims from these games. One day Father Rougeiron was curious to see such a gathering, and he escaped only because of his status of chief

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28 West NewBritain case. Viol bk

tacitly (recognized by the revellers).

Quite commonly young people of both sexes marry when they are between 18 and 20. When a young man makes a marriage proposal he is often refused if he is not a chief or of noble blood, and it does happen sometimes that if he is refused several times, he will remain unmarried. If the young woman accepts, marriage is concluded immediately with no further ceremony. Parents are not always consulted, and it also happens quite often that parents arrange marriages without consulting their children. These marriages, based only on good faith, are for life, unless the wife is openly unfaithful. In that case the marriage is dissolved and they can marry again. The children of the first marriage remain with the mother.

Young women have rights over their bodies. Sometimes their parents offer them to strangers, but once married, they must be faithful, and husbands often carry jealousy to dreadful extremes.

Kidnappings of married women occur at times and often cause fighting between tribes or families, unless the kidnapper is a chief or a fairly important person, when fear of what he may do will silence any ill feeling.

One day as I walked along the seashore about two leagues from the mission settlement, I entered a hut or small house in a very picturesque setting near a large rock without any vegetable garden. It seemed to be a country house where people came to sleep and eat shellfish. In there I found a young woman doing domestic activities; she was remarkably beautiful, even though she was heavily pregnant, **[839]** she seemed happy and content. I sat near her for a while and made her very happy by giving her some large blue beads. When I went home, I asked Father Rougeiron about the woman. He said she was the wife of the Ouabane village chief. I knew him and had even visited his house sometimes when I went hunting near his village. Whenever I went in he always offered me a coconut to drink, He was young, good-looking and with a fairly distinguished face. I did not know his wife as he had brought her to live with him only a short time before. She had previously been married to a nobleman of another village of the same tribe, and in the early stages of a pregnancy, the Ouabane chief had fallen in love with her, kidnapped her against her

wishes, and this caused much gossip in the whole neighbourhood. But his position of village chief, his widely recognised courage, the fact that he was a good young man, well liked, with a large number of supporters carried the day; and then, most astonishingly, once in her new home, the young woman liked it there and declared that she did not want to go back to her first husband.

As I have said earlier, the places where they live consist of several scattered huts. Some of them are for the use of the women only, and no man may enter them during the night. There are specific [huts] where women go for complete isolation when they have their periods.

Although the New Caledonians should be very aware from experience that only women can bear children, they still believe firmly that men become pregnant, but as they can't give birth, this is for them an illness which is always fatal. Despite all their efforts, the missionaries were unable to change their minds on this matter.

Polygamy is quite widespread on the island, especially among the chiefs who often have several wives.

As in all countries where men are more or less savages, women's lot is not a happy one.[29] It is their duty to do everything inside the house, to tend the crops in the fields once the planting is done, i.e., **[840]** they hoe, weed, etc. At the time of great tides, at low tide, they go out on the reefs with small baskets woven from green leaves, and often with a child on their backs, and using long pointed staves they stir the coral debris and sand to find shellfish for their husbands. Their skill and success at this is the result of long practice. You often meet these poor women in the middle of the forest and in the mountains foraging for specific tree bark and for a running root very similar to licorice, as well as arrowroot tubers and other plants which are not very nourishing. They make their finds into small bundles which they carry on their shoulders, and however low in nourishment are their finds, the women get only a small share. They are only allowed to eat yams, their staple food, when there's almost nothing left, except the poorest quality and the rotten ones. All this might still be bearable if they were not beaten by their husbands who treat them at whim with great

[29] Assumption

brutality. At times they break their arms or legs, and even kill them, and then eat them, but no one takes the trouble to punish them for such ferocity.[30]

Although the New Caledonian climate is very healthy, the inhabitants still manage to develop a large number of severe illnesses, largely because of their nudity and the coolness of the nights which are often very damp. As all these illnesses are not treated, or very badly cared for by natives who claim to practice medicine, the poor patients almost always die rapidly. If by chance there is a different outcome, convalescence is celebrated by a feast.

The sick, who are often considered to be without hope prematurely, and those who smell bad are removed to a wretched hut made with a few branches or even, more often, fully exposed to the open air; only, by pity, they make a little fire for them. Then they abandon them in total isolation. They are very surprised when the missionaries or any other Europeans approach these moribunds, and they say to them: “Why do you go near him? It is useless, he smells bad" or "he is going to die.”

[841] It is rare for a sick person to breath his last naturally. Once he is unconscious, often before the final agony, they block his mouth and nostrils to suffocate him, or they may even tug at his arms and legs from all sides. When an old man is totally incapacitated and loses his sense of existence, they sometimes bury him alive. When a sick man thinks he is dying, he calls his wives and children and states his final wishes. He often asks to be killed, and their family do it without scruple.

As soon as a sufferer breathes his last, a moment which is always hastened in some way, as I have just said, the relatives close his eyes and they bend his knees and tie his legs; then they tie the arms to the knees, so that the corpse is all compacted, as if crouching. He is then wrapped in some of their coarse fabrics, a type of tapa made from tree bark. The corpse is then buried in this position, with the head upwards, and taking care to surround him with a few presents. If they feel that their corpse had moved and may not be entirely dead, then they finish him off with a few club

[30] Discuss

blows.[31]

One day, accompanied by Fathers Rougeiron and Grange, I was walking to Pouébo, about three leagues from the settlement. To do the walk, we had to cross several small rivers or water courses coming from the mountains. As we were passing through one village after another, the villagers who saw us were joining us as if to honour us; and each tried to be the one who would carry us over the fords on their shoulders. We could never travel empty handed and we always made some small contribution to those who helped us; that is why they were always so eager. When we stopped near a fairly large ford, from the midst of the savages a tall, fit fellow, at least 40 years old, came forward and took me on his shoulders. Father Rougeiron, who knew this man, cried out in surprise when he saw him, as did Fr Grange; they were entitled to be astonished, as they believed him dead for quite a while. Once we reached the other side of the ford, the father talked with the native [**842**] and then told us the following story: when this man, who had been very ill, was believed dead, they prepared for burial, but those who were given this duty chose not to go ahead with it, as customary, during the night, and dumped him at the edge of a wood. In the evening, a chief who was passing by heard groans, approached and, finding the body all wrapped up, proceeded to ask the following questions: “Are you dead or alive?” – “I'm alive.”-“You're not a spirit?”-“No, I am a real man.”-“Who are you?” Then the poor devil told him his names, and had to provide the specific details about his life which were known to others to prove clearly that he was not dead. Only then was he taken out of his mortuary outfit and returned to life and liberty.[32]

Following this incident, Fr Rougeiron told me that shortly before my arrival on the island, they buried a poor fellow in a cave then they blocked the entrance by rolling a large stone into its mouth. This poor fellow regained his senses, and was dying of hunger and kept on crying out. He was not heard until the third day, and he must have been very lucky that they finally listened to his wailing.

Suicides are not rare; but it doesn't seem that, in the case of these savages, they [the

[31] Discuss
[32] Discuss

suicides] are premeditated. As I have said, they are very irresponsible but at the same time very impressionable as well. Thus for any insult received, or setback suffered, often quite pointless, they will go and hang themselves in the woods, and frequently the corpse is not discovered until it rots.

A woman who lives near the missionary settlement had lost a daughter whom she cherished. She wept night and day, and called out for the daughter: her life had become unbearable, and she pleated a rope and hanged herself. Someone sleeping in a nearby house heard cries and came to her aid. Afterwards the woman was very sorry to be resuscitated to life because, as she was saying, she had no further hope of happiness, and she wanted to join her daughter in the land of spirits. Fr Rougeiron preached to her and she has since become a fervent novice.[33]

Being as loved as they are by their neighbours, the missionaries can study their habits and customs, especially as some of them have been initiated in their **[843]** language. They watch them and pay close attention to all their activities, but up till this point they have been absolutely forbidden to be present at funeral ceremonies- they would run the risk of death if they tried to gain a closer knowledge of this mystery.

Those who pay their respects at the burial of a dead person are much loved and respected by the family, who give them gifts and go on doing so afterwards every now and then.

Those who pay their respects at the burial of a big chief or thea are honoured by the whole tribe and take the name of *douanongaite*; they are generally chosen from amongst the most handsome men.

The dead are buried in the depths of a wood near the village. When there is no forest in the immediate vicinity, the villagers maintain a kind of dense thicket consisting of a few trees, lianas, large shrubs and undergrowth. Vegetation, which is very strong in this region, succeeds all the better as access to this kind of cemetery is forbidden to everybody; over all these reserved sites reigns the taboo or *théguine* (prohibition or ban). and this means that access to the place is naturally prevented for

[33] Discuss reretrib

everybody. When we went out to hunt pigeons, the natives used to make us promise not to go into these places, and if they saw us go in after some birds, they seemed aghast and trembling with fear.[34]

The women never accompany the dead to their last resting place, they follow only to the entrance into the woods, uttering piercing cries, complaining about the fact that he is leaving so soon and saying a last farewell. On the following day they gather again, and the women go on weeping, but with the exception of the close relatives these are not heartfelt tears, for they can begin and dry out at will. Then they cheer up again, there is a meal prepared for all who are taking part and for visitors, but only on rare occasions the provisions are in sufficient quantities to satisfy the appetite of everyone present. After the meal they weep and cry out again, before taking their leave.

When the deceased is a chief, people come running from everywhere to weep at the funeral ceremony. Women bring yams and taro, carried on their backs in green leaf baskets. When everyone is gathered, many huts are set on fire, particularly the one where **[844]** the dead person used to sleep. They cut down a number of coconut trees, according to [the deceased's] wealth. Sometimes they wound these trees, that being their way of showing that, after the loss of their owner, the trees can only languish, wither and die. As if war is not causing them enough damage!… In our neighbourhood I saw some isolated coconut trees, which had been spared as a way of tauntingly adding to the profound misery they have brought about.

It is quite another matter when a tribe loses its *théa*. Then all the crops in the village where he lived are uprooted, making a year of famine unavoidable. In 1844 the chief of the Pouma tribe died. He had lived in the fairly important village of Koko, which was situated on one of the best sites on the bank of a quite large river. He was a fine old man, much loved by his people. The displays of sorrow were extreme. They did not limit just to the usual devastations done in similar situations but all the huts were set on fire, and almost all the population moved away. His eldest son, the chief of the Baiao tribe, is now the *théa* of the tribe.

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[34] Para Wahgi etc

New Caledonians usually pierce their ears when their parents die. Sometimes when the huts are being set alight they jump in and die in the middle of the blaze.[35]

A piece of wood with a large shell placed at one end and a scrap of their poor quality fabric are placed on the grave. At times they also heap stones on it. Furthermore for the théa they build a sort of mausoleum beside the most circulated paths and around the tribal boundaries. These consist of a little patch of cleared land where they make a small mound no taller than 50 or 60 centimetres. On this little mound, they stick in four fairly large stakes all of the same hight topped by shells and strips of fabric and holding a wood frame on which they place dried grass shaped into a garland. Sometimes they put a roughly carved wooden figure in the middle of this monument.

Superstition has more or less a hold over all peoples, according to their level of civilization and their beliefs. But among the savages (*sauvages*) everywhere superstition reigns in similar forms and makes them carry out very similar acts of cruelty.[36] **[845]** It is certainly a long way from Madagascar to New Caledonia: in both of these big islands, however, there is the same belief in witchcraft. Anyone accused of making evil spells will almost certainly perish. The New Caledonians, still closer to the natural state than the people of Madagascar, don't have, like the latter, refinements such as the trials by poison with *tanguin* for suspected witches. But all the same, [in New Caledonia] pity the person who wins such a reputation, for they are killed on the spot with no trial at all.

Witches can kill people at will: all they need to do is to enter a hut and leave small pieces of yam and taro and certain herbs.

When a chief dies, there is always the assumption that witchcraft was involved, and the poor devils, who had no idea of their [own appparent] “knowledge,” are put to death. Just before my stay on the island, more than twenty people were put to death in one village of the Bombé tribe, in the extreme north of the island, looking towards the sea, west of the long reef extending beyond the shores.[37]

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[35] Discuss
[36] Discuss
[37] Discuss the cbove paras

Monseigneur d'Amata learned that one man had killed several inhabitants and went to see him. He was well received by this man, whose face showed only goodness, and who offered him repeatedly and warmly some coconuts which had been given to him as a gift. Monseigneur then questioned him about the crime he was accused to have committed. He replied innocently that he had killed three men because they were sorcerers, and, to do that, he had gone to their huts and had cut their throats while they were asleep.

Even more recently, while we were there, a sort of epidemic broke out in the Ouabane village, two leagues from where we lived. The illness, caused by the drought and the heat which had contributed to drying up of the stagnant water in the midst of which the village stands, was a severe pitouitous fever. If not treated, it would kill the poor people within a few hours. M[onsieur] Lehouëlleur, our Surgeon-Major, went over, bled some of those in the early stages, stopping the progress of the illness for them, and advised evacuating the village. But each day there was another death to mourn, and all families had some dead to weep after. The Baiao chief, Bouéone, who is, as **[846]** I have said, the *théa* of his tribe, was greatly upset and went to the village with a large entourage. When he arrived, he assembled all the men, women and children, and put them in a line. He then took a rope and put it round the neck of the first person, then of the second, the third and so on, until he came to a man of about 40. He looked at that man carefully and untied the others. Assisted by two young men who were with him, he set about strangling this poor fellow, who escaped with his life only because of his loud protests that he was not a sorcerer; and especially because of his promise of rich gifts for the *théa*. When I left the island, it was still not certain if the man was going to recover his health, which had been greatly affected by the deep emotion he had gone through during his ordeal. After sparing him, the *théa* continued his operation with the rope until he came to an old woman. They put the cord around her neck and hung her several times from the branches of a large tree until she died. During this time, the hands and feet of the villagers were tied. A few days after this event, Fr Rougeiron learned that there was a sick man in the household of the Ouabane chief (I have already mentioned him, as he

is the one who had married a young woman whom he had kidnapped). The Father went to visit him, only to discover on his arrival that the chief was about to put to death a woman and a child whom he had condemned as sorcerers. The Father made use of all his influence, necessarily because she was still of savage spirit and only just a [Catholic] catechumen, exhorting against what the chief wanted to do.

Everything I have said previously provides sufficient knowledge of the poor people who live in this isolated area of the world. One can understand the motives of their woes. Though they live on fertile soil, they do not work it enough to supply their needs. They are expected to share what they have with all the visitors who arrive, and the more abundant their harvest, the more numerous the visitors. There is therefore no motivation to increase what is produced from the land. The main produce is the yam, which is harvested every eight months as I have said. Often in less than a week, everything is eaten at great banquets, and the hangers-on will not go away until there is nothing left. Some natives, however, show a kind of prudence by planting some **[847]** patches of yam in the mountains, in ravines far removed from the beaten paths.

With this habit of visiting each other, they eat and waste in two months an entire harvest, and then they only have taro to live on, to which they add, as I said, some shellfish and some wild roots. To top it up and to complete their ruin, there are other feasts, like those occasioned by funerals.

It is rare that a native meets a European without saying this word: *kakaye*, "I am hungry". As he says it, he presses his abdomen inward with his hands to let them hear that it is empty.[38] As they all have a taste for our biscuit, finding it very nourishing and filling, they are very happy when we can offer them a small piece. And often when I was going on a walk in the surrounding area with the hope of killing some birds for our dinner, I saw them following me around and guiding me on the nature tracks all day long on the promise to give them when I returned home some biscuit crumbs of biscuit weighing not more than two or three ounces. The natives are very partial to bird flesh, but as birds are rare, and as they have no good means to hunt them, they can only rarely catch any. It is different with flying foxes (*roussettes*) and

large bats which are very numerous on the island, as I have mentioned elsewhere. They catch them during the day when they are clinging or hanging on the branches of old trees. They are very happy when they get their hands on one of them. I had the opportunity to kill some and offer them as gifts. This game is never taken to the hut, because then they would be forced to share it. If they are so lucky to get their hands on one they will often hide it till they can get fire, then they go to a corner far from the paths, light some dried tree branches, hold the animal suspended alternatively by one leg or by the end of a wing above the fire, without even thinking of gutting it, or if it is a bird, removing the feathers. They roast their prey till the skin is well burned, delighting in the smell of burnt, and instead of waiting till it is cooked, they eat it dripping with blood, gnawing very skilfully at all the flesh which covers the biggest bones; as for the small ones, they chew those up with surprising ease.

The few travellers who had visited New Caledonia **[848]** before the arrival of the missionaries in 1843, had conveyed contradictory ideas about the inhabitants. Some said that they were gentle and humane; others painted them as ferocious cannibals. nIn a small article he published on his return to France, M. Julien de la Ferrière, who spent a month in Balade, speaks of them as gentle and easy-going men, and does not seem to suspect their cannibalism.[39] The missionaries themselves told me that it took some time before starting to suspect their voracity for human flesh. Thus it appears that they were anticipating that in the view of outsiders this would be unacceptable. When the good fathers, and especially the brothers, who had more contact with these barbarians, started to learn their language, they could have no doubts about the ghastly meals enjoyed especially by the chiefs. From that time on, they made the greatest effort to draw the people away from such a dreadful practice. Already they [the natives] consider cannibalism to be a habit as guilty as theft, and when they practise it, they hide from the missionaries with the greatest care, particularly the natives close to the mission, who take part, more or less, in the lessons of morality and religion, which are provided with some degree of success, the number of

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catechumens being already large, and increases each day.

Captain Richard, of the Marian Watson, about whom I had already an opportunity to speak, told me that one day he had seen on pirogues at Hienguène seventeen or eighteen corpses which were to be roasted.

The name of the current chief of the Hienguène tribe is Bouarate. He is a vigorous, fairly intelligent man, 30 years old at most, very courageous and with aa love for war. He is the brother-in-law through marriage of the young Thindine, who is *théa* of Mouhébé, and of Bouéone, also first chief of *Pouma*, since he married the three sisters. The wives of the two chiefs really love human flesh, and since they take their likings to extremes, as people of their sex do everywhere, they instigate these feasts. Thindine's tutor, chief Goa, a fairly old man, knows how to conceal his tastes, though his cannibal leanings are just as strong. They say he thinks that only prisoners of **[849]** war should be eaten. He is very aware of the state of inferiority of the natives when compared with the Europeans. The richest landowner of coconut plantations, he envies everything he sees at the missionaries. He goes begging the smallest thing from them, and he often looks for an opportunity to please them. When the *Seine* was shipwrecked, he was the one who went on the Pouebo coast to welcome the officer I had sent with a big armed detachment. He gave the officer a hut on the shore, in a place suitable for a temporary camp. Since I am compelled to say something about chief *Goa* as part of this narration, I will add that about a month after we settled in Baiao, there was a large meeting of chiefs at Pouébo, attended by Bouarate and the *théas* of the neighbouring *tribes*. I have even been told that even the chiefs of the tribe in the midst of whom we were living were present at that meeting. One of the chiefs spoke forcefully about the presence of the white foreigners in Baiao, and of the wealth they possessed. [He said] that we lived in fact without their help, but that, if the ships which we awaited did not arrive, we would force them to provide for us. [He said] that they should wage war against us, burn our houses, loot our stores, take our wealth and slay us. The majority were agreeing with him, when the *Goa* chief spoke, saying that we were many in number, without enumerating us, which he could not do, since he did not know how to count, as I will explain later. He said we all had

tignita (rifles), and were the strongest, that we had the means to destroy them without effort; that the only outcome would be disaster. He said that we were good, and that in more than a month we had been there, had only been good for them and had given them gifts; that *piscopo* (Monseigneur D'Amata) was powerful, and would share the riches which he awaited with his friends, and that instead of trying to harm us, they should seek our friendship. Apparently he was quite persuasive to get them all on his side, and from that moment, they did not have a single aggressive thought. On the contrary, Bouarate made every effort, perhaps because he was jealous, to attract the missionaries to Hienguène.[40]

One day Bouarate went to Pouébo to visit his young brother-in-law Thindine. At that point the latter had a shortage of provisions, and Bouarate said to him: "You see how thin you are and how your stomach is caved in; look at mine, it is fat and bulging; that is because, as you see, I am well fed. What use **[850]** are your *jamboïtes?*[41]Eat them and you will be like me." Unfortunately this young chief, quite aware that he is doing the wrong thing and that the missionaries do not approve of him, followed the pernicious suggestions he received, and, from that time on, he has made so to speak a regular slicing through his *jamboïtes* or servants, and eats them with his closest friends, including his wife, at least one a week. One day, Fr Rougeiron found relatives in tears, as their only child had just provided one of these meals.

On a visit to Baiao by the Hienguène chief, he brought as a gift human corpses which were shared out. There was even one person still alive destined to have the same fate and saved only by the intervention of the missionaries who had been warned in time.

One day one of the children whom the missionaries were raising was kidnapped, and taken to the hut of the Bouéone chief. He was about to kill him to have a feast with his friends, but fortunately Frs Rougeiron and Montrozier arrived in time. They were not greatly surprised, for not such a long time before, the chief had cut the

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41 See above

throat of a woman from his village, as well as his own aunt's, to eat them.

Trying to have as much work done as possible on the hydrography of the coast of New Caledonia where we were staying, I sent a well-armed rowing boat, accompanied by a dinghy to Hienguène, to draw the map of the port. Monseigneur d'Amata took advantage of this opportunity to travel to this place in order to negotiate with the *théa* about purchasing for the missionaries a suitable piece of land, surrounded by the people of this tribe, which is situated right in the centre of the island and is one of the most densely populated. The reports were as good as one might have hoped. Navy captain Roubet, whom I had placed in charge of the hydrographic project,[42] also sent me from Hinguène a report about his little trip. I have chosen this following fragment, which is quite strange, and which completes in a certain way what I have said about cannibalism among these islanders.

"During our exploration of the Hienguène port we went up the Enguène river about four or five miles, where are the huts belonging to the tribal chief Bouarate, on the left bank of the river. These huts, there are perhaps 5 or 6, are built in the most luxurious New Caledonian style, set on a small mound which dominates a small part **[851]** of the surrounding area. A fairly large number of trees, fields under cultivation with yam, taro and bananas, make this a fairly pleasant place. There are especially a large numbers of coconut palms, and the high mountains between which the river flows give this site a varied and picturesque aspect.

"What struck us most and at the same time produced, at least for me, one of the most repulsive feelings I have ever experienced in my life, was the display in front of one of the huts of human bones and the remains of the victims who, too often, provide infamous feasts for this savage chief.

"This kind of charnel house, tied to the trees shading the areas around the huts, contained five or six heads and large numbers of other bones in clear sight of all the natives, who possibly because of repeated exposure, do not seem to experience any distress in front of this sight, not very reassuring for people who could be at any moment the next designated victim.

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[42] Discuss

“The most astonishing detail was that the natives drew our attention to this monument of their chief's cruelty, and were explaining and trying to make us understand, through gestures and by pulling faces, that these bones were indeed the remains of the feasts held by Bouarate. All these explanations were given with the most natural tone and in such a carefree manner that was increasing our surprise, and what is worse, they laughed almost to our faces when we showed our disgust and indignation.

“This made me remember that, in one of the villages of the Hinguène port, where I was accompanying Fr Grange, a native was telling the Father, as the most natural thing in the world, that his son had been eaten by Bouarate a few years before, and he finished his story by praising the chief: *lelei Bouarate, aliki théa Bouarate*, etc. All this seemed very bizarre to us; it is true that he was telling the story in front one of Bouarate's younger brothers, and thus fear and lack of courage might have been the cause of such an extraordinary tale in the mouth of a father. Whatever the reason, it is difficult to see and difficult to hear, and one could imagine how, in spite of ourselves, we could not stop, in these two circumstances, from displaying, as I have said, out indignation and disgust.”

As I have already opened the subject of Hinguène and Bouarate, I think this is the right moment to say something **[852]** on this quite important aspect of New Caledonia, and on the connections established between Captain Richard of the *Marian Watson*, and the *thea*, and then on those more recent and more important [connections] between the *thea* and Monseigneur d'Amata.

Hinguène is situated about 40 miles east-south-east of Baiao, at the mouth of one of the largest rivers on the island. The banks near the seashore are steep; in the middle of the river's mouth, which is about a mile wide, there are small islands or sheer rocks, very prominent. One of these rocks is divided in two and stands out just like the towers of Notre Dame in Paris. They form a distinctive landmark for the area from the open sea. These rocks, blocking the river flow, have diminished the depth of the water and left in place only a fairly narrow channel which forms an excellent port, though small and only suitable for medium sized ships. Large ships can cast anchor

outside this channel, sheltered by some of the small islands and coral reefs which lie three or four miles out to sea.

As I have already mentioned, the population of Hinguène is one of the most numerous on the island, without even adding to the count the village of the Uveans who settled there and who are at least 700 or 800.

English captain Richard dropped anchor in this area almost at the same time as our missionaries were disembarking at Port Balade. He found sandalwood in fairly large quantity from good sized trees, easy to transport from the forest to the shore on the river, which is navigable in small boats for a fair distance from the river mouth. He was the first European who dared to establish a relationship with the islanders of this place on the coast. He bought the sandalwood cheaply. The savages were carrying to the ship the wood cut by the crew; they could not cut down the trees themselves easilly with their small stone axes; but they noticed very quickly the advantage of iron and wasted no time trying to obtain some for themselves. Captain Richard negotiated to pay for his entire purchase with old barrel hoops, cut into small pieces. The natives put handles on them after sharpening them laboriously and patiently on stones.[43]

The English captain, delighted with his voyage, returned to Sydney and he kept secret for everyone the spot in the Great Ocean where he **[853]** had made such a profitable deal and naturally he went back there soon after. He had counted on travelling from there to China, so he brought a large quantity of provisions and a fairly large crew, with the intention of leaving some of them there during his absence, to prepare a new cargo.

Despite the friendly relationship established between him and Bouarate, Captain Richard, who was beginning to understand the locals and their great desire for his bargaining goods, was always on guard and on alert. To make sure that he was leaving his men in as much safety as possible, he bought a small island about 3 miles from the shore, using as payment iron and especially small axes. He set up there a sort of settlement; meanwhile, considering that these measures are not entirely

[43] Ref. Shineberg Sandalwood

satisfactory, during his absence he sends the largest part of these trading goods to our missionaries for safe keeping, knowing how much respect the natives have for them; then his representatives can go and get them from Baiao in their canoe as the need arises.

So the relationship between Monseigneur d'Amata and Captain Richard is tolerable, even though the latter is a very zealous Methodist. Monseigneur explained very clearly to the captain how important it was for their common safety to abstain in all circumstances from giving fire-arms and ammunition to the natives. For a long time M. Richard kept his promise, as this coincided with his own interests. But since our arrival, Bouarate, having a real fondness for our destructive weapons, was dreaming up ways of obtaining a rifle for himself. Captain Richard, whom I had asked to come to Baiao in order to engage him to transport to Sydney part of the crew of the *Seine,* left some of his men in Hienguene under the command of his first mate and of his surgeon, to continue his timber trade. The iron sheets had lost a lot of their value, especially as the axes were worth more and the natives found them more attractive. The missionaries had a good supply and they had already distributed a fairly large number in the surrounding area. In his desire to win over for good the thea, M. Richard gave him as a gift a double-barrelled rifle and some ammunition to kill birds, *pigeons*, as the chief had put it. Two or three days after, Bouarate came to see me. I was very surprised to see him with a rifle in his hands. This weapon needed some small repairs, and he asked our armourer to do it for him, which I prevented [from happening], but unfortunately the rifle was in a fairly good condition. I thought **[854]** of asking the gunsmith to disable it at once, but he [Bouarate] would have noticed this and the fact would have had its disadvantages. I refrained [from any action], especially when I realized that this was a percussion weapon, and that, without maintenance, the nipple would soon be damaged, and that his ammunition would soon run out. Captain Richard promised me to not give him any more.

When the *Marian Watson* had left, Bouarate practised killing birds for several days; and he proved to be quite skilful. One day he travelled to the small island and asked the first mate to lend him another rifle so that he and one of his brothers could

hunt birds together. Which is is exactly what he did, and afterwards he brought back the rifle he had borrowed. A few days later, a similar demand was made, but the weapon was kept, and the poor Englishman, who is not a very courageous man, and who was not very happy to leave things as they were, did not dare to ask to have it back.

As soon as Bouarate found himself in possession of two rifles and of a small box of bullets, which had been stolen from one of our midshipmen at our first camping at Pouebo, without any initial knowledge of their usefulness, he considered that he was the most powerful of the chiefs. Without any excuse or any warning, he went to war against his neighbour in the south-east[44]. The latter tried to resist, and Bouarate killed as many opponents as he wished. Satisfied with his endeavour, he went home after a few days. This had just happened when Monseigneur and M. Roubet arrived there. People were saying that he had eaten five of the men he had killed. Asked about this, he confessed eating three. This chief was clearly envious of the welfare of the people of the Pouma tribe since the missionaries were at Baiao, and the idea of settling some of them [missionaries] near him was something of an obsession. For his part, Monseigneur d'Amata, who was considering expanding his mission, and, what's more, fearing that consequently Captain Richard would bring in the area some Welleien [*sic* = Wesleyan or Methodistw0] minister, wanted to establish a station there. The deal was agreed upon in the service-boat (*chaloupe*) of the *Seine*. In exchange for a small chest holding about thirty small axes, a large block of land belonging to the *thea* was acquired. This property consists of a steep promontory at the very end of the left bank, overlooking the port; at its foot boats could come to dock and load or unload their cargo. This land is currently covered by a fine coconut plantation, and has good, clear water springs, and, as it forms a peninsula, it would allow **[855]** if necessary, easy defence. Our missionaries inspire such a confidence that Bouarate, fearing that he would have to give some of the axes he had received to his minor chiefs, as is the custom, asked Monseineur d'Amata to take them back and to keep them safely in storage for him.

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[44] Comment

After our departure from the island, Father Grange and a brother had to settle in Hienguene.

When a man's corpse is set aside to be eaten, they cut it into pieces, which are roasted separately; the flesh is devoured before it is properly cooked. They make it into portions which are served on taro leaves used as plates. The parts that they seem to savour the most are the cartilage and muscles of the fingers, hands and feet, which are gnawed clean.

If in the Pouma cannibalism has not completely ceased, the people who engage in it conceal it with the greatest care: they are convinced that what they are doing is worthy of blame and displeasing to Jehovah [*Jéovah*], the name which the missionaries have given for God in the various idioms spoken by these savages.

While we were there, Monseigneur d'Amata took advantage of the presence of the small schooner from the Central Oceania missions, the *Clara*, to go and visit the missionaries who were on the Solomon Islands, being very concerned about their safety. During his absence of 26 days, the *thea* Boueone, from Baiao, killed one of his wives. When he then called in at the mission station, which he visited every few days, Fr Rougeiron, who was temporarily in charge of the mission and had learned about the murder of which the man was guilty, sent him away, and told him that if he came back, he would set the dogs on him. He considered himself warned and did not come back. When the bishop returned, he went visiting the natives in their huts. He went into chief Boueone's hut and addressed him scathing reproaches. The latter begged his pardon humbly and promised that in the future he would not kill anyone else. He said that he was not as guilty as one could imagine, that in fact he had indeed killed one of his wives, but he did not eat her; and the good prelate lifted his interdict.[45]

Since the missionaries have been in New Caledonia a revolution in the habits and ideas of its poor inhabitants is taking place, so to speak. How many new things they **[856]** are learning! Each day they recognise more and more the superiority of Europeans, and they feel how insignificant they are, and that they can aim at a better

[45] Comment

lot in life than at present when they don't even have enough to eat.

When Captain Cooke [*sic*] stopped over in Balade, he left behind a number of cats who, as I have mentioned elsewhere, have not been very successful at increasing their numbers in the wild: there are still a few in existence which, for lack of food, doubtless, are extremely skinny. Apart from these few animals, which were unkown in the other parts of the island, no other quadruped had appeared. The missionaries have introduced different kinds of species: two cows and a bull, pigs, sheep, goats, some rabbits and consequently several dogs, and quite a large number of fowls of different sorts. All these animals caused great astonishment to the natives, who did not comprehend what they could be. For example, one day a group were staring at some rabbits; one of them asked: “Whose offspring are they?”—“Can one ask such a question?” said one of the important members of the group. “Can't you see the father and mother?” pointing to the bull and one of the cows. On another occasion, Fr Rougeiron was calling a hen who had chicks, to feed the little ones. “Don't disturb them like that,” said to him a savage; “can't you see that the hen will breastfeed them which is so much better for them than what you are about to throw for them.”[46]

All the missionaries' domestic animals are greatly respected, and though they roam quite often far away from the station, they have not yet been subject of anyone's greed. The natives loathe pigs because these animals search for moist ground to dig in, and often cause great havoc in the taro plantings.

The mission had a mare who was in foal when it was brought in from Sydney: a chief of a distant tribe came upon it near Baiao, threw a javelin and wounded it fatally. One of the brothers carried out a caesarean operation, and there is now a small, very alert foal which the islanders love because it is very gentle and amusing with its jumps and skips.

Among these animals, all new to them, the one which captured most of their attention and which is the most astonishing for them is the dog. The missionaries have several, including a large **[857]** bulldog left behind as a gift on his passing through Balade by Captain Bérard, the commander of the corvette *Le Rhin*. The

[46] Comment

fathers called him Rhin in memory of that ship. Since then, several vessels assigned to the missions, which had come to New Caledonia as well, have left some other dogs; but, of them all, Rhin is the most intelligent, and, what's more, he has developed a hatred for the natives; one of them approaching puts him on the alert. Even though he is not a vicious dog, the slightest word or sign is enough; and he bites its way into the legs or arms of the poor devils against whom he was set: as soon as he is in pursuit, the other dogs follow him, and then it is incredible to see how all the natives run away, even those whose quiet behaviour has not started the pursuit.

It would be very difficult to explain what the New Caledonians think of the dog, but it is clear that they believe it has every ability they do, and they show the dog a lot of respect, particularly Rhin whom they view as a great chief.

One day, after prowling around in the neighbourhood, Rhin went back to the mission and found the door closed; after slamming on the door, he lied down very quietly in the doorway. From among the natives near the hut, and there is always a certain number of them around, one of them went and knocked at the door which was then opened. This native said to the person who appeared: “What, you did not hear the *chief* knocking? You must be either very nasty or very neglectful.”

On another occasion, the chief of a neighbouring village called in accompanied by a small suite; he asked to speak to Rhin; the dog was immediately called, then he [the dog] was presented with a large gift of yams, sugar cane, taro, etc. The chief made a little speech for him, telling him how great and powerful he considere him, and that he had brought presents as a way of asking for his friendship, and so that he [Rhin] would order the other dogs, his servants, to do him [the chief] or his subjects no harm in the future.

We have always treated the savages with extreme kindness, and while keeping an eye on them we allowed them near the mission during the day. There were always **[858]** some of them watching the workers from the *Seine* busy making various useful objects, particularly the blacksmith whose activities had a great attraction for them; often they were needed to give a helping hand on some brute force work needed to put up the wooden frame of a new house.

One of the natives, not from the village, stole a tool that a carpenter was using and ran away as fast as he could. But one shout “Here, Rhin!” created an instant effect. The bulldog was already on his way, with others at his heels, when the culprit was overcome by terror, dropped the object he had taken, and seeing that he would be caught climbed quickly to the top of a tree. Rhin stopped dead near it. The other savages witnessing this scene, and who were completely innocent, thought it best to run away when the dogs were called. These animals left Rhin at the foot of the tree, went for these poor wretches who were running away, sinking their teeth into their legs. They reached the riverbank and dived in the water, with the dogs in pursuit. The natives were diving, but to no avail, as soon as they came back to the surface, the head of a dog was next to them. It was an almost comical chaos, that could only be stopped with difficulty by calling off the aggressors who were very excited in their hunt. The thief, perched on top of a tree, with Rhin on guard at the foot of the tree, watched the whole scene quite calmly for the moment. But one can imagine his anguish when he saw the carpenter he had stolen from heading for the tree with an axe in his hand and getting in position to cut the base of his aerial retreat. [The native] uttered some heart-breaking cries; a missionary put an end to the comedy by taking hold of Rhin and lecturing the poor savage who was making the most beautiful promises for the future.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this account, at the beginning of their stay on the island the missionaries did not have the joy of living in perfect security among the savages. From one moment to the next, because of the attraction of some object to steal or through some unpremeditated action, they could have become victims of some act of violence, and as a result they were always on their guard. Father Rougeiron was standing out as having the most self-control and being always very resourceful in using his wits. Young and intelligent, he had been the first to begin learning the Pouma language, and for that reason alone perhaps **[859]** he was the most loved priest. He enjoys being their [the natives’] favourite. They believe that he has supernatural powers, though lesser than the bishop's which they consider to be infinite. For this reason, one day during a drought the natives went to him and said:

“Why are you so mean with us? You do not give us any rain. Your fellow countrymen the whites are keeping it all for themselves in their country. Come and see our plantations, they are dying, that's how dry the soil is.”[47] They also believe that the missionaries have a water which can stop them from dying and on occasion they even asked for some. All of these beliefs are based on some of Fr Rougeiron's interventions, which appeared to be extraordinary, and which had been imposed by necessity.

One evening a large gathering of armed men formed near the house, and despite urgings to do so, they did not disperse. The missionaries were most apprehensive, but Fr Rougeiron went to the doorway, and spoke without his usual gentleness, gave them the order to go away or else he would put them all to death by fire. As he was saying this he brought out a match and struck it on the palm of his hand. All the savages run away promptly. This scene was related in the villages. “Yes, they were saying, we have seen it, Fr Rougeiron pulled fire out of his hand, and if we had not run away, he would have burned us all!”

Sometime later, this time in the middle of the day, there was a large number of islanders gathered around the missionaries who were working, I believe, on the building of their little church, a few steps away from the mission house. This mob was becoming all the more worrying as some of the men in the group were strangers, not members of the tribe and thus unknown. At that time the priests did not have dogs, and could only encourage the natives to go away, but in this instance they did not succeed. Fr Rougeiron, the ever-resourceful man, called one of the brothers in a very solemn tone of voice, and ordered him to go and find in the hut a cask of salted meat which had just been opened, and to stand it near him. Rolling up the sleeves of the jacket he was wearing, he pulled out two whole legs of pork, his hands dripping with brine, and held them out for the natives to see; **[860]** they were dumbfounded and struck by fear. He told them that they would share the same fate if they did not go away immediately. They all cleared out on the spot, as they believed that they had seen human limbs coming out of the barrel, where they would have been placed as a

[47] Comment

punishment for some wrongdoing.[48]

To go briefly over everything already mentioned, it should be noted that all the brutality and cruelty of these savages is more the result of their social situation, which is so unfavourable to anything which might let them enjoy some happiness. Their real character is not evil; they have a natural tendency to help each other. Hospitality is a duty; the chiefs themselves can't own what for them would be riches without considering it their duty to share with their subjects and even with outsiders of the tribe who may come and visit them.

When two New Caledonians meet, they exchange pleasantries. The first to speak asks these questions: “Where are you going? Where do you come from? What are you going to do?” After he has received answers he talks about himself.

The chiefs rarely move around alone; their company varies according to their rank. Everywhere I went, I was always considered a great chief. I had to answer to everyone I met. The first word was always *Aliki?* (You are a chief?)[49] I would answer *aliki*. Since I did not speak the language, I would simply indicate the village where I was heading. If I was just out for a walk, I would say Baiao.

One day, I had gone for a walk with Fr Rougeiron. He had brought his breviary with him, intending to read from it in a pleasant shady place near our road. While he was doing this I went and sat on a large rock from where I could see the waves breaking against the reef, which was practically on the path. Several people of both sexes came; a few sat down not far from me, the others turned back. Soon my walking companion came to me and asked me to stand up. He explained that as long as I remained seated there, no native would go past me. That was how they behaved with the tribal chiefs, and they considered me as the Europeans' thea.

The New Caledonians spend part of their times, as I have said, sitting or lying outside **[861]** their huts in the shade of trees. They talk and gossip almost always quite cheerfully, making witty remarks at the expense of some members of the group and often about those not present. They like very much Fr Rougeiron, particularly as

[48] Comment
[49] Malayo=Polynesian

he is very cheerful: “You see, they say, how well he knows to make a joke and to say things that make us laugh.”

These islanders like dancing and engage gladly in this kind of exercise. Usually it involves two or four people. These dances have nothing remarkable: in some they use quite expressive gestures. They show a strong sense of rhythm, yet at the same time they do not accompany the danse with any instrument or singing.

The women's dance is not as mild as the men's; it is always led by a woman chief, who sets the rhythm by slapping a large piece of paoli bark on the palm of one hand. They have as well a big dance in which 500 to 600 people sometimes take part, holding slings, lances and maces, with which they gesture in rhythm, beaten out by sharp whistling. The main chief also beats it out by hitting the ground with a large bamboo pole which is closed off at both ends, and which produces under this action a loud sound. When the dance is finished, one after the other they give a dreadful shout on the final beat, and simultaneously they all crouch down. In these large-scale dances, many of them wear hideous masks which makes them look bigger. These masks have enormous faces made of black painted wood, with misshapen features and rows of teeth made of small shells which are stuck inside the mouth with resinous glue. Others have teeth made of red seeds. This hideous head is dressed with an enormous wig topped with the type of cylindrical bonnet which the great chiefs often wear. At the neck is attached a sort of petticoat made of a trimmed net and completely covered with birds feathers. The savages attired in this costume have their eyes at the level of the enormous mouth of the mask, through which they can see enough to move around. When this large-scale dance occurs in the evening near a large fire which spreads a bright light, there is something strange and weird about the scene which often has amused me greatly.[50]

Just as I was getting ready, with Monseigneur d'Amata, to **[862]** say a final farewell to these savages, all the people of Baiao gathered around us, with chief Boueone at their head. I made them a gift of a large sack of broken biscuits, leftovers from our provisions. This pleased them greatly, and they lined up in a circle around

[50] Pictures of masks known?

the precious sack and began to dance showing the greatest joy, and several times the mountain echo repeated the frightful shout they utter as they crouch down. Since I mention that particular day still present in my memory, I recall that when we were going down the river to board the *Arabian*, which would take us back home, everyone, even the women and children, kept following us on the bank, and when we reached the open sea, the chief and many others embarked on their pirogues, followed us until they were almost on board and did not leave us until we unfurled the sails, and several of them were shedding heartfelt tears seeing their good bishop go away.

This people seem to love music, if one might judge by the pleasure they took when they were listening to military tunes on our bugles, or those played on various instruments the mission owned, and which some of our musically inclined gentlemen were putting to good use. But these savages were very backward on this subject as in everything else, for I am aware of only one instrument they use. It consists of a small reed pierced with several holes, with which, by blowing on one end, they manage to produce a feeble and monotone sound, lacking any harmony.[51]

Before 1843, the year when the missionaries and Captain Richard came to the northern part of the island, the use of iron was almost unknown to the New Caledonians. However. they had seen some pieces which were introduced, without a doubt, by the few ships which had been to Port St Vincent. They quickly grasped the advantages of using this metal for their common little activities. Now these natives look down on the small stone axes which they used to use. These tools are made of basalt or jasper, thinned down with much effort over a long period. They are secured to a small handle of ironwood, in the style of our adzes [*a kind of axe used by carpenters and barrel makers, with a curved blade which is at 90 degree angle with the handle]. They now replace the stones with laminated pieces of iron sharpened with great effort at one end on pebbles. What they like and want the most now are our own little axes.

[863] One can get some understanding of how little these people practise the arts. It takes them a very long time to do even the smallest things, and from this point of

[51] Jew's harp?

view these men are endowed with admirable patience. Their cutting tools, apart from axes, are pieces of pearl oyster shell, fragments of quartz, and a sort of broken crystal rock. Pieces of broken glass from bottles are now much sought after.

These islanders seem to like sculpture, if we may judge from the rough wooden faces found here and there which adorn especially the doorways and the tops of the chiefs' huts. They also create some badly proportioned figurines in hard wood. These do not represent idols for them, they are simple toys. Out of softer wood they make the grotesque masks they use in their dances.

Apart from lances made from ironwood, to make these weapons, they ordinarily use a mangrove wood, which is not as hard or colourful, and which they colour in black with a sort of mud harvested in the marshes. Their clubs or maces are made of ironwood, which is at the same time heavy and solid. They fashion this weapon in varried weird shapes, depending on which ones seem more fearsome and dangerous. They decorate the handle (a sign of great luxury to them) with a plate or a braid made of the hair of the large bat I mentioned earlier.

The small egg-shaped stones which the natives use for the catapult also require a lot of work, but this is negligible compared to the time needed to shape jasper beads as large as pistol bullets, from which they make necklaces: for this reason they are the hight of luxury. The few women I saw wearing them were not prepared to part with them at any price. Even Monseigneur d'Amata tried to obtain some for me but to no avail.

They make little braids, sometimes very fine, from tree bark fibres and grasses. From the same materials they make rough fabrics to use as mats in their huts and as sails on their pirogues. These islanders make their nets with the greatest skill, forming the mesh, as we do, on a roller. The needles, on which they put quite a length of thread, are made of wood, and look much like the ones we use for similar tasks. The nets are never large. They **[864]** add small stones to one of the bands so that the net will sink, and they fix the upper band to a small stick which they hold in their hand. When they see small fish swimming in schools near the bank or at the mouth of streams, they run along and encircle them with the net. One can imagine that such a

method of fishing requires great skill and much practice. Our sailors tried it without any success and could not manage to catch even one fish.

The art of pottery is not unknown to these islanders,[52] but they only know how to make one object, the *ta*, this large round pot which I mentioned [p. 832] which they use especially for cooking yams. They use for this purpose a clay soil which appears suitable, and which no doubt later on they will put to better use. They mix it up carefully, and they make a long sausage about two centimetres in diameter, then shape it in a spiral which they round up with their hands giving it the desired form. When they are happy with the shape, they smooth it and rub it inside and out with their moistened hands. Then they coat it with a resin, often in a liquid form, which is a sort of varnish, and then they bake it.

The illnesses which the New Caledonians develop most commonly are elephantiasis (which at least ten percent of the men have), dropsy, and eye illnesses, all the result of the fact that they sleep on the ground in very damp huts, especially during the winter period. That is why they also develop dangerous colds. Venereal illness is widespread in the entire island and can be seen in the most hideous forms. It does not seem probable to me that Europeans gave them this deadly gift.[53]

Here, like in any other country, naturally, they seek cures for all health problems, and charlatans abound as elsewhere. There are professional doctors, but they are not common. There are at most two or three in each tribe. Everyone thinks they are very learned and skilful. These doctors are very careful to share their knowledge only with those of their children who show some talent. These men are skilful in dealing with dislocated limbs and healing some fractures. In some situations, they practice bleeding, particularly for **[865]** head wounds resulting from blows. They use small shards of quartz, making tiny pricks around the bruised area. They also raise blisters by burning the part where they want to drain off an infection. Sometimes they purge the sick by giving them to drink seawater, which they also use to cauterize the sores caused by venereal diseases.

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[52] Archaeology?
[53] Comment!

During the two months that the crew of the *Seine* spent in Baiao, our surgeon major, M. Lehouëlleur was often taken to the natives' huts by the missionaries to treat the sick. He cured several, rather through improved hygiene than by the use of medication. In the last period the savages often came to ask for his help. They respected him greatly and knew him only by the name *House Burner (Brûle-Maison)*.

In Baiao there was one of the best doctors in the country, with the highest reputation. He was a dangerous man to have as an enemy, for although he was not a bad man, he loved blazes, and during the night often burned huts for his own amusement. For this reason, his neighbours for several leagues around were very frightened of him. It seems even that at the beginnings of the mission settlement in Mahamata, on several occasions he threw burning embers on the straw roof of their poor dwelling. Since they came and settled in Baiao, he became one of their nearest and kindest neighbours and he visits them every day. He loves to learn and cultivates his fields more carefully than in the past. The missionaries, or rather the brothers, call him *House Burner (Brûle-Maison)*, name that he does not understand but which appears as an honour. All these savages give up their own names gladly to take names of saints the missionaries give to their catechumens. And for that same reason our empiricist is called by the other natives only by the new name, of which he is so proud. They seem to believe that this name refers to his role as a doctor, and because of this they have decided to give the same name to M. Lehouëlleur.[54]

In the islands of Amoa (Navigators) and Hapay (Friendly) as well as in Wallis, the natives have difficulty speaking French. When there are two consecutive consonants in a word, they always omit one, and it is **[866]** very difficult to get them to pronounce the silent E. But it is a different matter in New Caledonia, where the inhabitants pronounce quite easily French with all its intonations.[55]

At the beginning of this essay it was said that the various tribes spoke different languages, and that even the closest neighbours could barely understand each other. However, all these languages, full of imperfections, have more or less the same spirit,

[54] On medicine and missions

and all have four duals [linguistic term referring to a category of number, different from singular or plural, which denotes two people or two things in conjugation or declension in some languages].

Fr Rougeiron has composed a grammar and a small dictionary of the Pouma language, and the outcome of that is that we could not make ourselves understood with the words of the vocabulary given by M. de Laferrière, corvette captain, the commander of the *Bucéphale*, and the reasons are simple and very natural. Thus for example, for the word *eye*, if a native is asked to name his eye, he will give one word; if asked to name both eyes, he will give another, and the word used for the eyes of the person speaking with him, or for the eyes of number of people, will be different again.

The first extensive contact that these savages have had with Europeans came with our French missionaries, who need each day to name a large number of new objects which come before them, and which they largely consider useful: naturally they preserve the French terms for them, and if this continues and the island becomes totally Roman Catholic, our language will be partially introduced, and the dealings between natives and our ships will be much easier.

The art of calculation is very limited, and, I believe, more so than with any other people. They have no way of counting beyond one hundred. Often in the early days when the missionaries wanted to find out a number, the answer was puzzling. So, for example, “You mourned at so and so's death?” “Yes.” “Were there a lot of you?” “Oh yes!” “How many?” “Two men.” These *two men* meant *forty*. This requires naturally an explanation. To start with, they count as many units as there are fingers of a hand; for numbers bigger than five they say: one hand, two hands, up to four hands which makes twenty, to which they refer as *a man*, meaning that they add up all the fingers and toes of a person. Thus the New **[867]** Caledonian counts up to five *men* which adds up to one hundred, and still, only the most intelligent can calculate that far. For the numbers which exceed that figure they just say: many, many, many, etc.

To close this account about New Caledonia and its poor inhabitants, I will please

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[55] Re patois

the readers, perhaps, if I share with them my idea about the causes of their previous isolation, surrounded by so many islands which are not as beautiful or as large [but] often visited by travellers, and about their present situation and probable future which is prepared for them.

In the islands of Central Oceania, and on those to the north of the Equator such as the Sandwich islands, when the first ships arrived, they found peoples who were intelligent and who had a more or less advanced civilization.[56] Though they were savages, they were at least partially clothed, they knew how to build large and impressive huts, as in Fidji (Viti) and Hapay; with their totally inadequate tools, they were building those beautiful large double pirogues which continue to impress us to this day, and in which they were venturing on daring trips from one archipelago to another. At Ohihée, Tahiti, Tonga, Vavao, etc.,one could find means to get refreshments for the crew. Using different barter goods, one could obtain plenty of pigs, chickens and fruits. Pearl fishing increased the visits to Pomotou and other dangerous small archipelagos: the love of profit made people willing to face everything. In this multitude of islands there are Europeans who settled there and who have become pilots navigating through all these coral [reefs]. Today hundreds of ships from all the countries criss-cross the Great Ocean in its length and breadth hunting the great whale, which one day, if this goes on, will disappear altogether from the vast seas. The whalers call into ports and often there are lots of ships anchored at the same time in all the islands mentioned above, where they find provisions and refreshments. What would all these sailors do in New Caledonia, on this island marked by the many dangerous reefs which surround it, where they would find a population who would not even be able to offer them some fruit? Lately a small number of fortune-seekers have started going there to harvest sandalwood. It cannot be long before the wood close to the shore is used up, and soon it will then be much more difficult to exploit it than in the New Hebrides, **[868]** where there are fewer reefs to defy and more resources. New Caledonia has remained isolated not only because of the difficulty of getting close to it but also because there is nothing

[56] Robertson

there for speculators. If there were any major advantages in going there, its shores would have been very rapidly explored.

So this should be the present aim of the missionaries: to improve the lot of the inhabitants, to civilise them a little, to convince them to wear proper clothes and to help them eat more suitably, to teach them to grow cotton, which does well there, and sow crops of mountain rice, as is done in Madagascar, and of maize; because, in this intertropical climate there can be no question of our cereals. One could raise many animals but the skins and wool would be of dubious quality to attract speculators to try their products which could not compete with the products from New Holland, Van Dieman's Land or New Zealand. These are large countries, with a climate close to our southern European climate where an immigrant who has the enterprise and agricultural skills can plough his fields and tend his vines and where the beautiful fields are already covered with huge flocks and herds.

New Caledonia is thus destined to remain isolated, under the control of missionaries, for who can covet it: England? Good God, [that country] has more colonies than it can exploit. And there isn't nor could it be any market for manufactured goods there, as there is nothing they could trade with. What nation would attempt to set up a base there without any intermediary, some four or five hundred leagues further away than the main English settlements in New South Wales which have an immense future, where industry is rapidly developing, and where ideas about independence are growing at a rate to terrify the English central government.

Brest December 15 1847
J. Leconte, Captain

P.S. Just as I was finishing this small work, I received letters from New Caledonia. There has been a dreadful epidemic which has affected its poor inhabitants. They have been decimated. Fortunately he missionaries have escaped this scourge, but several of the chiefs I mention have died. **[869]** Payama, chief of Mahamata, the *thea* Thindine from Mouhébé and his tutor, the chief Goa, have all gone. The missionaries

are also mourning the deaths of some fervent catechumens. To add to this distress, some adventurers from the Hienguene tribe and from tribes further south came in, destroyed and plundered the missionary plantations. They are forced to begin over, but they are doing so with their usual patience and characteristic resignation.