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In Two Volumes: Volume I  
W. H. R. Rivers  
Frontmatter  
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THE HISTORY OF  
MELANESIAN SOCIETY

IN TWO VOLUMES  
VOLUME I

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Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to Melanesia

# THE HISTORY OF MELANESIAN SOCIETY

BY

W. H. R. RIVERS, F.R.S.

FELLOW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

IN TWO VOLUMES

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TO THE SOCIETY  
OF  
ST JOHN'S COLLEGE  
CAMBRIDGE  
TO WHOSE FELLOWSHIP  
THIS BOOK IS LARGELY DUE

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## PREFACE

AN earlier book of mine, *The Todas*, was intended to be a sample of scientific method as applied to the collection and recording of ethnographical facts. The present book is a demonstration of ethnological, rather than of ethnographical, method.

When *The Todas* was written, I had fully realised the insufficiency of current methods of collecting the facts of ethnography, but I was then under the sway of the crude evolutionary doctrine of the time, and did not see that the need for sound method was equally great in the theoretical treatment of these facts. It was only in the act of writing this book that I came gradually to realise the unsatisfactory character of current ethnological methods. From that time, method again became my chief interest, and it is primarily as a study in method that this book is put forward.

The methods I have used have led to the formulation of a scheme of Melanesian history so complicated that it may seem at first sight to go far beyond the conclusions warranted by the facts now at our disposal. I may say at once that I do not anticipate that this scheme will be fully confirmed by future research; it may even have to suffer radical change as new facts come to our knowledge, but it is my hope that such modification, or even destruction if it come, will be due, not to faults of method, but to the insufficiency of the facts to which these methods have been applied. Our present store of the facts of Melanesian culture is so insignificant beside that which still remains to be garnered that we cannot

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expect this book to give more than a shadowy picture of the real course of Melanesian history. The scheme which I put forward will, however, receive its full justification if it arouses such interest in Melanesia as will lead to some organised attempt to rescue its culture from oblivion. Such an attempt must be made within the next few years if it is to be of any avail. During the last year a vast volcanic catastrophe has swept away a large proportion of the population, and altered the configuration, of one of the most interesting islands of Melanesia, but this destruction is trivial in extent and importance beside that which is being brought upon the same region every year by the devastating effects of our 'civilisation.'

It is a pleasant relief to turn from these depressing facts to thank those who have helped me in my work both at home and abroad. This book forms the first instalment of the work of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to Melanesia, and I am glad to acknowledge here the generous assistance of the Trustees and to thank them for the patience with which they have awaited the publication of the work. It is also pleasant to mention here the unfailing interest in my work and the support I have had from Dr A. C. Haddon, not only while this book has been in progress, but ever since he first introduced me to the study of ethnology.

I am greatly indebted to Dr A. S. Lea, Mr S. H. Ray and Mr W. J. Perry for their help in reading the proofs of the book and for many valuable suggestions, and I owe much to Mr Perry for help in other ways.

To Mr A. M. Hocart I owe many thanks for allowing me to use some of the results of our joint work in the Western Solomons, as well as for several corrections in my chapter on Fiji. Mr G. C. Wheeler also helped me greatly by allowing me to see his papers on the Shortland Islands before their publication.

For many of the illustrations I am indebted to the Rev. W. J. Durrad and Mr J. C. Palmer of the Melanesian

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Mission, while others have been taken by his kind permission from the valuable collection of Melanesian photographs by Mr J. W. Beattie of Hobart, Tasmania.

By the kind permission of the Royal Geographical Society I am able to reproduce (with some alteration) the map at the end of the first volume which had appeared in the *Geographical Journal*.

I am glad of this opportunity of expressing my thanks for help and hospitality to Sir Everard im Thurn and Mr A. B. Joske in Fiji, to Mr C. M. Woodford in the Solomons, and to the Bishop and staff of the Melanesian Mission upon whose vessel, the *Southern Cross* I obtained much of my material.

I have expressed my indebtedness in the text to many individual members of the Melanesian Mission as well as to others, but I owe so much to one that I cannot pass over his name in silence. No one who studies the part taken in my theoretical scheme by the facts collected from the Banks Islands and Tikopia can fail to recognise how this scheme would have suffered if this part of my work had not been done, or had been done less fully. Not only would the collection of this material have been impossible without the help of the Rev. W. J. Durrad, but large sections of the evidence consist of information, collected by Mr Durrad after I had left the islands, which he allows me to record side by side with that we obtained when working together on the *Southern Cross*.

Lastly, I must recall with gratitude the aid of two men, one Melanesian and the other Polynesian, who have died since my visit to their islands. Nearly the whole of my account of the Banks Islands and Tikopia was obtained from John Pantutun and John Maresere. These two men were not merely passive witnesses, but they entered heartily into the work of trying to make me understand the customs and beliefs with which they were familiar. They showed such interest and intelligence in the task that it was clear how



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great might be our hopes for the future of Melanesia and Polynesia if their peoples were given a fair chance. These two men were doubtless above the average of their fellows, but their capacity shows how much might be done by the encouragement of independent industry and the preservation of such features of native culture as do not conflict with the better aspects of our civilisation.

W. H. R. RIVERS.

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

*June 9, 1914.*

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*Abbreviations.*

- M. Codrington's *Melanesians*.
- M. L. Codrington's *Melanesian Languages*.

*Phonetic System.*

See vol. I, p. 18.