

A PAPUAN MOSQUITO NET.

BY R. HAMLYN-HARRIS, D.Sc. (DIRECTOR).

(Plate III.)

DURING his term of office as Administrator of British New Guinea, His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, Sir William MacGregor, whilst on a visit to the Mekeo District, came across a native mosquito "net" erected in one of the houses, and was fortunate enough to secure it for the famous MacGregor collection which he made and which is now housed in the Queensland Museum in Brisbane.

The "net" takes the form and shape of a bag, 15 ft. 5 in. long by 5 ft. 3 in. wide, and is suspended with cords from the rafters of the native houses somewhat in the fashion shown in the figure, Plate No. III. Long strips of cocoanut bark, that withered portion so common around the blossoms and the leaves, are sewn together, and closed on three sides, the fourth being available for entrance and exit. This "net," though suspended, rests in the main on the floor of the houses on native mats, the frayed edges of the entrance closing automatically and sufficiently to act as an effective bar to mosquitoes.

The heat and closeness of the interior must be intense, since practically no ventilation is possible, and the bag is used by the various members of the family who repose there for the night.

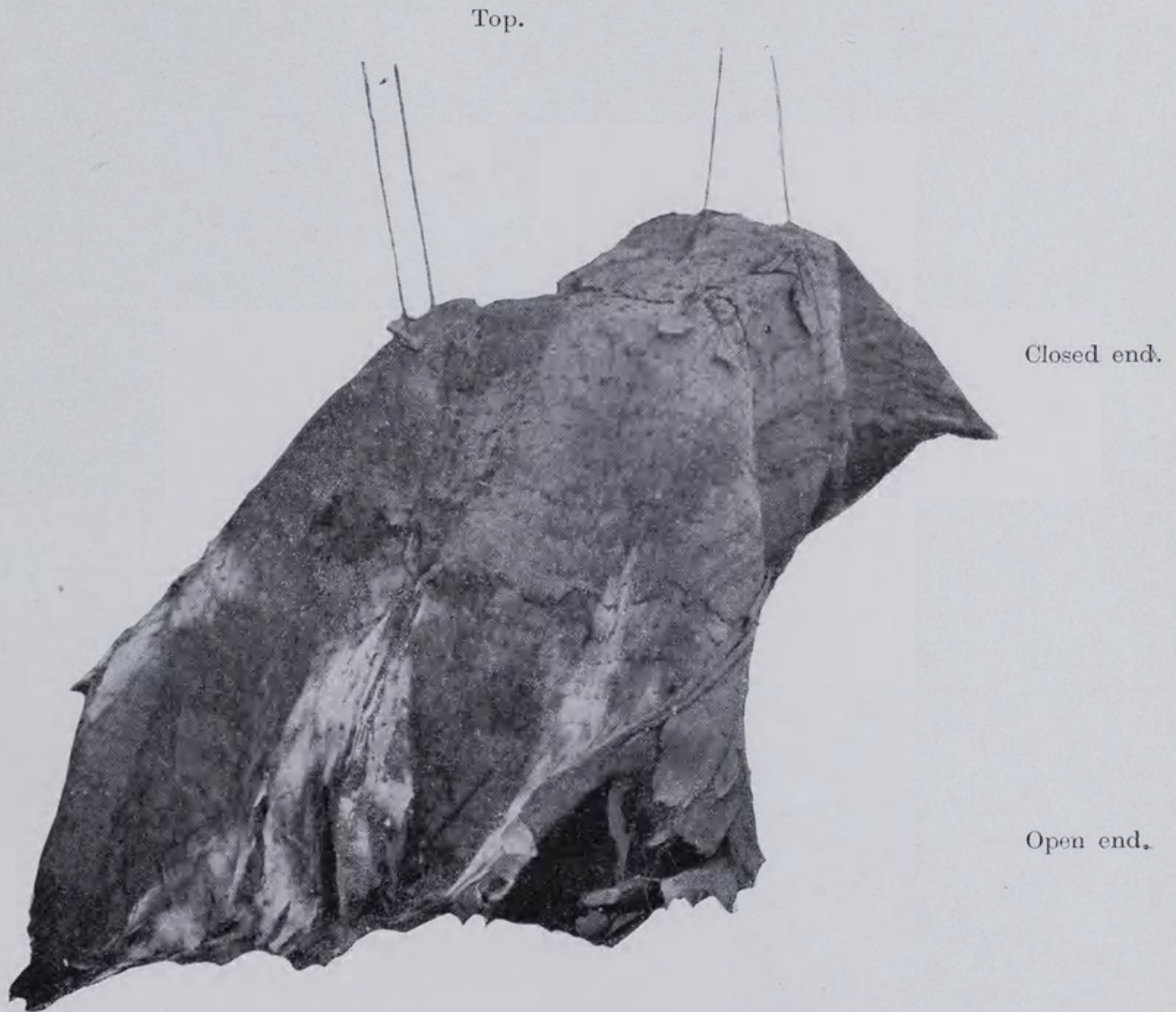
The writer is indebted to His Excellency for kindly drawing his attention to this rare and unique specimen and for the assistance given in deciding its identity, which had been lost many years ago. It is no wonder that such should have been the case, for one would never think of recognising, in this cocoanut fibre bag, so useful an article as a native mosquito "net." His Excellency does not recollect ever having seen another of its kind, and tells me that the particular part of Mekeo where the "net" was actually in use—one of the villages on the river—was so infested with mosquitoes that devices had to be invented to prevent great suffering to the natives. He remembers that the boys who worked his boat up the river had to wrap up their limbs and take other precautions against the attacks of these pests; and so it is not to be wondered at that the Papuans of that part should construct such a serviceable protection for themselves whilst asleep. In this connection it may not be out of place to recall

the case of the Nile fishermen who successfully kept off mosquitoes by hanging up their fishing-nets around their beds at night. Herodotus refers to them as follows:—

“ Against the innumerable mosquito they have these devices. Those that live above the marshes are protected by the towers into which they climb to sleep; for the mosquitos are unable to fly high from the ground in the breeze. But those who dwell about the lagoons have another device in place of the towers. Every man of them has a net in which he catches fish by day, and in the night uses it thus on his bed: He rigs up the net round his bed, gets in under it, and so goes to sleep. If he sleeps with his cloak or a sheet wrapped round him, the mosquitos bite clear through the covering; but they don't ever try to bite through the net.”*

If fishing-nets were successful agencies in securing to their owners nights free from the molestation of mosquitoes, we have no reason to doubt the thorough effectiveness of the Papuan mosquito “ net ” for the purpose for which it was intended.

* Herodotus, Book 2, Ch. 95.



A MOSQUITO NET USED BY THE PAPUANS OF THE MEKEO DISTRICT, BRITISH NEW GUINEA.

Hanging by cords, but base resting on floor.

Specimen No.: N.G.E. 13/315.

Face page 8.



Hamlyn-Harris, R. 1913. "A Papuan Mosquito Net - Plate III." *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 2, 7-8.

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