



A Welcoming Group of Ongies on Little Andaman Island

## NATIVES OF THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

A Pygmy People Who Lead an Isolated and Idyllic Existence  
in Their Island Homes in the Bay of Bengal

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**A**GES ago, when the maritime people of India first came into contact with the Andaman Islands, they called the local aborigines by a Sanscrit name that meant "monkey people." From this name the present word Andaman was derived. So few are the early records of these islands that we can only suppose that this archipelago was rarely visited by seamen. For centuries, since prehistoric times, in fact, these islands have remained out of contact with the general march of South Asiatic civilization. So bitterly did their population resent the intrusion of foreigners that, today, they remain literally as primitive as they ever have been.

Racially, the Andamanese belong to the negroid race and can be classed as true pygmies. Formerly, anthropologists believed that all negroid races once upon a time migrated from Africa. Today, although this theory is not entirely disproved, it is believed there once existed a negroid people well distributed in southeastern Asia and indigenous to the country. To this race, now nearly extinct, the Andamanese must have belonged. Probably they inhabited the southern

part of the great Indian peninsula in a pre-Druidian period. With the advent of the latter people they may have been largely exterminated, and some of their survivors found their way south by sea to their present isolated abode.

As pygmies, the Andamanese may be compared to very small similar peoples living in Malay, the Phillipines, and the Belgian Congo. Since characteristics of all races are indubitably due to their environment and possibly food, one could ascribe these same elements as the cause of the very short statures of all pygmies. The Andamanese are living in an age previous to that of agriculture and metals. It is true that nowadays they have some metals, but these have filtered to them from the present colony formed by the British at Port Blair. Except for this source, they would have no metals at all. So primitive is the life of the Andamanese, so little have they of what we understand as worldly goods, that it is really surprising how well they get along. They are of two types—those living along the shore and truly amphibian, and those living in the midst of the dense tropical jungle of the interior.