

THE TAVAU, OR COIL FEATHER CURRENCY OF  
SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, SANTA CRUZ GROUP.

By R. ETHERIDGE, Junr., Curator.

---

(Plate xliv.)

---

“THE basis of money is at times a shell, a bead, a robe, a skin,” says Mr. O. T. Mason,<sup>1</sup> but, adds Dr. G. B. Tylor,<sup>2</sup> “in this roughest kind of barter we do not yet find that clear notion of a unit of value which is the great step in trading.”

An account of the currency used by the native races of the South Pacific has yet to be written, and when investigated a very fascinating study it will prove to be. A perusal of the curious and interesting list of objects given by Dr. T. de Lacouperie as “Shapes of Currency from Barter to Money,”<sup>3</sup> used throughout the world, will impress this fact on the reader. In a review of Dr. Lacouperie’s list Dr. J. D. E. Schmeltz<sup>4</sup> adds some further important facts, including the “feather money” of Santa Cruz.

Feather money, according to the Rev. Dr. R. H. Codrington,<sup>5</sup> as a medium of exchange is also met with on Santa Maria, of the neighbouring Banks Group, and on Meralava (or Meralaba), the northernmost of the New Hebrides Group. A form of feather money is again said to occur in Samoa by Professor W. T. Brigham, who in his excellent “Preliminary Catalogue”<sup>6</sup> mentions “Feather currency from Samoa.”

An opportunity was afforded the Trustees last year (1901) of acquiring by purchase a coil of the Santa Cruz currency, and it is now my purpose to describe this in detail, for, so far as I know, very little, with the exception of a passage in Codrington’s work, has been written on the subject. This coil is twenty six feet ten

---

<sup>1</sup> Mason—Origin of Invention, 1895, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Tylor—Anthropology, 1881, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Lacouperie—Brit. Mus. Cat. Chinese Coins, vii. Cent. B.C. to A.D. 621, 1892, p. xx.

<sup>4</sup> Schmeltz—Internat. Archiv. Ethnographie, vi., 1893, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Codrington—The Melanesians, 1891, p. 324.

<sup>6</sup> Brigham—Prelim. Cat. Bernice Pauahi Bishop Mus., 1, 1892, p. 18, No. 142.