

Faery Lands
Of the South Seas





[See p. 241

These lagoons swarm with strange forms of life unknown
in northern waters

JAMES NORMAN HALL, 1887-
CHARLES BERNARD NORDHOFF, 1887-



FAERY LANDS OF THE SOUTH SEAS



GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING CO., INC.
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

Chas. S. Corbi Library Fund

32871

COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY HARPER & BROTHERS.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES AT THE COUNTRY LIFE
PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.



CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	PREFACE	ix
I.	A LEISURELY APPROACH	3
II.	IN THE CLOUD OF ISLANDS	20
III.	MAROONED ON MATAORA	47
IV.	THE LAND OF AHU AHU	65
V.	A MEMORY OF MAUKÉ	86
VI.	RUTIARO	107
VII.	A DEBTOR OF MOY LING	132
VIII.	AN ADVENTURE IN SOLITUDE	148
IX.	THE STARRY THRESHOLD	171
X.	COSTLY HOSPITALITY	196
XI.	HIS MOTHER'S PEOPLE	207
XII.	IN THE COOK GROUP	230
XIII.	AT THE HOUSE OF TARI	251
XIV.	IN THE VALLEY OF VAITIA	277
XV.	TAHITIAN TALES	303
XVI.	ANCHORED OFF THE REEF	321
XVII.	THE ENGLISHMAN'S STORY	328
XVIII.	ABOARD THE "POTU RAVARAVA"	343

CONTENTS

PREFACE

THE islands of the South Seas are places of an interest curiously limited. The ethnological problem presented by the native is interesting only to men of science, commerce is negligible, there is little real agriculture, and no industry at all. There remains the charm of living among people whose outlook upon life is basically different from our own; of living with a simplicity foreign to anything in one's experience, amid surroundings of a beauty unreal both in actuality and in retrospect.

It is impossible to write of the islands as one would write of France or Mexico or Japan—the accepted viewpoint of the traveler is not applicable here. A simple attempt to impart information would prove singularly monotonous, and one is driven to essay a different task; to pry into the life of the mingling races, hoping to catch something of its significance and atmosphere. In making such an attempt it is necessary at times to dig deeper than would be consistent with good taste if names were mentioned, and for this reason—in the case of certain small islands—the ancient Polynesian names have been used instead of those given on the chart. All of the islands described are to be found in the Paumotu, Society, and Hervey groups.

J. N. H.
C. B. N.

TAHITI, *April 10, 1921.*

Landfall



Faery Lands Of the South Seas



CHAPTER I

A Leisurely Approach



DON'T remember precisely when it was that Nordhoff and I first talked of this adventure. The idea had grown upon us, one might say, with the gradual splendor of a tropical sunrise. We were far removed from the tropics at that time. We were, in fact, in Paris and had behind us the greatest adventure we shall ever know. On the Place de la Concorde and along the Champs-Élysées stood rank on rank of German cannon, silent enough now, but still menacing, their muzzles tilted skyward at that ominous slant one came to know so well. For a month we had seen them so, children perched astride them on sunny afternoons, rolling pebbles down their smooth black throats; veterans in soiled and faded horizon blue, with the joy of this new quiet world bright on their faces, opening breech-blocks, examining mechanism with the skill of long use at such employment; with a kind of wondering hesitation in their movements too, as though **at any**

Faery Lands of the South Seas

moment they expected those sinister monsters in the fantastic colors of Harlequin to spring into life again.

Those were glorious days! Never again, I think, will there be such a happy time as that in Paris. The boulevards were crowded, the tables filled under every awning in front of the cafés; and yet there seemed to be a deep silence everywhere, a silence intensified by the faint rustling of autumn leaves and the tramping of innumerable feet. One heard the sound of voices, of laughter, of singing, the subdued, continuous rumble of traffic; but not a harsh cry, not a discordant note. All the world seemed to be making holiday at the passing of a solemn, happy festival.

Well, we had kept it with the others—Nordhoff and I—and have the memory of it now, to be enjoyed over and over again as the years pass. But there was danger that we might outstay the freshness of that period. We were anxious to avoid that for the sake of our memories, if for nothing else. While we were not yet free to order our movements as we chose, we pretended that we were, and so one rainy evening in the December following the armistice we decided to call that chapter of experience closed and to go forward with the making of new plans.

For we meant to have further adventure of one kind or another—adventure in the sense of unexpected incident rather than of hazardous activity. That had been a settled thing between us for a long time. We had no craving for excitement, but turned to plans for uneventful wanderings which we had sketched in broad outlines months before. They had been left, of necessity, vague; but now that any of them might be made realities, now that we had leisure and a

A Leisurely Approach

reasonable hope for the fulfillment of plans—well, we had cause for a contentment which was something deeper than happiness.

The best of it was that the close of the war found us with nothing to prevent our doing pretty much as we chose. We might have had houses or lands to anchor us, or promising careers to drag us back into the bewilderingments of modern civilization; but, fortunately or unfortunately, there were none of these things. The chance of war had given us a freedom far beyond anyone's desert. We had some misgivings about accepting so splendid a gift, which the event sometimes proves to be the most doubtful of benefits. Viewed in the light of our longings, however, our capacity for it seemed incalculable, and so, by degrees, we allowed our minds to turn to an old allurements—the South Pacific. It became irresistible the more we talked of it, longing as we then were for the solitude of islands. The objection to this choice was that the groups of islands which we meant to visit have been endowed with an atmosphere of pseudoromance displeasing to the fastidious mind.

But there was not the slightest chance of our being pioneers wherever we might go. We could not hope to see with the eyes of the old explorers who first came upon those far-off places. We must expect great changes. But much as we might regret for the purposes of this adventure that we had not been born two hundred years earlier, comfort was not wanting to our situation. Had we been contemporaries and fellow-explorers with De Quiros, or Cook, or Bougainville we should have missed the Great War.

We came within view of Tahiti one windless February

Faery Lands of the South Seas

morning—such a view as Pedro Fernandez de Quiros himself must have had more than three hundred years before. The sky to the west was still bright with stars and but barely touched with the very ghost of light, giving it the appearance of a great water, with a few clouds, like islands, immeasurably distant. Half an hour later the islands themselves lay in full sunlight, jagged peaks falling away in steep ridges to the sea. Against sheer walls still in shadow in upland valleys one could see a few terns; but there was no other movement, no sound, nor any sign of a human habitation—nothing to shatter the illusion of primitive loveliness.

It was illusion, of course, but the reality was nothing like so disappointing as I had feared it would be. Outwardly, two hundred years of progress have wrought no great amount of havoc. There is a little port, a busy place on boat days. But when the steamer has emptied the town of her passengers, the silence flows down again from the hills. Off the main harbor-front thoroughfare streets lie empty to the eye for half hours at a time. Chinese merchants sit at the doorways of their shops, waiting for trade. Now and then broad pools of sunlight flow over the gayly flowered dresses of a group of native women, scarcely to be seen otherwise as they move slowly through tunnels of moist green gloom; or a small schooner, like a detail gifted with sudden mobility in a picture, will back away from shore, cross the harbor, bright with the reflections of clouds, and stand out to sea. In the stillness of the noon siesta one hears at infrequent intervals the resounding thud of ripe fruits as they tear their way to the ground through barriers of foliage; and at night the melancholy thunder of the surf on the reef outside

A Leisurely Approach

the harbor, and the slithering of bare feet in the moonlit streets.

Coming from a populous exile, doubly attracted for that reason by the lure of unpeopled places, Nordhoff and I sought here an indication of what we might find later elsewhere. The few thousands of natives, whites, Orientals, half-castes, live in a charmed circle of low land fronting the sea, conscious of their mountains, no doubt, but the whites without curiosity, the Orientals without desire, the natives without remembrance. There must have been a maze of trails in the old days, leading down from the rich valleys. Now they are overgrown, untraveled, lost. Since the old life is no more than a memory, one is glad for the desolation, and grateful to the French lack of enterprise which surely is the only way to account for it.

No, we couldn't have chosen a better jumping-off place for our unpremeditated wanderings. We had the whole expanse of the Pacific before us, or, better, around us, and there was, as I have said, a harbor full of shipping. Boats with pleasing names, like the *Curieuse*, the *Avarua*, the *Potii Ravarava*, the *Kaeo*, the *Liane*—and self-confident, seagoing aspect. Some tidy and smart with new paint and rigging; others with decks warped and sides blistered, bottoms foul with the accumulation of a six months' cruise, reeking with the warm odor of copra. Boats newly arrived from remote islands, with crowds of bare-legged natives on their decks, their eyes beaming with pleasure in anticipation of the delights of the great capital; outward-bound to the Marquesas, the Australs, the Cooks, the Low Archipelago, despite the fact that it was the middle of the hurricane season. Among these latter there was

Faery Lands of the South Seas

one whose name was like a friendly hail from Gloucester, or Portland, Maine. But it was not this which attracted me to her, for all its assurance of Yankee hospitality. She was off to the Paumotus, the Cloud of Islands, and a longing to go there persisted in the face of a number of vague discouragements. There were no practical difficulties. Easy enough to get passage by one schooner or another. Paumotu copra is famous throughout the Southern Pacific. There is a good deal of competition for it, boats racing one another for cargo to the richer islands. The discouragements weren't so vague, either, now that I think of them. They came from men kindly disposed, interested in the islands in their own way. But their concerns were purely commercial. I heard a deal of talk about copra—in kilos, in tons, in shiploads; its market value in Papeete, in San Francisco, in Marseilles, until the stately trees which gave it lost for a time their old significance. Talk, too, of coconut oil and its richness in butter-fat. Butter-fat! There was a word to bring one back to a workaday world. To meet it at the outset of a long-dreamed-of journey was disheartening. It followed me with the shrill insistence of a creamery whistle, and I came very near giving up my plans altogether. Nordhoff did change his. He said that it was silly, no doubt, but he didn't like the idea of wandering, however lonely, in a cloud of butter-fat islands. Therefore we said good-by, having arranged for a rendezvous at a distant date, and set out on diverging paths.

I ought to leave Crichton, the English planter, out of this story altogether. He doesn't belong in a commonplace record of travel such as this one set out

A Leisurely Approach

to be. He had very little to do with the voyage of the *Caleb S. Winship* among the atolls. But when I think of that vessel he comes inevitably into mind. I see him sitting on the cabin deck with his freckled brown hands clasped about his knees, looking across a solitude of waters; and in my mental concept of the Low Archipelago he is always somewhere in the background, standing on the sun-stricken reef of a tiny atoll, his back to the sea, almost as much a part of the lonely picture as the sea itself.

But one can't be wholly matter of fact in writing of these islands. They are not real in the ordinary sense, but belong, rather, to the realm of the imagination. And it is only in the imagination that you can conceive of your ever having been there, once you are back again in a well-plowed sea track. As for the people, whether native or alien, in order to focus them in a world of reality it is necessary to remember what they said or did; what they ate; what sort of clothing they wore. Otherwise they elude you just as the islands do.

This point of view isn't, perhaps, commonly held among the few white men who know them—captains of small schooners, managers of trading companies, resident agents, whose interest, as I have said, is in what they produce rather than in what they are. As one old skipper of my acquaintance put it, in speaking of the atolls, "Take them by and large, they are as much alike as the reef-points on that sail." Findlay's *South Pacific Directory*, a supposedly competent authority, bears him out in this: "They are all of similar character," adding, for emphasis, no doubt, "and they exhibit very great sameness in their features." He does,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

however, make certain slight concessions to what may be his own private conception of their peculiar fascination, "This vast collection of coral islands; one of the wonders of the Pacific," and later, in his account of them, "The native name, 'Paumotu,' signifies a Cloud of Islands, an expressive term." But he doesn't forget that he is writing for practical-minded mariners who want facts and not fancies, however truthful these may be to reality.

"Now, there's Tikehau," one of them said to me before I had been out there. "That's a round atoll; and Rahiroa is sort o' square like, an' so on. Some with passes and a good anchorage inside the lagoon. Others you got to lay outside an' take your cargo off the reef in a small boat."

But, to go back to Crichton, no one knew who he was or where he came from. The manager of the Inter-Island Trading Company had lived in Papeete for years and had never seen him until the day when he turned up at the water front trundling a wheelbarrow loaded with four crates of chickens and an odd lot of plantation tools and fishing tackle. Following him were two native boys carrying a weather-blackened sea chest, and an old woman with an enormous roll of bedding tied loosely in a pandanus mat. That was about an hour before the schooner weighed anchor. He stacked his gear neatly on the beach and then went on board, asking for passage to Tanao.

"No, sir," the manager said, in telling about it afterward, "I never laid eyes on him until that moment, and I don't know anyone who had. Where's he been hiding himself? And why in the name of common sense does he want to go to Tanao? There's no copra or

A Leisurely Approach

pearl shell there—not enough, anyway, to make it worth a man's while going after it.”

Tino, the supercargo, was equally puzzled.

“I know Tanao from the sea,” he said. “Passed it once coming down from the Marquesas when I was supercargo of the *Tiare Tahiti*. We were blown out of our course by a young hurricane. Didn't land. There's no one on the God-forsaken place. Now here's this Englishman, or Dane, or Norwegian—whatever he is—asking to be set down there with four crates of chickens and an old Kanaka woman for company!” He shook his head with a give-it-up expression, adding a moment later: “Well, you meet some queer people down in this part of the world. I don't believe in asking them their business, but it beats me sometimes, trying to figure out what their business is.”

He was not able to figure it out in this case. The old woman was talkative; but the information he gathered from her only stimulated his curiosity the more. She owned Tanao, an atom of an atoll miles out of the beaten track even of the Paumotu schooners. There had never been more than a score of people living on it, she said, and now there was no one. Crichton had taken a long lease on it, and was going out there—as he told me afterward—“to do my writing and thinking undisturbed.”

I didn't know this until later, however. When I first heard him spoken of we were only a few hours out from Papeete. We had left the harbor with a light breeze, but at four in the afternoon the schooner was lying about fifteen miles offshore, lazy jacks flapping against idle sails with a mellow, crusty sound. After a good deal of fretting at the fickleness of land

Faery Lands of the South Seas

breezes, talk had turned to Crichton, who was up forward somewhere looking after his chickens. I didn't pay much attention then to what was being said, for I had just had one of those moments which come rarely enough in a lifetime, but which make up for all the arid stretches of experience. They give no forewarning. There comes a flood of happiness which brings tears to the eyes, the sense of it is so keen. The sad part of it is that one refuses to accept it as a moment. You say, "By Jove! I'm not going to let this pass!" and it has gone as unaccountably as it came, half lost through foreboding of its end. One prepares for it unknowingly, I suppose, through months, sometimes years, of longing for something remote and beautiful—such as these islands, for example. And when you have your islands, the moment comes, sooner or later, and you see them in the light which never was, as the saying goes, but which is the light of truth for all that. Brief as it is, no one can say that the reward isn't ample. And it leaves an afterglow in the memory, tempering regret, fading very slowly; which one never wholly loses since it takes on the color of memory itself, becoming a part of that dim world of worth-while illusions.

All of which has very little to do with what was passing aboard the *Caleb S. Winship*, except that I was prevented from taking an immediate interest in my fellow passengers; but this being my first near view of a Polynesian trading schooner, the scene on deck had all the charm of the unusual. Our skipper was a Paumotuan, a former pearl diver, and the sailors—six of them, including the mate—Tahitian boys. In addition to these there were Crichton, the

A Leisurely Approach

planter; the supercargo, master of three major languages and half a dozen Polynesian dialects; the manager of the Inter-Island Trading Company; William, the engineer; Oro, the cabin boy; a Chinese cook and two Chinese storekeepers—evidence of the leisurely, persistent Oriental invasion of French Polynesia; thirty native passengers; a horse in an improvised stall amidships; a monkey perched in the mainmast rigging; Crichton's four crates of chickens, and five pigs. In addition to the passengers and live stock, we were carrying out a cargo of lumber, corrugated iron, flour, rice, sugar, canned goods, clothing, and dry goods. Each of the native passengers brought with him as much dunnage as an Englishman carries when he goes traveling, and his food for the voyage—limes, oranges, bananas, breadfruit, mangoes, canned meat. With all of this, a two months' supply of gasoline for the engines, and fresh water and green coconuts for both passengers and crew, we made a snug fit. Even the space under the patient little native horse was used to stow his fodder for the long journey.

The women, with one exception, were barefooted, bareheaded, but otherwise conventionally dressed according to European or American standards. This, I suppose, is an outrageous betrayal of a trade secret, if one may say that writers of South Sea narratives belong to a trade. Those seriously interested in the islands have, of course, known the truth about them for years; but I believe it is still a popular misconception that the women who inhabit them—no one seems to be interested in the men—are even to this day half-savage, unself-conscious creatures who display

Faery Lands of the South Seas

their charms to the general gaze with naïve indifference. Half-savage they may still be, but not unself-conscious in the old sense. There are a few, to be sure, who, by means of the bribes or the entreaties of itinerant journalists and photographers, may be persuaded to disrobe before the camera for a moment's space; and in this way the primitive legend is preserved to the outside world. But, as I told Nordhoff, although we are itinerant, we may as well be occasionally truthful and so gain, perhaps, a certain amount of begrudged credit.

The one exception was a girl of about nineteen. She came on board balancing unsteadily on high French heels, her brown legs darkening the sheen of her white-cotton stockings. I had seen her the day before as she passed below the veranda of Le Cercle Bougainville, the everyman's club of the port. She walked with the same air of precarious balance, and her broad-brimmed straw hat was set at the jaunty angle American women affect.

"*Voilà! L'indigène d'aujourd'hui,*" my French companion said. Then, breaking into English: "The old Polynesia is dead. Yes, one may say that it is quite, quite dead." A memory he called it. "*Maintenant je vous assure, monsieur, ce n'est rien que ça.*" He rang changes on the word, in a soft voice, with an air of enforced liveliness.

I was rather saddened at the time, picturing in my mind the scene on the shore of that bright lagoon two hundred years ago, before any of these people had been forced to accept the blessings of an alien civilization. But the girl with the French heels wasn't a good illustration of *l'indigène d'aujourd'hui*, even in the

A Leisurely Approach

matter of surface changes. Most of the women dress much more simply and sensibly, and it was amusing as well as comforting to see how quickly she got rid of her unaccustomed clothing once we had left the harbor. She disappeared behind a row of water casks and came out a moment later in a dress of bright-red material, barefooted and bareheaded like the rest of them. She had a single hibiscus flower in her hair, which hung in a loose braid. I don't believe she had ever worn shoes before. At any rate, as she sat on a box, husking a coconut with her teeth, I could see her ankle calluses glinting in the sun like disks of polished metal.

There was another girl sitting on the deck not far from me, with an illustrated supplement of an American paper spread out before her. It was an ancient copy. There were pictures of battlefields in France; of soldiers marching down Fifth Avenue; a tennis tournament at Longwood; aeroplanes in flight; motor races at Indianapolis; actresses, society women, dressmakers' models making a display of corsets and other women's equipment—pictures out of the welter of modern life. The little Paumotuan girl appeared to be deeply interested. With her chin resting on her hands and her elbows braced against her knees, she went from picture to picture, but looked longest at those of the women who smiled or posed self-consciously, or looked disdainfully at her from the pages. I would have given a good deal to know what, if anything, was passing in her mind. All at once she gave a little sigh, crumpled the paper into a ball, and threw it at the monkey, who caught it and began tearing it in pieces. She laughed and clapped her hands at this, called the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

attention of the others, and in a moment men, women, and children had gathered round, laughing and shouting, throwing bits of coconut shell, mango seeds, banana skins, faster than the monkey could catch them.

The spontaneity of the merriment did one's heart good. Even the old men and women laughed, not in the indulgent manner of parents or grandparents, but as heartily as the children themselves. Unconscious of the uproar, one of the Chinese merchants was lying on a thin mattress against the cabin skylight. Although he was sound asleep, his teeth were bare in a grin of ghastly suavity, and his left eye was partly open, giving him an air of constant watchfulness. He was dreaming, I suppose, of copra, of pearl shell—in kilos, tons, shiploads; of its market value in Papeete, in San Francisco, in Marseilles, etc. Well, the whites get their share of these commodities and the Chinamen theirs; but the natives have a commodity of laughter which is vastly more precious, and as long as they do have it one need not feel very sorry for them.

Dusk gathered rapidly while I was thinking of these things. Heavy clouds hung over Tahiti and Moorea, clinging about the shoulders of the mountains whose peaks, rising above them, were still faintly visible against the somber glory of the sky. They seemed islands of sheer fancy, looked at from the sea. It would have been worth all that one could give to have seen them then as De Quiros saw them, or Cook, or the early missionaries; to have added to one's own sense of their majesty, the solemn and more childlike awe of the old explorers, born of their feeling of utter isolation from their kind with the presence of the unknown on every hand. It is this feeling of awe,

A Leisurely Approach

rarely to be known by travelers in these modern days, which pervades many of the old tales of wanderings in remote places; which one senses in looking at old sketches made from the decks of ships, of the shores of heathen lands.

The wind freshened, then came a deluge of cool water, blotting out the rugged outlines against the sky. When it had passed it was deep night. The forward deck was a huddle of shelters made of mats and bits of canvas, but these were being taken down now that the rain had stopped. I saw an old woman sitting near the companionway, her head in clear relief against a shaft of yellow light. She was wet through and the mild misfortune broke the ice between us, if one may use a metaphor very inapt for the tropics. With her face half in shadow she reminded me of the typical, Anglo-Saxon grandmother, although no grandmother of my acquaintance would have sat unperturbed through that squall and indifferent to her wet clothing afterward. She didn't appear to mind it in the least, and now that it was over fished a paper of tobacco and a strip of pandanus leaf out of the bundle on which she was sitting. She rolled a pinch of tobacco in the leaf, twisting it into a tight corkscrew, and lit it at the first attempt. Then she began talking in a deep, resonant voice, and by a simplicity and an extraordinary lucidity of gesture conveyed the greater part of her meaning even to an alien like myself. It was not, alas! a typical accomplishment. I have not since found others similarly gifted.

She was Crichton's landlady, the owner of Tanao. "Pupure" she called him, because of his fair hair. I couldn't make out what she was driving at for a

Faery Lands of the South Seas

little while. I understood at last that she wanted to know about his family—where his father was, and his mother. I suppose she thought I must know him, being a white man. They have queer ideas of the size of our world. He was young. He must have people somewhere. She, too, couldn't understand his wanting to go to Tanao; and I gathered from her perplexity that he hadn't confided his purposes to her to any extent. I couldn't enlighten her, of course, and at length, realizing this, she wrapped herself in her mat to preserve the damp warmth of her body, and dozed off to sleep.

I went below for a blanket and some dry clothing, for the night air was uncomfortably cool after the rain. The cabin floor was strewn with sleeping forms. Three children were curled up in a corner like puppies in a box of sawdust. Little brown babies lay snugly bedded on bundles of clothing, the mothers themselves sleeping in the careless, trustful attitudes of children. The light from a swinging lamp threw leaping shadows on the walls; flowed smoothly over brown arms and legs; was caught in faint gleams in masses of loose black hair. And to complete the picture and make it wholly true to fact, cockroaches of the enormous winged variety ran with incredible speed over the oilcloth of the cabin table, or made sudden flying sallies out of dark corners to the food lockers and back again.

On deck no one was awake except Maui at the wheel. There was very little unoccupied space, but I found a strip against the engine-room ventilator where I could stretch out at full length. By that time the moon was up and it was almost as light as day. I was not at all sleepy, and my thoughts went forward

A Leisurely Approach

to the Paumotus, the Cloud of Islands. We ought to be making our first landfall within thirty-six hours. I didn't go beyond that in anticipation, although in the mind's eye I had seen them for months, first one island and then another. I had pictured them at dawn, rising out of the sea against a far horizon; or at night, under the wan light of stars, lonely beyond one's happiest dreams of isolation; unspoiled, unchanged, because of their very remoteness. Well, I was soon to know whether or not they fulfilled my hopeful expectations.

Some one came aft, walking along the rail in his bare feet. It was Oro, the cabin boy, who is taken with an enviable kind of madness at the full of the moon. He looked carefully around to make sure that everyone was asleep, then stood clasping and unclasping his hands in ecstasy, carrying on a one-sided conversation in a confidential undertone. Now and then he would smile and straightway become serious again, gazing with rapt, listening attention at the world of pure light; nodding his head at intervals in vigorous confirmation of some occult confidence. At length his figure receded, blurred, took on the quality of the moonlight, and I saw him no more.



CHAPTER II

In the Cloud of Islands



RUAU, the old Paumotuan woman, and the owner of Tanao, was the last of her family. There were relatives by marriage, but none of them would consent to live on so poor an atoll; and the original population, never large, had diminished, through death and migration, until at last she was left alone, living in her memories of other days, awed by the companionship of spirits present to her in strange and terrible shapes. At last she felt that she could endure it no longer; but it was many months before the smoke of one of her signal fires was seen by a passing schooner. She returned with it to Tahiti, and if she had been lonely before, she was tenfold lonelier there, so far from the graves of her husband and children. It was at this time that Crichton met her. He had been living at Tahiti for more than a year, on the lookout for just such an opportunity as Ruau offered him. Although only twenty-eight, he was in the tenth year of his wanderings, and had almost despaired of finding the place he had so long dreamed of and searched for. During that period he had been moving slowly eastward, through Borneo, New Guinea, the Solomons, the New Hebrides, the Tongas, the Cook

In the Cloud of Islands

Group. In some of these islands the climate was too powerful an enemy for a white man to contend with; in others there was no land available, or they lacked the solitude he wanted. This latter embarrassment was the one he had met at Tahiti. The fact is an illuminating commentary on his character. Most men would find exceptional opportunities for seclusion there; not on the seaboard but in the mountains; in the valleys winding deeply among them, where no one goes from year's end to year's end. Even those leading out to the sea are but little frequented in their upward reaches. But Crichton was very exacting in his requirements in this respect. He was one of those men who make few or no friends—one of those lonely spirits without the ties or the kindly human associations which make life pleasant to most of us. They wander the thinly peopled places of the earth, interested in a large way at what they see from afar or faintly hear, but looking on with quiet eyes; taking no part, being blessed or cursed by nature with a love of silence, of the unchanging peace of great solitudes. One reads of them now and then in fiction, and if they live in fiction it is because of men like Crichton, their prototypes in reality, seen for a moment as they slip apprehensively across some by-path leading from the outside world.

He had a little place at Tahiti, a walk of two hours and a quarter, he said, from the government offices in the port. He had to go there sometimes to attend to the usual formalities, and I have no doubt that he knew within ten seconds the length of the journey which would be a very distasteful one to him. I can imagine his uneasiness at what he saw and heard on

Faery Lands of the South Seas

those infrequent visits. An after-the-war renewal of activity, talk of trade, development, progress, would startle him into a waiting, listening attitude. Returning home, maps and charts would be got out and plans made against the day when it would be necessary for him to move on. He told me of his accidental meeting with Ruau, as he called the old Paumotuan woman. It came only a few days after the arrival from San Francisco of one of the monthly steamers. A crowd of tourists—stop-over passengers of a day—had somehow discovered the dim trail leading to his house. “They were much pleased with it,” he said, adding, with restraint: “They took a good many pictures. I was rather annoyed at this, although, of course, I said nothing.” No doubt they made the usual remarks: “Charming! So quaint!” etc.

It was the last straw for Crichton. So he made another visit to the government offices where he had his passport viséed. He meant to go to Maketea, a high phosphate island which stands like a gateway at the northwestern approach to the Low Archipelago. The phosphate would be worked out in time and the place abandoned, as other islands of that nature had been, to the seabirds. But on that same evening, while he was having dinner at a Chinaman’s shop in town, he overheard Ruau trying to persuade some of her relatives to return with her to Tanao. He knew of the island. He is one of the few men who would know of it. He had often looked at it on his charts, being attracted by its isolated position. The very place for him! And the old woman, he said, when she learned that he wanted to go there, that he wanted to stay always—all his life—gripped his hands in both of hers

In the Cloud of Islands

and held them, crying softly, without saying anything more. The relatives made some objections to the arrangement at first. But the island being remote, poverty-stricken, haunted, they were soon persuaded to consent to a ten years' lease, with the option of renewal. Crichton promised, of course, to take care of Ruau as long as she lived, and at her death to bury her decently beside her husband.

He proceeded at once with his altered plans. There were government regulations to be complied with and these had taken some time. On the day when he was at last free to start he learned that the *Caleb S. Winship* was about to sail on a three months' voyage in the Low Archipelago. He had no time to ask for passage beforehand. He had to chance the possibility of getting it at the last moment. It is not to be supposed that either the manager of the Inter-Island Trading Company or the supercargo of the *Winship* would have consented to carry him to such an out-of-the-way destination had they known his reason for wanting to be set down there. It amuses me now to think of those two hard-headed traders, men without a trace of sentiment, going one hundred and fifty miles off their course merely to carry the least gregarious of wanderers on the last leg of his long journey to an ideal solitude. It was their curiosity which gained him his end. They believed he had some secret purpose, some reason of purely material self-interest in view. They had both seen Tanao from a distance and knew that it had never been worth visiting either for pearl shell or copra. It is hard to understand what miracle they believed might have taken place in the meantime. During the voyage I often heard them

Faery Lands of the South Seas

talking about the atoll, about Crichton—wondering, conjecturing, and always miles off the track. It was plain that he was a good deal disturbed by their hints and furtive questionings. He seemed to be afraid that mere talk about Tanao on the part of an outsider might sully the purity of its loneliness. He may have been a little selfish in his attitude, but if that is a fault in a man of his temperament it is one easily forgiven. And what could he have said to those traders? It was much better to keep silent and let them believe what they liked.

It must not be thought that Crichton poured out his confidences to me like a schoolgirl. On the contrary, he had a very likable reserve, although a good half of it, I should say, was shyness. Then, too, he had almost forgotten how to talk except in the native dialects of several groups of widely scattered islands. In English he had a tendency to prolong his vowels and to omit consonants, which gave his speech a peculiar exotic sound. He made no advances for some time. Neither did I. For more than three weeks we lived together on shipboard, went ashore together at islands where we had put in for copra, and all that while we did not exchange above two hundred words in conversation. There was so little talk that I can remember the whole of it, almost word for word. Once while we were walking on the outer beach at Raraka, an atoll of thirty-five inhabitants, he said to me:

“I wish I had come out here years ago. They appeal to the imagination, don't you think, all these islands?”

His volubility startled me. It was a shock to the senses, like the crash of a coconut on a tin roof heard

In the Cloud of Islands

in the profound stillness of an island night. There was my opportunity to throw off reserve and I lost it through my surprise. I merely said, "Yes, very much." An hour later we saw the captain, no larger than a penny doll, at the end of a long vista of empty beach, beckoning us to come back. We went aboard without having spoken again. It was an odd sort of relationship for two white men thrown into close contact on a small trading schooner in the loneliest ocean in the world, as Nordhoff put it. We were no more companionable in the ordinary sense than a pair of hermit crabs.

But the need for talking drops away from men under such circumstances and neither of us found the long silences embarrassing. The spell of the islands was upon us both. I can understand Crichton's speaking of their appeal to the imagination while we were in the midst of them; for our presence there seemed an illusion—a dream more radiant than any reality could be. In fact, my only hold upon reality during that voyage was the *Caleb S. Winship*, and sometimes even that substantial old vessel suffered sea changes; was metamorphosed in a moment; and it was hard to believe that she was a boat built by men's hands. Often as she lay at anchor in a lagoon of dreamlike beauty I paddled out from shore in a small canoe, and, making fast under her stern, spent an afternoon watching the upward play of the reflections from the water and the blue shadows underneath, rippling out and vanishing in the light like flames of fire. For me her homely, rugged New England name was a pleasant link with the past. I liked to read the print of it. The word "Boston," her old home port, was still faintly legible

Faery Lands of the South Seas

through a coat of white paint. It brought to mind old memories and the faces of old friends, hard to visualize in those surroundings without such practical help. Far below lay the floor of the lagoon where all the rainbows of the world have authentic end. The water was so clear, and the sunlight streamed through it with so little loss in brightness that one seemed to be suspended in mid-air above the forests of branching coral, the deep, cool valleys, and the wide, sandy plains of that strange continent.

Crichton, I believe, was beyond the desire to keep in touch with the world he had left so many years before. His experiences there may have been bitter ones. At any rate, he never spoke of them, and I doubt if he thought of them often. People had little interest for him, not even those of the atolls which we visited. When on shore I usually found him on the outer beaches, away from the villages which lie along the lagoon. In most of the atolls the distance from beach to beach is only a few hundred yards, but the ocean side is unfrequented and solitary. On calm days when the tide begins to ebb the silence there is unearthly. The wide shore, hot and glaring in the sun, stretches away as far as the eye can reach, empty of life except for thousands of small hermit crabs moving into the shade of the palms. They snap into their shells at your approach and make fast the door as their houses fall, with a sound like the tinkling of hailstones, among heaps of broken coral. We waded along the shallows at low tide. When the wind was onshore and a heavy surf breaking over the outer edge of the reef, we sat as close to it as we could, watching the seas gathering far out, rising in sheer walls fringed with

In the Cloud of Islands

wind-whipped spray, which seemed higher than the island itself as they approached. It was a fascinating sight—the reef hidden in many places in a perpetual smoke of sunlight-filtered mist, through which the oncoming breakers could be seen dimly as they swept forward, curled, and fell. But one could not avoid a feeling of uneasiness, of insecurity, thinking of what had happened in those islands—most of them only a meter or two above sea level—in the hurricanes of the past; and of what would happen again at the coming of the next great storm.

We made landfalls at dawn, in midafternoon, late at night—saw the islands in aspects of beauty exceeding one's strangest imaginings. We penetrated farther and farther into a thousand-mile area of atoll-dotted ocean, discharging our cargo of lumber and corrugated iron, rice and flour and canned goods; taking on copra; carrying native passengers from one place to another. Sometimes we were out of sight of land for several days, beating into head winds under a slowly moving pageantry of clouds which alone gave assurance of the rotundity of the earth. When at last land appeared it seemed inaccessibly remote, at the summit of a long slope of water which we would never be able to climb. Sometimes for as long a period we skirted the shore line of a single atoll, the water deepening and shoaling under our keel in splotches of vague or vivid coloring. From a vantage point in the rigging one could see a segment of a vast circle of islands strung at haphazard on a thread of reef which showed a thin, clear line of changing red and white under the incessant battering of the surf. Several times upon going ashore we found the villages deserted, the inhabitants having

Faery Lands of the South Seas

gone to distant parts of the atoll for the copra-making season. In one village we came upon an old man too feeble to go with the others, apparently, sitting in the shade playing a phonograph. He had but three records: "Away to the Forest," "The Dance of the Nymphs Schottische," and "Just a Song at Twilight." The disks were as old as the instrument itself, no doubt, and the needles so badly worn that one could barely hear the music above the rasping of the mechanism. There was a groove on the vocal record where the needle caught, and the singer, a woman with a high, quavery voice, repeated the same phrase, "when the lights are low," over and over again. I can still hear it, even at this distance of time and place, and recall vividly to mind the silent houses, the wide, vacant street bright with fugitive sunshine, the lagoon at the end of it mottled with the shadows of clouds.

The sense of our remoteness grew upon me as the weeks and months passed. Once, rounding a point of land, we came upon two schooners lying inside the reef of a small atoll. One of them had left Papeete only a short while before. Her skipper gave us a bundle of old newspapers. Glancing through them that evening, I heard as in a dream the far-off clamor of the outside world—the shrieking of whistles, the roar of trains, the strident warnings of motors; but there was no reality, no allurements in the sound. I saw men carrying trivial burdens with an air of immense effort, of grotesque self-importance; scurrying in breathless haste on useless errands; gorging food without relish; sleeping without refreshment; taking their leisure without enjoyment; living without the knowledge of content; dying without ever having lived. The

In the Cloud of Islands

pictures which came to mind as I read were distorted, untrue, no doubt; for by that time I was almost as much attracted by the lonely life of the islands as my friend Crichton. My old feeling of restlessness was gone. In its place had come a certitude of happiness, a sense of well-being for which I can find no parallel this side of boyhood.

It was largely the result of living among people who are as permanently happy, I believe, as it is possible for humankind to be. And the more remote the island, the more slender the thread of communication with civilization as we know it, the happier they were. It was not in my imagination that I found this true, or that I had determined beforehand to see only so much of their life as might be agreeable and pleasant to me. On the contrary, if I had any bias at first, it was on the other side. Disillusionment is a sad experience and I had no desire to lay myself open to it. Therefore I listened willingly to the less favorable stories of native character which the traders, and others who know them, had to tell. But summed up dispassionately later, in the light of my own observations, it seemed to me that the faults of character of which they were accused were more like the natural shortcomings of children. In many respects the Paumotuans, like other divisions of the Polynesian family, are children who have never grown up, and one can't blame them for a lack of the artificial virtues which come only with maturity. They are without guile. They have little of the shrewdness or craftiness of some primitive peoples. At least so it appeared to me, making as careful a judgment of them as I could. I have often noticed how like children they are in their

Faery Lands of the South Seas

amazing trustfulness, their impulsive generosity, and in the intensity and briefness of their emotions.

The more I saw of their life, the more desirable it seemed that they might continue to escape any serious encroachments of European or American civilization. They have no doctors, because illness is almost unknown in their islands. Crime, insanity, feeble-mindedness, evils all too common with us, are of such rare occurrence that one may say they do not exist. It may be said, too, without overstatement, that their community life very nearly approaches perfection. Every atoll is a little world to itself with a population varying from twenty-five to perhaps three hundred inhabitants. The chief, who is chosen informally by the men, serves for a period of four years under the sanction of the French government. He has very little to do in the exercise of his authority, for the people govern themselves, are law-abiding without law.

When I first learned that there are no schools throughout the islands I thought the French guilty of criminal neglect, but later I reversed this opinion. After all, why should they have schools? No education of ours could make them more generous more kindly disposed to one another, more hospitable and courteous toward strangers, happier than they are now. Certainly it could not make them less selfish, covetous, rapacious, for most of them are as innocent of those vices as their own children. In a few of the richer, more accessible islands they are slowly changing in these respects, owing to the example set them by men of our own race. In another fifty years, perhaps, they may have learned to believe that material wealth is the only thing worth striving for. Then will come

In the Cloud of Islands

pride in their possessions, envy of those who have greater, contempt and suspicion for those who have less, and so an end to their happiness.

I had never before seen children growing up in a state of nature and I made full use of the rare opportunity. I spent most of my time with them; played on shore with them; went fishing and swimming with them; and found in the experience something better than a renewal of boyhood because of a keener sense of beauty, a more conscious, mature appreciation of the happiness one has in the simplest kinds of pleasures. Sometimes we started on our excursions at dawn; sometimes we made them by moonlight. I became a collector of shells in order to give some purpose to our expeditions along the reef. I couldn't have chosen a better interest, for they knew all about shells, where and when to find the best ones, and they could indulge their love of giving to a limitless extent. In the afternoons we went swimming in the lagoon. There I saw them at their best and happiest, in an element as necessary and familiar to them as it is to their parents. It is always a pleasure to watch children at play in the water, but those Paumotuan youngsters with their natural grace at swimming and diving put one under an enchantment. Many of the boys had water glasses and small spears of their own and went far from shore, catching fish. They lay face down on the surface of the water, swimming easily, with a great economy of motion, turning their heads now and then for a breath of air; and when they saw their prey they dived after it as skillfully as their fathers do and with nearly as much success. Seen against the bright floor of the lagoon, with swarms of brilliantly colored fish scattering

Faery Lands of the South Seas

before them, they seemed doubtfully human, the children of some forsaken merman rather than creatures who have need of air to breathe and solid earth to stand on. If education is the suitable preparation for life, the children of the atolls have it at its best and happiest without knowing that it is education. They are skillful in the pursuits and learned in the interests which touch their lives, and one can wish them no better fortune than that they may remain in ignorance of those which do not.

Their parents, as I have said, are but children of mature stature, with the same gift of frank, generous laughter, the same delight in the new and strange. Very little is required to amuse them. I had a mandolin which I used to take ashore with me at various atolls, after I had become convinced that their enjoyment of my music was not feigned. At first I was suspicious, for I had no illusions about my virtuosity, and even when I thought of it in the most flattering way their pleasure seemed out of all proportion to the quality of the performance. But there was no doubting the genuineness of it. The whole village would assemble to hear me play. I had a limited repertoire, but that seemed to matter very little. They liked to hear the same tunes played over and over again. I learned some of the old missionary hymns which they knew: "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," "Oh, Happy Day," "We're Marching to Zion," and others.

It was strange to find those songs, belonging, fortunately, to a bygone period in English and American life, living still in that remote part of the world, not because of anything universal in their appeal, but merely because they had been carried there years ago

In the Cloud of Islands

by representatives of the missionary societies. Many eccentric changes had been made in both the rhythm and melody, greatly to the improvement of both, but no amount of changing could make them other than what they are—the uncouth expression of a narrow and ugly kind of religious sentiment. I don't think the Paumotuans care much for them, either. They always seemed glad to turn from them to their own songs, which have nothing either of modern or old-time missionary feeling. A woman usually began the singing, in a high-pitched, nasal, or throaty voice, which she modulated in an extraordinary way. Immediately other women joined in, then several men whose voices were of tenor quality, followed by other men in basses and barytones, chanting in two or three tones which, for rhythm and tone quality, were like the beating of kettledrums. The weird blending of harmonies was unlike anything I had ever heard before. There is nothing in our music which even remotely resembles theirs, so that it is impossible to describe the effect of the full chorus. Some of the songs make a strong appeal to savage instincts. The less resolute of the early missionaries, hearing them, must have thrown up their hands in despair at the thought of the long, difficult task of conversion awaiting them. But if there were any irresolute missionaries, they were evidently overruled by their sterner brothers and sisters.

On nearly every island there is now a church, either Protestant or Catholic. In the Protestant ones the native population practice the only true faith, largely to the accompaniment of this old barbaric music. Those unsightly little structures rock to the sound

Faery Lands of the South Seas

of exultant choruses which ought never to be sung withindoors. The Paumotuans themselves know best the natural setting for their songs—the lagoon beach with a great fire of coconut husks blazing in the center of the group of singers. I liked to hear them from a distance where I could get their full effect; to look on from the schooner lying a few hundred yards offshore. All the inhabitants of the village would be gathered within the circle of the firelight, which brought their figures and the white, straight stems of the coconut palms into clear relief against a background of deep shadow. The singing continued far into the night, so that I often fell asleep while listening, and heard the music dying away, mingling at last with the interminable booming of the surf.

By degrees we worked slowly through the heart of the archipelago, pursuing a general southeasterly course, the islands becoming more and more scattered, until we had before us an expanse of ocean almost unbroken to the coast of South America. But Tanao lay at the edge of it, and at length, on a lowering April day, we set out on that last leg of our outward journey. The *Caleb S. Winship* lay very low in the water. By that time she had a full cargo of copra, one hundred tons in the hold and twelve, sacked, on deck. A portion of the deck cargo was lost that same afternoon, during a gale of wind and rain which burst upon us with fury and followed us with a seeming malignity of intent. We ran before it, far out of our course, for three hours. To me the weight of air was something incredible, an unusually vigorous flourish of the departing hurricane season. Water spouted out of the scuppers in a continuous stream, and loose articles

In the Cloud of Islands

were swept clear of the ship, disappearing at once in a cloud of blinding rain. There was a fearful racket in the cabin of rolling biscuit tins and smashing crockery. Then an eight-hundred-pound safe broke loose and started to imitate Victor Hugo's cannon. Luckily it hadn't much scope and no smooth runway, so that it was soon brought to a halt by Ruau, the old Paumotuan woman, who was the only one below at the time. She made an effective barricade of copra sacks and bedding, dodging the plunging monster with an agility surprising in a woman of sixty. But what I remember best was Tané, a monkey belonging to one of the sailors, skidding along the cabin deck until he was blown against the engine-room whistle, which rose just clear of the forward end of it. He wrapped arms and legs around it in his terror, opening the valve in some way, and the shrill blast rose high above the mighty roar of wind, like the voice of man lifted with awe-inspiring impudence in defiance of the mindless anger of nature.

The storm blew itself out toward sundown and the night fell clear—a night for stars to make one wary of thought; but the moon rose about nine, softening the pitiless distances, throwing a veil of mild light across the black voids in the Milky Way, seen so clearly in those latitudes. The schooner was riding a heavy swell, and, burdened as she was, rose clumsily to it, sticking her nose into the slope of every sea. Ruau was at her accustomed place against the cabin ventilator, unmindful of the showers of spray, maintaining her position on the slanting deck with the skill of three months' practice. The thought that I must soon bid her good-by saddened me, for I knew there was

Faery Lands of the South Seas

small chance that I should ever meet her again. I envied Crichton his opportunity for friendship with that noble old woman, so proud of her race, so true to her own beliefs, to her own way of living. Her type is none too common among Polynesians in these days. One gets all too frequently an impression of a consciousness of inferiority on their part, a sense of shame because of their simple way of living as compared with ours. Ruau was not guilty of it. She never could be, I think, under any circumstances. I learned afterward of an attempt which had been made to convert her to Christianity during her stay at Tahiti. Evidently she had not been at all convinced by the priest's arguments, and when he made some slighting remark about the ghosts and spirits which were so real to her, she refused to listen any longer. Frightened though she was of spirits, she was not willing that they should be ridiculed.

We sighted her atoll at dawn, such a dawn as one rarely sees outside the tropics. The sky was overcast at a great height with a film of luminous mist through which the sun shone wanly, throwing a sheen like a dust of gold on the sea. Masses of slate-colored cloud billowed out from the high canopy, overhanging a black fringe of land which lay just below the line of the horizon. The atoll was elliptical in shape, about eight miles long by five broad. There were seven widely separated islands on the circle of reef and one small *motu* in the lagoon. We came into the wind about a half mile offshore and put off in the whaleboat. The sea was still running fairly high, and the roar of the surf came across the water with a sound as soothing as the fall of spring rain; but it increased in volume

In the Cloud of Islands

as we drew in until the ears were stunned by the crash of tremendous combers which toppled and fell sheer, over the ledge of the reef. It was by far the most dangerous-looking landing place we had seen on the journey. There was no break in the reef; only a few narrow indentations where the surf spouted up in clouds of spray. Between the breaking of one sea and the gathering of the next, the water poured back over a jagged wall of rock bared for an instant to an appalling depth. Only a native crew could have managed that landing. We rode comber after comber, the sailors backing on their oars, awaiting the word of the boat steerer, who stood with his feet braced on the gunwales, his head turned over his shoulder, watching the following seas. All at once he began shouting at the top of his voice. I looked back in time to see a wall of water, on the point of breaking, rising high above us. It fell just after it passed under us, and we were carried forward across the edge of the reef, through the inner shallows to the beach.

The two traders started off at once on a tour of inspection and we saw nothing more of them until late in the evening. Meanwhile I went with Ruau and Crichton across the island to the lagoon beach where her house was. As in most of the atolls, the ground was nearly free from undergrowth, the soil affording nourishment only to the trees and a few hardy shrubs. Coconuts and dead fronds were scattered everywhere. A few half-wild pigs, feeding on the shoots of sprouted nuts, gazed up with an odd air of incredulity, of amazement as we approached, then galloped off at top speed and disappeared far in the distance. Ruau stopped when we were about halfway

Faery Lands of the South Seas

across and held up her hand for silence. A bird was singing somewhere, a melodious varied song like that of the hermit thrush. I had heard it before and had once seen the bird, a shy, solitary little thing, one of the few species of land birds found on the atolls.

While we were standing there, listening to the faint music, Crichton took me by the arm. He said nothing, and in a moment withdrew his hand. I was deeply moved by that manifestation of friendliness, an unusual one for him to make. He had some unaccountable defect in his character which kept him aloof from any relationship approaching real intimacy. I believe he was constantly aware of it, that he had made many futile attempts to overcome it. It may have been that which first set him on his wanderings, now happily at an end. It was plain to me the moment we set foot on shore that he would have to seek no farther for asylum. Tanao is one of the undoubted ends of the earth. No one would ever disturb him there. He himself was not so sure of this. Once, I remember, when we were looking at the place on the chart, he spoke of the island of Pitcairn, the old-time refuge of the Bounty mutineers. Before the opening of the Panama Canal it had been as far removed from contact with the outside world as an island could be. Now it lies not far off the route through the Canal to New Zealand and is visited from time to time by the crews of tramp steamers and schooners. Tanao, however, is much farther to the north, and there is very slight possibility that its empty horizons will ever be stained by a smudge of smoke. As for an actual visit, one glance at the reef through the binoculars would convince any skipper of the folly of the attempt.

In the Cloud of Islands

Even our own crew of natives, skilled at such hazardous work, came to grief in their second passage over it. They had gone out to the schooner for supplies Crichton had ordered—a few sacks of flour, some canned goods, and kerosene oil; in coming back the boat had been swept, broadside, against a ledge of rock. It stuck there, just at the edge of the reef, and the sailors jumped out with the line before the next wave came, capsizing the boat and carrying it inshore, bottom up. All the supplies were swept into deep water by the backwash and lost. There had been a similar accident at the other atoll—flour and rice brought so many thousands of miles having been spoiled within a few yards of their destination. I remember the natives plunging into the water at great risk to themselves to save a few sacks of soggy paste in the hope that a little of the flour in the center might still be dry; and a Chinese storekeeper, to whom it was consigned, standing on the shore, wringing his hands in dumb grief. It was the first time I had ever seen a Chinaman make any display of emotion, and the sight brought home to me a conception of the tragic nature of such accidents to the inhabitants of those distant islands.

Crichton took his own loss calmly, concealing whatever disappointment he may have felt. Ruau was not at all concerned about it, and, while we were making an examination of the house, went out on the lagoon in a canoe and caught more than enough fish for supper. Then we found that all of our matches had been spoiled by sea water, so we could make no fire. Judging by the way Crichton brightened up at his discovery, one would have thought the loss a piece of luck. He

Faery Lands of the South Seas

set to work at once to make an apparatus for kindling fire, but before it was finished Ruau had the fish cleaned and spread out on a coverlet of green leaves. We ate them raw, dipping them first into a sauce of coconut milk, and for dessert had a salad made of the heart of a tree. I don't remember ever having eaten with heartier appetite, but at the same time I couldn't imagine myself enjoying an unrelieved diet of coconuts and fish for a period of ten years—not for so long as a year, in fact. Crichton, however, was used to it, and Ruau had never known any other except during her three months' stay at Tahiti, where she had eaten strange hot food which had not agreed with her at all, she said.

Dusk came on as we sat over our meal. Ruau sat with her hands on her knees, leaning back against a tree, talking to Crichton. I understood nothing of what she was saying, but it was a pleasure merely to listen to the music of her voice. It was a little below the usual register of women's voices, strong and clear, but softer even than those of the Tahitians, and so flexible that I could follow every change in mood. She was telling Crichton of the *tupapaku* of her atoll which she dreaded most, although she knew that it was the spirit of one of her own sons. It appeared in the form of a dog with legs as long and thick as the stem of a full-grown coconut tree, and a body proportionally huge. It could have picked up her house as an ordinary dog would a basket. Once it had stepped lightly over it without offering to harm her in any way. Her last son had been drowned while fishing by moonlight on the reef outside the next island, which lay about two miles distant across the eastern end of

In the Cloud of Islands

the lagoon. She had seen the dog three times since his death, and always at the same phase of the moon. Twice she had come upon it lying at full length on the lagoon beach, its enormous head resting on its paws. She was so badly frightened, she said, that she fell to the ground, incapable of further movement; sick at heart, too, at the thought that the spirit of the bravest and strongest of all her sons must appear to her in that shape. It was clear that she was recognized, for each time the dog began beating its tail on the ground as soon as it saw her. Then it got up, yawned and stretched, took a long drink of salt water, and started at a lope up the beach. She could see it very plainly in the bright moonlight. Soon it broke into a run, going faster and faster, gathering tremendous speed by the time it reached the other end of the island. From there it made a flying spring, and she last saw it as it passed, high in air, across the face of the moon, its head outstretched, its legs doubled close under its body. She believed that it crossed the two-mile gap of water which separated the islands in one gigantic leap.

That is the whole of the story as Crichton translated it for me, although there must have been other details, for Ruau gave her account of it at great length. Her earnestness of manner was very convincing, and left no doubt in my mind of the realness to her of the apparition. As for myself, if I could have seen ghosts anywhere it would have been at Tanao. Late that night, walking alone on the lagoon beach, I found that I was keeping an uneasy watch behind me. The distant thunder of the surf sounded at times like a wild galloping on the hard sand, and the gentle slapping of

Faery Lands of the South Seas

little waves near by like the lapping tongue of the ghostly dog having its fill of sea water.

We left Tanao with a fair wind the following afternoon, having been delayed in getting away because of the damaged whaleboat, which had to be repaired on shore. Tino, the supercargo, insisted on pushing off at once, the moment the work was finished. Crichton and Ruau were on the other beach at the time, so that I had no opportunity to say good-by; but as we were getting under way I saw him emerge from the deep shadow and stand for a moment, his hand shading his eyes, looking out toward the schooner. I waved, but evidently he didn't see me, for there was no response. Then he turned, walked slowly up the beach, and disappeared among the trees. For three hours I watched the atoll dwindling and blurring until at sunset it was lost to view under the rim of the southern horizon. Looking back across that space of empty ocean, I imagined that I could still see it dropping farther and farther away, down the reverse slope of a smooth curve of water, as though it were vanishing for all time beyond the knowledge and the concern of men.

My first packet of letters from Nordhoff was brought by the skipper of the schooner *Alouette*. He had been carrying it about for many weeks, and had it in the first place from the supercargo of another vessel, met at Rurutu, in the Austral group. The envelope, tattered and weather-stained, spoke of its long journey in search of me.

Before separating at Papeete we had arranged for a rendezvous, but at that time we still possessed American

In the Cloud of Islands

ideas of punctuality and well-ordered travel. Now we know something of the casual movements of trading schooners and have learned to regard the timely arrival of a letter as an event touching on the miraculous—the keeping of a rendezvous, a possibility too remote for consideration. One hears curious tales, in this part of the world, of the outcome of such temporary leave-takings as ours was meant to be—husbands seeking their wives and wives their husbands; families scattered among these fragments of land and striving for many months to reunite.

I witnessed, not long ago, the sequel of one of these unsuccessful quests. A native from a distant group of islands set out for one of the atolls of the Low Archipelago, the home of his sweetheart. Arrangements for the marriage had been made long before, but letters had gone astray, and upon his arrival the young man found that the family of his prospective father-in-law had gone to another atoll for the diving season. With no means of following, he submitted to the inevitable, and married another girl. Months later, the woman of his first choice returned with her second choice of a husband; and the former lovers met, for the young man had not yet been able to return to his own island. Neither made any question of the other's decision—life is too short; and from the native point of view, it is foolish to spend it in wanderings which, at the last, may never fulfill their purpose.

Nevertheless, I shall make a search for Nordhoff—a leisurely search, with some expectation of finding him. Our islands, like those of Mr. Conrad's enchanted Heyst, are bounded by a circle two thousand or more miles across, and it is likely that neither of us

Faery Lands of the South Seas

will ever succeed in breaking through to the outside world—if, indeed, there is an outside world. I am beginning to doubt this, for the enchantment is at work. As for Nordhoff, his letters, which follow, may speak for themselves.

Eaters of the Lotos



CHAPTER III

Marooned on Mataora



THE sun was low when the *Faaité* steamed out through the pass and headed for the Cook group, six hundred miles west and south. Dark clouds hung over Raiatea—Rangi Atea of Maori tradition, the Land of the Bright Heavens—but the level sunlight still illuminated the hillsides of Tahaa, the lovely sister island, protected by the same great oval reef. Far off to the north, the peak of Bora Bora towered abruptly from the sea.

It was not yet the season of the Trades, and the northeast breeze which followed us brought a sweltering heat, intolerable anywhere but on deck. Worthington was sitting beside me—a lean man, darkly tanned, with very bright blue eyes. His feet were bare; he wore a singlet, trousers of white drill, and a Manihiki hat—beautifully plaited of bleached pandanus leaf—a hat not to be bought with money. The dinner gong sounded.

“I’m not going down,” he remarked; “too hot below. I had something to eat at Uturoa. How about you?”

I shook my head—it needed more than a normal appetite to drive one to the dining saloon. Banks of

Faery Lands of the South Seas

squall cloud, shading from gray to an unwholesome violet, were gathering along the horizon, and the air was so heavy that one inhaled it with an effort.

“This is the worst month of the hurricane season,” Worthington went on; “it was just such an evening as this, last year, that the waterspout nearly got us—the night we sighted Mataora. I was five months up there, you know—marooned when Johnson lost the old *Hatutu*.”

“I was pretty well done up last year, and when I heard that the *Hatutu* was at Avarua I decided to take a vacation and go for a six weeks’ cruise with Johnson. Ordinarily he would have been laid up in Papeete until after the equinox, but the company had sent for him to make a special trip to Penrhyn. We had a wretched passage north—a succession of squalls and broiling calms. The schooner was in bad shape, anyway: rotten sails, rigging falling to pieces, and six inches of grass on her bottom. On a hot day she had a bouquet all her own—the sun distilled from her a blend of cockroaches and mildewed copra that didn’t smell like a rose garden. On the thirtieth day the skipper told me we were two hundred miles from Penrhyn and so close to Mataora that we might sight the palm tops. I’d heard a lot about the place (it has an English name on the chart)—how isolated it was, what a pleasant crowd the natives were, and how it was the best place in the Pacific to see old-fashioned island life.

“We had been working to windward against a light, northerly breeze, but the wind began to drop at noon, and by three o’clock it was glassy calm. There was a wicked-looking mass of clouds moving toward us from

Marooned on Mataora

the west, but the glass was high and Johnson said we were in for nothing worse than a squall. As the clouds drew near I could see that they had a sort of purplish-black heart, broad at the top, pointed at the bottom, and dropping gradually toward the water. There was something queer about it; the mate was pointing, and Johnson's Kanakas were all standing up. Suddenly I heard a rushing sound, like a heavy squall passing through the bush; the point of the funnel had touched the sea three or four hundred yards away from us—a waterspout! There wasn't a breath of air, and the *Hatutu* had no engine. It was moving straight for us, so slowly that I could watch every detail of its formation. The boys slid our boat overboard; the mate sang out something about all hands being ready to leave the schooner.

“I've heard of waterspouts ever since I was a youngster, but I never expected to see one as close as we did that day. As the point of cloud dropped toward the sea it was ragged and ill defined; but when it touched the water and the noise began I saw its shape change and its outlines grow hard. It was now a thin column, four or five feet in diameter, rising a couple of hundred feet before it swelled in the form of a flat cone, to join the clouds above. Curiously enough, it was not perpendicular, but had a decided sagging curve. Nearer and nearer it came, until I could make out the great swirling hole at its base, and see the vitreous look of this column of solid water, revolving at amazing speed. It hadn't the misty edges of a waterfall. The outside was sharply defined as the walls of a tumbler. I wondered what would happen when it struck the *Hatutu*. The mate

Faery Lands of the South Seas

was shouting again, but just then the skipper pushed a rifle into my hands. 'Damned if I leave the old hooker,' he swore. 'Shoot into the thing—maybe we can break it up.' And, believe me or not, we did break it up.

"It didn't come down with a crash, as one might have expected. When we had pumped about twenty shots into it, and it was not more than fifty yards away, it began to dwindle. The column of water became smaller and drew itself out to nothing; the rushing noise ceased; the hole in the sea disappeared in a lazy eddy; the dark funnel rose and blended with the clouds above.

"A fine southeast breeze sprang up as the clouds dispersed, and we were reaching away for Penrhyn when a boy up forward gave a shout and pointed to the northwest. Sure enough there was a faint line on the horizon—the palms of Mataora. A sudden idea came to me. I was fed up with the schooner. Why not ask to be put ashore and picked up on the *Hatutu's* return from Penrhyn? She would be back in a fortnight, and it was only a few miles out of her way to drop me and pick me up.

"Johnson is a good fellow; his answer to my proposition was to change his course at once and slack away for the land twelve miles to leeward. 'You'll have a great time,' he said; 'I wish I were going with you. Old Tari will put you up—I'll give you a word to him. Take along two or three bags of flour and a few presents for the women.'

"At five o'clock we were off the principal village, with canoes all about us and more coming out through the surf. The men were a fine, brawny lot, joking

Marooned on Mataora

with the crew, and eager for news and small trade. I lowered my box, some flour, tobacco, and a few bolts of calico, into the largest canoe, and said good-by to Johnson.

“It was nearly a year before I saw him again; as you know, he lost the *Hatutu* on Flying Venus Shoal. They made Penrhyn in the boat and got a passage to Tahiti two months later. Everyone knew I was on Mataora, but it was five months before a schooner could come to take me off.

“There is no pass into the lagoon. As we drew near the shore I saw that the easy, deceptive swell reared up to form an ugly surf ahead of us. At one point, where a crowd of people was gathered, there was a large irregular fissure in the coral, broad and deep enough to admit the passage of a small boat, and filled with rushing water each time a breaker crashed on the reef. My two paddlers stopped opposite this fissure and just outside the surf, watching over their shoulders for the right wave. They let four or five good-sized ones pass, backing water gently with their paddles; but at last a proper one came, rearing and tossing its crest till I thought it would break before it reached us. My men dug their paddles into the water, shouting exultantly as we darted forward. The shouts were echoed on shore. By Jove! it was a thriller! Tilting just on the break of the wave, we flew in between jagged walls of coral, up the fissure, around a turn—and before the water began to rush back, a dozen men and women had plunged in waist deep to seize the canoe.

“Mataora is made up of a chain of low islands—all densely covered with coconut palms—strung to-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

gether in a rough oval to inclose a lagoon five miles by three. Though there is no pass, the surf at high tide breaches over the gaps between the islands. The largest island is only a mile and a half long, and none of them are more than half a mile across. Dotted about the surface of the lagoon are a number of *motu*—tiny islets—each with its flock of sea fowl, its clump of palms, and shining beach of coral sand. Set in a lonely stretch of the Pacific, the place is almost cut off from communication with the outside world; twice or three times in the course of a year a trading schooner calls to leave supplies and take off copra. Undisturbed by contact with civilization, the life of Mataora flows on—simple, placid, and agreeably monotonous—very little changed, I fancy, since the old days. It is true that they have a native missionary, and use calico, flour, and tobacco when they can get them; but these are minor things. The great events in their annals are the outrage of the Peruvian slavers in eighteen sixty-two, when many of the people were carried off to labor and die in the Chinchas Islands, and the hurricane of nineteen thirteen.

“After presenting myself to the missionary and the chief I was escorted by a crowd of youngsters to the lagoon side of the island, where Tairi lived, in a spot cooled by the trade wind and pleasantly shaded by coconuts. The old chap was a warm friend of Johnson’s and made me welcome; I soon arranged to put up with him during my stay on the island. His house, like all the Mataora houses, was worth a bit of study.

“Pandanus logs, five or six inches in diameter and set four feet apart, made the uprights. On each side

Marooned on Mataora

of these logs, and extending from top to bottom, a groove was cut. Thin laths, split from the aërial roots of the pandanus, were set horizontally into the grooves, making a wall which permitted the free circulation of air. At the windward end of the house, a large shutter of the same material was hung on hinges of bark; on warm days it could be opened to admit the breeze. The plates and rafters were made of the trunks of old coconut palms—a beautiful hard wood which blackens with age and can be polished like mahogany. The roof was thatched with *kakao*—strips of wood over which were doubled selected leaves of pandanus, six feet long and four inches across. The *kakao* are laid on like shingles, so deeply overlapped that only six inches of each is exposed, and the result is a cool and perfectly water-tight roof which lasts for years.

“The floor of Tari’s house was of fine white gravel, covered with mats. A bed of mats, a few odds and ends of fishing gear, and a Bible in the Rarotongan language made up the furniture. The old man had been a pearl diver for many years; he knew all the lagoons of this part of the Pacific, and could give the history of every large pearl discovered in these waters. Twenty fathoms he considered an ordinary depth for the naked divers—twenty-five, the limit. One day he went too deep, and since then he had been a cripple with paralyzed legs, dependent for care on the kindly people of his island. He busied himself in carving out models of the ancient Polynesian sailing canoes, beautifully shaped and polished, inlaid with shell, and provided with sails of mother-of-pearl. Now and then he presented a canoe to the captain of a

Faery Lands of the South Seas

trading schooner visiting the island, and received in return a bag of flour or a few sticks of tobacco.

“I had some interesting yarns with Tari—I speak Rarotongan, and the Mataora language is a good deal the same. They have three extra consonants, by the way—the f, l, and h. What a puzzle these island dialects are!

“Tairi told me a lot about pearl fishing. The people had divided their lagoon into three sections, one of which was fished each year. In this way each section got a two years’ rest. The shell is the object of the diving—pearls are a secondary issue. The divers are not much afraid of sharks, but dread the tonu and the big conger eel. Some years before, when Tari was resting in a boat after a spell under water, one of his companions failed to return to the surface. Looking through his water glass, he saw a great tonu lying on the bottom, sixty feet beneath him—the legs of his comrade hanging from its jaws. Fancy the ugly brute, ten feet long and all head, like an overgrown rock cod, with a man in his mouth. Tairi and several others seized their spears and were over the side next moment; they killed the tonu, but too late to save the life of their companion.

“Conger eels grow to enormous size in the pearl lagoons, and the divers keep a close watch for them. They lie in holes and crevices of the coral and dart out their heads to seize a passing fish, or the wrist of a diver stooping and intent on his task. When the conger’s jaws close on wrist or ankle, the diver needs a cool head; no amount of struggling will pull the eel from his hole. One must wait quietly, Tairi told me, until the conger relaxes his jaws preparatory to taking

Marooned on Mataora

a better grip. Then a quick wrench, and one is free.

“On an atoll like Mataora, where the food supply is limited to fish and coconuts, with a chicken or a piece of pork as an occasional treat, fishing plays a large part in the life of the people. The men were all expert fishermen, and used a variety of ingenious methods to catch the different kinds of fish. Tairi, of course, was no longer able to go out; but a friend of his—an old fellow named Tamatoa—used to take me with him. He was a fine specimen—six feet tall, muscular and active as a boy, with clear eyes and thick gray hair. One day he proposed trying for koperu, a small variety of mackerel.

“The settlement is on the lee side of the island, where a coral shoal runs out half a mile to sea, covered with twenty to forty fathoms of water. It was early in the morning—a dead calm—when we launched the big canoe and slipped out through the surf. About a quarter of a mile offshore Tamatoa asked me to hold the canoe stationary while he went about his fishing. Fastening a twenty-foot rope to the thwart, he made a noose at the other end and passed it under his arms. Then he took a ripe coconut, split it, and gouged out the meat with his knife. With the white pulp in one hand, he slipped overboard and swam down as far as the rope would let him. Through my water glass I watched him put pieces of coconut into his mouth and blow out clouds of the finely chewed stuff, which drifted and eddied about him in the gentle current. He seemed to stay under indefinitely—the lungs of a pearl diver are wonderful things! Now and then he came to the surface for a fresh supply of chum, and finally—

Faery Lands of the South Seas

at first in twos and threes, and then in shoals—the koperu began to appear from the depths. Little by little he enticed them close to the surface, until they swam all about him fearlessly, gobbling the morsels of coconut. At last the old man reached up for his fishing tackle—an eighteen-inch twig, with a bit of doubled sewing cotton and a tiny barbless hook. He baited the hook with a particle of coconut and dangled it under the nose of the nearest koperu. While he hung on the shortened rope, just beneath the surface, his right arm broke water in a series of jerks, and each time it rose a fish tumbled into the canoe until they lay in the bottom by dozens.

“Though the people of Mataora made sport of their work, they had plenty of leisure for other things. In the evening, when the tasks of the day had been completed by lighting the lamps in the roofed-over sleeping places of the dead, the young people loved to gather for a session of *akatu talanga*—story telling. They met in some one’s house or brought mats to spread in the bright moonlight outside; and while the others lay about, intent on the tale, one after another related the adventures of some Polynesian hero or the loves of some legendary island princess—strange fragments from the old days, full of specters and devils and monstrous heathen gods. There was a girl named Porima who told her stories marvelously well—a tall youngster of seventeen, with a dash of off-island blood; Hawaiian, I think. She was an artist in her way; one could imagine in her the pioneer of a literature to come. Her broad forehead, the masses of black hair which from time to time, with an impatient gesture, she shook back over her shoulders, and the slumberous

Marooned on Mataora

eyes, with a suggestion of hypnotic power, made her a person not easily forgotten. Although she had told them many times, Porima's stories never failed to hold her audience; the whispering ceased when she began, and every head turned toward where she sat, her hands continually in motion, her voice rising in excitement, or dying away to a murmur, while the listeners held their breath. As the hours passed, both audience and performers used to grow weary and drop off to sleep, one by one; finally a rooster crowed and one awoke with a start to realize that it was day.

“One evening, at a story telling, I heard a shout from the beach and remembered that I had been invited to go after flying fish. A dozen canoes were putting out through the surf, each manned by four paddlers. I made a fourth in the last canoe; we shot out of the opening with a receding wave, paddled desperately through the surf, and a moment later were rocking gently beyond the breakers. The canoes were formed into a rough line; each stern-man lit a torch of coconut leaves bound with bark, and a man forward took his place standing—net in hand. The net is like a shallow landing net, set on a haft of stiff bamboo, and can be handled only after years of unconscious training. My position, paddling amidships, enabled me to watch how the net was managed—one doesn't often see such an exhibition of dexterity and strength. The art consists in clapping the net over the fish just at the moment when he is lying at the surface, hesitating before taking flight; at any instant the netter may see a fish to port, to starboard, or directly ahead. Our man swung his net continually, and each time it passed over the canoe he flipped it

Faery Lands of the South Seas

upside-down to drop a fish. Think of the muscles needed for this sort of thing; the quickness of eye and hand, where a delicate balance must be maintained, and one is constantly alert to guard one's face against the fish, which whizz past at all angles. Then remember that it is a pretty serious matter to capsize in this torch-lit water, swarming with sharks, where it is imprudent even to trail one's hand overboard.

“In the bend of a bow-shaped islet at the north end of the lagoon, under the palms behind a shore of blue water and dazzling sand, lived an old chap named Ruri, who introduced me to another kind of fishing. Ruri was close to seventy, but a strong man still; his only complaint was lack of teeth, which compelled him to live on *varuvaru*—the grated-up meat of the young coconut, mixed with its own milk. The ambition of his life was a trip to Tahiti to get a set of false teeth. He was not a native of Mataora—his mother was a Gilbert-Islander and his father a Samoan. For many years Ruri had followed the sea—cabin boy under Bully Hayes; deserter (to keep a whole skin) from the famous *Leonora*; blackbirder in the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands; pearl fisher in Penrhyn and the lagoons of the Paumotu. At last, on a black night of storm, his vessel struck and went to pieces on the coral of Mataora, and Ruri's days of wandering were over. He married a woman of the island, but now she was dead and the old man lived alone, a mile from the settlement, occupied with his simple wants and immersed in dreams of the past. Close beside his house was the grave of his wife—a tomb of cement inclosed in a neat building of octagonal shape, with a door and a small curtained window. A fine lamp, carefully

Marooned on Mataora

tended and lit every evening at sunset, hung above the grave, and a few stunted gardenias and frangipanis, brought from enormous distances, were planted about the door. Ruri's little plantation of coconuts and coarse taro was free from weeds, and the neatness of his house, shipshape and scrupulously clean, betrayed the old sailor.

"After a spell of calm weather, when the breaching surf had ceased to cloud the waters of the lagoon, and the suspended particles of coral sand had settled to the bottom, Ruri offered to show me how to catch tenu—a fine fish, inhabiting the lagoon in ten to twenty fathoms of water—speckled like a trout on a ground of brown and gold, and reaching a weight of twenty pounds.

"In the absurdly complicated process of obtaining bait, tenu-fishing is typical of the South Pacific. The night before, Ruri had spent two hours with a torch, catching hermit crabs; now, using these crabs for bait, we had to catch some ku ta—a small, prickly fish which alone has power to interest the tenu. We set out in Ruri's leaky canoe and paddled to a big, coral mushroom, which rose to within a yard of the surface. Here the old man smashed the shells of his hermit crabs with a stone, broke off the claws, set the soft bodies to one side, and mashed the claws to a paste, which he dropped overboard and allowed to drift into a dark hole in the coral. Then he produced a short line, baited the hook with a body of a crab, and let it sink out of sight into the darkness of the hole. In ten minutes a dozen ku ta were gasping in the bottom of the canoe—fantastic little fish, colored scarlet and vermilion, with enormous black eyes and

Faery Lands of the South Seas

a dorsal fin which seemed to be carved out of red sealing wax. We put them in a basket, trailed overboard to keep them alive, and began the real fishing of the day. I paddled slowly, while Ruri—who did not believe in fishing till the fish was in sight—leaned over the side, scrutinizing the bottom through his water glass. Finally he signaled me to stop—his eye had caught the movement of a tenu among the masses of live coral, forty feet below us. The rest was simple: one hooked a ku ta under the dorsal fin, tossed him overboard, and allowed the weight of the hook and line to carry him to the bottom. By means of the water glass, one could watch the approach of the tenu, see him seize the bait, and judge the proper moment to strike.

“The bonito, which they call atu, is the most important of all fish to the people of Mataora. Almost any fine day one could see a fleet of canoes working offshore, busy at bonito catching, surrounded by a cloud of the sea birds which guide one to the schools. They use a pretty lure for this fishing—a sort of jig cut out of mother-of-pearl, equipped with a tuft of red-dyed coconut husk and a barbless hook of shell. Each fisherman carries a stiff bamboo rod and half a dozen of these lures—ranging in color from pale green to black—attached to ten-foot lengths of line. The islanders have discovered that the condition of the water and the variations of light make certain colors more attractive than others at a given time; and when a school is found they try one shade after another till they discover which the bonito prefer. Then the jigs not in use are hooked to a ring at the base of the pole, and the fisherman begins to pull bonito from

Marooned on Mataora

the water, heaving them out by main strength, without a moment's play. The barbless hook releases itself the moment the fish is in the canoe, and the lure goes overboard without the loss of an instant.

“One day, after a period of low tides, I saw another method of fishing—rarely practised nowadays—an ora, or fish-poisoning picnic. You know the barringtonia, probably—the big tree from which they make their drums; it grows on all the high islands, and sometimes one finds it on the richer atolls. There were a few on Mataora. Ever notice the flower? It is a lovely thing—a tassel of silky cream-colored stamens, shading to old rose at the ends, and tipped with golden beads. The fruit is odd-looking, like a squarish pomegranate, and it has odd properties, for when pounded up and put into shallow water it seems to stupefy the fish.

“I was sitting in the shade beside Tari's house when a boy came through the settlement, blowing melancholy blasts on a conch shell and announcing that the chief wanted everyone to be on hand that afternoon at a certain part of the lagoon, where an ora was to be held. We set out at noon, the women carrying the crushed seeds of the barringtonia in hastily woven baskets of green coconut frond. A crowd from the other settlements was awaiting our arrival; and when the babies had been put to sleep in the shade, with small children stationed beside them to fan away the flies, the fun began. A shallow stretch of lagoon lay before us, half a mile long by a quarter wide, and into this plunged the women and girls, wading and swimming in all directions, trailing behind them their baskets of poison. As time went on, a faint and

Faery Lands of the South Seas

curious odor began to rise from the water—a smell which reminded me vaguely of potassium cyanide. Soon the spearmen were busy—wild brown figures, naked except for scarlet loin cloths—pursuing the half-stupefied fish among the crevices of the coral. Before the effect of the poison wore off and the reviving fish began to make their escape to deeper water the men were returning to the beach, the strings of hibiscus bark at their belts loaded and dragging.

“On another day I joined a party of young people for a picnic across the lagoon. It was glassy calm; the water was like a mirror in which the palms of the wooded islets were reflected with motionless perfection. The beaches on the far side, invisible on an ordinary day, seemed to rise far out of water in the mirage. We landed on an uninhabited island, hauled up our canoes, and set out on a hunt for coconut crabs.

“They are extraordinary creatures, these crabs, enormous, and delicious to eat. You will not find many on the high islands; but in a place like Mataora there are hundreds of them, and they do a lot of damage to the coconuts. During the day they hide in their holes, deep among the roots of some big trees; at night they come out, climb the palms, nip off the nuts with their powerful claws, descend to the ground, tear off the husks, break open the shells, and devour the meat. To catch them, one can either dig them out or build a fire at the mouth of the hole, which never fails to draw them. Fire simply fascinates the brutes. They must be handled warily, for their claws can grip like a pair of pipe tongs and shear off a man’s finger without an effort.

“We lit a fire under the shade of a puka tree and

Marooned on Mataora

liberated the crabs we had captured. It sounds incredible, but they walked into the fire, and sat down quietly on the embers to roast! One of the boys climbed a palm and brought us some coconuts of a variety called nu mangaro, with an edible husk, sweet and fibrous, like sugar cane. After lunch we had a swim in the deep water close inshore and lay about smoking while the girls wove us wreaths of sweet fern. It was an idyllic sort of a day.

“I spent five months on Mataora. At first, when the schooner did not appear, I was worried and used to fret a little; but as time went on I grew to like the easy-going, dreamy life, and when at last a schooner came to take me off I didn't know whether to be glad or sorry—there were moments when I almost decided to send for a few things and follow the example of old Ruri.

“During those five months I knew more disinterested kindness than I had supposed existed in the world; my heart warmed to the people of Mataora.

“Finally the day came when the schooner dropped anchor in the lee of the village—Whitmore's *Tureia*. Canoe after canoe shot out through the surf; the women gathered in the shade of the canoe houses on the beach, awaiting the landing of the boatmen, who would bring news of husbands diving for shell in distant lagoons, or relatives scattered among far-off groups of islands. As I shook hands with Whitmore I heard a prolonged wailing from the village—the *tangi* of a new widow.

“When I went to the house to get my things together Tari informed me that, as the schooner would not leave till next day, the people were preparing a farewell

Faery Lands of the South Seas

feast in my honor. It was held in the assembly house of the village, decorated with arches of palm frond, garlands of scented fern, and the scarlet flowers of the hibiscus. Everyone brought a gift for the departing stranger—a fan, a hat, a pearl fishhook, a drinking cup of ornamented coconut shell, a carved paddle of porcupine wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl. I distributed what little I had to offer, wishing it were a dozen times as much.

“On the beach next morning the people of Mataora gathered for a last handclasp; smile cynically if you will—there were tears shed; I wasn’t too happy myself when I heard their plaintive song of farewell floating out across the water.”

Worthington ceased speaking and leaned forward to scratch a match. The squall had passed long since; the immense arch of the Milky Way stretched overhead, and low in the south—beyond Hull Island and Rimatara, over the loneliest ocean in the world—the Southern Cross was rising. Lying on mats behind us, a party of Cook-Islanders spoke in soft tones, their faces illuminated fitfully by the glow of their cigarettes. My companion was lighting his pipe, and in the flare of the match I could see that he was smiling to himself.

“Some day,” he said, “you will hear that I have closed up my affairs and disappeared. Don’t worry when that happens; you’ll know I have gone to Mataora—this time to stop for good.”

CHAPTER IV

The Land of Ahu Ahu



IMIGHT attempt to set down a matter-of-fact description of this place if only the subject permitted one to be matter-of-fact. Strange and remote, set in a lonely space of the sea and isolated from the world for the seven or eight centuries following the decline of Polynesian navigation, there is no other land like this hollow island of Ahu Ahu. Week after week, month after month, the watcher on its cliffs may gaze out toward the horizon and see never a sail nor a distant trail of smoke to liven the dark-blue desert of the Pacific. The cliffs themselves are strange—the reef of an ancient atoll, upraised in some convulsion of the earth to form a ring of coral limestone—sheer precipices facing the sea, half a mile of level barren summit, and an inner wall of cliffs, overlooking the rich lowlands of the interior. During the unnumbered years of their occupation, the land has set a stamp upon its people—so long on Ahu Ahu that they have forgotten whence they came. Hardy, hospitable, and turbulent, they are true children of the islands, and yet a family apart—ruder and less languid than the people of Samoa or Tahiti, and speaking a harsher tongue. And, more than any other island folk, they live in the past, for

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ghosts walk on Ahu Ahu, and the living commune nightly with the old dead who lie in the *marae*.

It was an hour before sunset when we sighted the land—the merest blue irregularity on the horizon, visible from one's perch in the shrouds each time the schooner rose to the crest of a sea. The mellow shout of landfall brought a score of native passengers to their feet; at such a moment one realizes the passionate devotion of the islander to his land. Men sprang into the rigging to gaze ahead with eager exclamations; mothers held up their babies—born on distant plantations—for a first glimpse of Ahu Ahu; seasick old women, emerging from disordered heaps of matting, tottered to the bulwarks with eyes alight. The island had not been visited for six months, and we carried a cargo of extraordinary variety—hardware, bolts of calico, soap, lumber, jewelry, iron roofing, cement, groceries, phonograph records, an unfortunate horse, and several pigs, those inevitable deck-passengers in the island trade. There were scores of cases of bully beef and ship's biscuit—the staple luxuries of modern Polynesia, and, most important of all, six heavy bags of mail.

As we drew near the land, toward midnight, I gave up the attempt to sleep in my berth and went on deck to spread a mat beside Tari, our supercargo, who lay aft of the mainmast, talking in low tones with his wife. It was calm, here in the lee of the island; the schooner slipped through the water with scarcely a sound, rising and falling on the long gentle swell. Faint puffs of air came off the land, bringing a scent of flowers and wood smoke and moist earth. We had been sighted, for lights were beginning to appear in the

The Land of Ahu Ahu

village; now and then, on a flaw of the breeze, one heard a sigh, long drawn and half inaudible—the voice of the reef. A party of natives, seated on the forward hatch, began to sing. The words were modern and religious, I believe, but the music—indescribably sad, wild, and stirring—carried one back through the centuries to the days when man expressed the dim yearnings of his spirit in communal song. It was a species of chant, with responses; four girls did most of the singing, their voices mingling in barbaric harmonies, each verse ending in a prolonged melodious wail. Precisely as the last note died away, in time with the cadence of the chant, the deep voices of the men took up the response, “*Karé, aué!*” (“No, alas!”) Tari turned to me.

“They sing well,” he said, “these Ahu Ahu people; I like to listen to them. That is a hymn, but a stranger would never suspect it—the music is pure heathen. Look at the torchlights in the village; smell the land breeze—it would tell you you were in the islands if you were set down here blindfold from a place ten thousand miles away. With that singing in one’s ears, it is not difficult to fancy oneself in a long canoe, at the end of an old-time voyage, chanting a song of thanksgiving to the gods who have brought us safely home.”

He is by no means the traditional supercargo of a trading schooner, this Tari; I have wasted a good deal of time speculating as to his origin and the reasons for his choosing this mode of life. An Englishman with a hint of Oxford in his voice—quite obviously what we call a gentleman—a reader of reviews, the possessor (at his charming place on Nukutere) of an enviable collection of books on the natural history and

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ethnology of the South Seas, he seldom speaks of himself or of his people at home. For twenty years he has been known in this part of the world—trading on Penrhyn, Rakahanga, Tupuai, the atolls of the Paumotu. He speaks a dozen of the island dialects, can join in the singing of *Utes*, or bring a roar of applause by his skill in the dances of widely separated groups. When the war broke out he enlisted as a private in a New Zealand battalion, and the close of hostilities found him with decorations for gallantry, the rank of captain, and the scars of honorable wounds. As a subject for conversation, the war interests him as little as his own life, but this evening he had emptied a full bottle of rum, and was in the mildly mellow state which is his nearest approach to intoxication.

“I never thought I’d see the old country again,” he said, “but the war changed all that. I got a nasty wound in Gallipoli, you see, and they sent me home to convalesce. The family wasn’t meant to know I was hurt, but they saw a bit of a thing in the paper [an account of the exploit which won Tari his D. C. M.], and there they were at the dock when the transport off-loaded. I hadn’t laid eyes on them for fifteen years. . . . The old governor—by Jove! he was decent. It was all arranged that I should stop in England when the war was over; I thought myself it was a go. When the job was finished, and I’d got a special dispensation to be demobbed at home, I stood it for a fortnight and then gave up. . . .

“Home is all very well for a week or two, but for a steady thing I seem to fit in better down here. What is it that makes a chap stop in the islands? You must have felt it yourself, and yet it is hard to put

The Land of Ahu Ahu

into words. This sort of thing, perhaps [he swept his hand through the soft darkness] . . . the beauty, the sense of remoteness, the vague and agreeable melancholy of these places. Then I like the way the years slip past—the pleasant monotony of life. My friends at home put up with a kind of dullness which would drive me mad; but here, where there is even less to distinguish one day from another, one seems never to grow fretful or impatient of time. One's horizon narrows, of course; I scarcely look at the newspaper any more. If you stop here you will find yourself unconsciously drifting into the native state of mind, readjusting your sense of values until the great events of the world seem far off and unreal, and your interests are limited to your own business, the vital statistics of your island, and the odd kinks of human nature about you. Perhaps this is the way we are meant to live; at any rate, it brings serenity.

“I've been here too long to sentimentalize about the natives—they have their weak points, and plenty of them. Allowing for these, you'll find the Kanakas a good sort to have about—often amusing, always interesting; at once deep, artful, gay, simple, and childish. At bottom they are not very different from ourselves; it is chiefly a matter of environment. Consider any of the traders who came here as boys—old fellows who will buttonhole you and spend hours abusing the people—the truth is that they have become more native than the men they abuse.

“There are places, like Africa, where one can live among a primitive people and absorb nothing from them; their point of view is too alien, their position in the scale of humanity too widely separated from

Faery Lands of the South Seas

our own. It is different in the islands. If one could discover the truth, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that these people were distant cousins of ours. The scholars—in whose conclusions I haven't much faith—trace them back, along the paths of successive migrations, through Indonesia to northern India or the land of the Cushites. In any case, I believe that the blood we term Caucasian flows in their veins, the legacy of ancestors separated from the parent stock so long ago that mankind had not yet learned the use of iron. And they are old, these island tribes who were discovering new lands in the Pacific in the days when our forefathers wore the horns of bulls upon their heads. Don't judge them in the present, or even in the time of Cook; they were a dying people then, whose decline had begun five or six hundred years before. It seems to me that a race, like an individual, grows old, loses heart, and fades away. On nearly every island they are dying to-day—a tragedy, an inevitable one, which the coming of the European has hastened, but not caused.

“Whether or not it may be accounted for on grounds of a distant kinship, it is impossible to stop long in the islands without absorbing, to a certain extent, the native point of view. Things which seemed rubbish at first slowly acquire significance; one begins to wonder if, after all, there may not be varieties of knowledge lost to us in the complexities of civilization. . . . I've seen some queer things myself.

“My wife's mother lives on Ahu Ahu, where her ancestors have been hereditary rulers since Maui fished the island out of the sea. I've known the family a good many years, and long before I married Apakura the old lady was kind enough to take a

The Land of Ahu Ahu

motherly interest in me. I always put up with her when we touched at Ahu Ahu. Once, after I had been away for several months, I sat down to have a yarn with her, and was beginning to tell about where I'd been and what I'd done when she stopped me. 'No, let me tell you,' she said, with an odd smile; and, upon my honor, she did—down to the details! I got the secret out of her the same evening. She is very friendly, it seems, with an ancestor of hers—a woman named Rakamoana, who lived twenty-eight generations—seven hundred years—ago, and is buried in the big *marae* behind the village. When one of the family is off on a trip, and my mother-in-law suspects that he is in trouble or not behaving himself, she puts herself into a kind of trance, calls up old Rakamoana, and gets all the facts. I hope the habit won't come into general use—might prove jolly awkward, eh? Seriously, though, I can't account for the things she told me without accepting her own explanation. Strange if there were a germ of truth in the legends of how the old sea-going canoes were navigated—the priests, in a state of trance, directing the helmsmen which way to steer for land. . . .

“There is another old woman on Ahu Ahu whose yarns are worth hearing. Many years ago a Yankee whaling vessel called at the island, and a Portuguese harpooner, who had had trouble with the captain, deserted and hid himself in the bush. The people had taken a fancy to him and refused to give him up, so finally the captain was obliged to sail away without his man. From all accounts this harpooner must have been a good chap; when he proved that he was no common white waster, the chief gave him a bit of land

Faery Lands of the South Seas

and a girl of good family for a wife—now the old lady of whom I spoke. I think it was tools he needed, or some sort of gear for a house he was building; at any rate, when another whaler touched he told his wife that he was going on a voyage to earn some money and that he might be gone a year. There was a kind of agreement, current in the Pacific in those days, whereby a whaling captain promised to land a man at the point where he had signed him on.

“Well, the harpooner sailed away, and, as might have been expected, his wife never saw him again; but here comes the odd part of the story. The deserted wife, like so many of the Ahu Ahu women, had an ancestor who kept her in touch with current events. Being particularly fond of her husband, she indulged in a trance from time to time, to keep herself informed as to his welfare. Several months after his departure the tragedy occurred—described in detail by the obliging and sympathetic dweller in the *marae*. It was a kind of vision, as told to me, singularly vivid for an effort of pure imagination—the open Pacific, heaving gently and ruffled by a light air; two boats from rival vessels pursuing the same whale; the Portuguese harpooner standing in the bows of one, erect and intent upon the chase, his iron the first, by a second of time, to strike. Then came a glimpse of the two boats foaming side by side in the wake of the whale; the beginning of the dispute; the lancing and death flurry of an old bull sperm; the rising anger of the two harpooners, as the boats rocked gently beside the floating carcass; the treacherous thrust; the long red blade of the lance standing out between the shoulders of the Portuguese.

The Land of Ahu Ahu

"The woman awoke from her trance with a cry of anguish; her husband was dead—she set up the widow's *tangi*. One might have thought it an excellent tale, concocted to save the face of a deserted wife, if the same vessel had not called at Ahu Ahu within a year, to bring news of the husband's death under the exact circumstances of the vision.

"What is one to believe? If seeing is believing, then count me a believer, for my own eyes have seen an incredible thing. It was on Aitutaki, in the Cook group. An old chief, the descendant of a very ancient family, lay ill in the village. I had turned in early, as I'd promised to go fishing on the reef when the tide served, an hour after midnight. You know how the spirits of the dead were believed to flee westward, to Hawaiki, and how their voices might be heard at night, calling to one another in the sky, as they drove past, high overhead. Early in the evening, as I lay in bed, a boy came into the next room, panting with excitement. He had been to a plantation in the hills, it seemed, and as he returned, just after dusk, had heard the voices of a shouting multitude passing in the air above him. I was tired and paid little attention to his story, but for some reason I found it impossible to sleep. It was a hot night, very still and sultry, with something in the air that made one's nerves twitch every time a coconut frond dropped in the distance. I was still lying awake when my fishing companions came to get me; a little ahead of time, for, like me, they had been unable to sleep. We would wait on the reef, they suggested, where it was sure to be cool, until the tide was right.

"We were sitting on the dry coral, smoking. I had

Faery Lands of the South Seas

just looked at my watch, I remember; it lacked a few minutes to one o'clock. Our canoes were hauled up on one side of the Arutunga Passage—the western pass, by the way. There was no moon. Suddenly one of the boys touched me. 'What is that?' he exclaimed, in a startled voice. I looked up; the others were rising to their feet. Two flaring lights were moving across the lagoon toward us—together and very swiftly. Nearer and nearer they came, until they revealed the outlines of a canoe larger than any built in the islands nowadays—a canoe of the old time, with a flaming torch set at prow and stern. While we stood there, staring in silence, it drew abreast of us, moving with the rush of a swift motor boat, and passed on—out to sea. I was too amazed to think clearly until I heard one of the boys whisper to another, '*Kua mate te ariki*—the chief is dead; the great canoe bears him out to the west.' We launched our canoes and crossed the lagoon to the village. Women were wailing; yes, the old man was dead—he had drawn his last breath a little before one o'clock. Remember that I saw this thing myself. . . . Perhaps it was a dream—if so, we all dreamed alike."

It was late. The singing died away; the lights in the village went out one by one. The passage in the Ahu Ahu reef is a bad place by daylight—the chances were that no canoes would risk it till dawn. Tari struck a match for an instant and lay down on the mat beside his wife. In the little flare of light I saw her sleeping in the unconscious manner of a child.

I know their story—a pretty one, in pleasant contrast to the usual ignoble and transitory loves of white and

The Land of Ahu Ahu

brown. Apakura is the daughter of the principal family of this island—her mother and father for many years the warm friend of Tari. He had petted the child from the time she was three; she was always on the beach to meet the canoe that brought him ashore, and he, for his part, never forgot the small gifts for which she waited with sparkling eyes. On his rambles about the island the little girl followed Tari with the devotion of a dog; many a time, clambering along the base of the cliffs at dawn, his first knowledge of her presence came with the shrill cry of, “*Tiaké mai, Tari!*” and he waited while his small follower managed some difficult pile of coral in the rear. Their friendship had only Tari’s two or three visits a year to feed on, but neither forgot, and in the course of time, as the child learned to read and write, a correspondence began—very serious on her side, pleased and amused on his. When he went away to the war she was eleven—a slim, dark-eyed child; when he returned she was sixteen, and a woman, though he did not know it.

On this occasion, in the evening, when the rest of the family had gone to bed, he sat talking with Apakura’s mother—or, rather, listening while the old woman told one of her stories of life on Ahu Ahu, equally fascinating and long drawn out. It is not difficult to reconstruct the scene in imagination—Tari comfortable in bare feet and a *pareu*, half reclining against the wall as he smoked his pipe in absent-minded puffs; the woman cross-legged on the floor, leaning forward in earnest speech—her voice rising, falling, and dying to a whisper in the extraordinary manner of the Polynesian teller of tales; her hands from time to time falling simultaneously with a loud

Faery Lands of the South Seas

slap to her knees, in emphasis of some point in the narrative. The story ended, little by little the mother led the conversation to the subject of her daughter. Tari began to praise the girl.

“What do you think of her,” asked the old woman, “now that you have been away these five years?”

“There is no other girl like her,” said Tari.

“Since that is so, take her with you; we shall be pleased, all of us—I in particular, who look on you as a son. She is a good girl; she can sew, she can cook, and the young men say that she is beautiful.”

“You propose that I take her as a wife?” exclaimed the astonished Tari, to whom, in truth, the idea had not occurred.

“Yes. Why not? You need a wife, now that the little affair of Tukonini has blown over.”

“But think, mamma—I am forty and the child is sixteen; it is not fitting.”

“Young wives are best if they are faithful; Apakura will never look at another man.”

“I will think it over,” said Tari; “let us leave it so. Not this year, at any rate—she is too young.”

As he bade her good night and turned to go to his sleeping place the old woman spoke again.

“Bear one thing in mind,” she said, with a smile; “it will help you to decide. Consider, now and then, the thought of my daughter married to another.”

In the end, as is often the case, it was Apakura who settled the matter. Next morning Tari was busy with some stock taking and did not board the schooner till the last moment, or notice—in his preoccupation—the mysterious smiles with which the crew greeted him. They were a dozen miles offshore before he

The Land of Ahu Ahu

folded the last of his papers, lit a pipe, and went on deck for a breath of air. The old woman's last words stuck unpleasantly in his mind, I fancy, as he stood there smoking, with his back to the companionway. All at once he saw the helmsman—an Ahu Ahu boy he had known since childhood—lift his eyes from the binnacle and grin from ear to ear; at the same moment Tari felt a hand slip into his own, and heard a small, familiar voice say, "I am here." It was Apakura—more serious than usual and a little frightened, but not to be put off longer. They were married in Tahiti a fortnight later.

It was Apakura's voice that awakened me. She was leaning over the bulwark in eager conversation with her mother, who had come off in the first canoe. The air was fresh with the cool of dawn; in the east the sky was flushing behind scattered banks of trade-wind clouds, tinted in wonderfully delicate shades of terra cotta. A dozen big outrigger canoes, of the type peculiar to this island, were coming out through the passage, each paddled by four men, who shouted as their heavy craft dashed through the breakers.

Little by little, not at all after the manner of traditional dawn in the tropics, the light increased, until Ahu Ahu lay fully revealed before us—the smoking reef, the shallow lagoon, and the cliffs, their summits plumed with coconut palms. A crowd of islanders was already gathering on the reef, and I could see others making their way down the steep path from the settlement. As the sun rose the colors of the scene grew stronger—green palms, gray cliffs, white walls of the village, pale blue of the sky, azure of the sea water. There is no color in the world—that I have seen—like

Faery Lands of the South Seas

the blue of the water off the Ahu Ahu reef; so vivid, so intense, one felt that a tumbler of it, held up to the sun, would be a mass of sapphire, or that a handkerchief dipped in it would emerge strongly dyed.

Apakura was going ashore with her mother. Standing in the narrow canoe, she directed the stowing of her luggage—a mat, a bright patchwork quilt, a box of cedar wood. Tari was awaiting the coming of the traders, for the schooner was stocked with good Tahiti rum, and the rites of welcome would take place on board.

“There they are,” he said, pointing to two white figures wading gingerly across the shallow lagoon to the reef; “you’re going to meet a pair of rare ones—they’ve been hard doers in their time!”

The distant figures reached the edge of the boat passage and I could see a boy beckoning them into a waiting canoe, but now they stopped and seemed to argue, with many gestures. Tari chuckled.

“No use trying to hurry them,” he told me; “they are discussing the loss of the *Esperanza*. She went ashore here in the late ’nineties—a full-rigged ship. Peter was one of her crew; Charley had just come here to trade, and saw the whole thing. They’ve spent twenty years thrashing out the question of whether or not the wreck might have been avoided. Every morning, after breakfast, Charley strolls across to Peter’s house to smoke a pipe and discuss some of the fine points; every evening, after tea, Peter returns the visit, and the argument goes on till bedtime. Charley’s an American—an old man now, close to seventy. He put in thirty years on Hiva Oa, in the Marquesas, before he came to Ahu Ahu; I’d like to have some of

The Land of Ahu Ahu

his memories. Notice his arms if he pulls his sleeves up. He has sixteen children on Hiva Oa and fourteen here—all numbered; he says he never can remember their heathen names. When his wife died in the north he gave all his land to the children and left on the first schooner. She touched at Papeete, but he didn't go ashore. Then she made Ahu Ahu, where he landed and established himself a second time. He has never seen a motor car, a telephone, or an electric light."

Presently the canoe came dancing alongside, and the two old men clambered painfully over the rail—Peter thin, hatchet faced, and stooping; Charley the ruin of a magnificent man. He towered above any of us on the deck—this ancient dweller among cannibals—still erect, his head still carried proudly, but the flesh hanging loose and withered on his bones. It was easy to fancy the admiration he must have inspired forty years ago among the wild people, in whose eyes physical strength and perfection were the great qualities of a man. In the cabin, while the cook squeezed limes for the first of many rum punches, Charley took off his tunic of white drill, and as he sat there in his singlet I saw that his arms and chest, like his face, were tanned to an indelible dull brown, and that patterns in tattooing ran from wrist to shoulder—greenish blue and barbaric.

I never learned his history—it must have been a thing to stir the imagination. Once, as we sat drinking, Tari mentioned Stevenson, and the old man's face brightened.

"É," he said, slowly, in native fashion, "I remember him well; he came to Hiva Oa with the *Casco*. A funny fellow he was . . . thin! There was nothing to

Faery Lands of the South Seas

him but skin and bones. And questions—he'd ask you a hundred in a minute! I didn't take to him at first, but he was all right. He didn't care how he dressed; one day I saw him walking on the beach with nothing on but a pair of drawers."

The cook plied back and forth, removing empty glasses and bringing full ones. As each tray was set on the table, Peter—typical of a lively and garrulous old age—seized his glass and held it up.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed. "Down she goes," drawled Charley, and Tari murmured, "Cheerio!" At the end of two hours Charley's eyes were beginning to glaze, and Peter was mumbling vaguely of the *Esperanza*. Tari rose and beckoned to me.

"Make yourselves at home," he said to the old men; "I've got to go ashore. Akatara will give you lunch whenever you want it."

As our canoe made for the reef my companion told me there was to be a feast in his honor, and that his wife wished me to be present. We shot into the passage without a wetting; the people crowded about Tari, laughing, shaking his hand, speaking all at once—an unmistakable warmth of welcome.

The settlement, reached by a short, steep trail, lies at the base of a break in the cliffs. At the door of her mother's house Apakura met us—turned out, as becomes a supercargo's wife, in the choicest of trade finery. She wore heavy golden earrings; bands of gold were on her fingers, and her loose frock was of pale embroidered silk. Her mother—the keen-eyed old woman I had seen in the canoe—made me welcome.

In the afternoon, when the feast was over and we rose stiffly, crammed with fish and taro and baked

The Land of Ahu Ahu

fig, I asked Tari if he knew a youngster who would show me the best path to the interior of the island. A boy of ten was soon at the door—a dark-skinned child with a great shock of hair, and legs disfigured by the scars of old coral cuts.

A twisting path, cobbled, and wide enough to walk two abreast, led us to the summit. The stones were worn smooth by the passage of bare feet, for, excepting fish, all the food of the village is brought over this road from the plantations to the sea. There could be no doubt that the ring of cliffs on which we stood was an ancient reef; in places one could recognize the forms of coral, imbedded, with shells of many varieties, in the metamorphosed rock. Here and there one found pockets of a material resembling marble, veined and crystalline—formed from the coral by processes impossible to surmise. The bulk of the rock is the fine-grained white limestone called *makatea* in the eastern Pacific. The level summit of the cliffs, over which, in centuries gone by, the sea had washed and thundered, forms a narrow plain, sparsely wooded and cultivated in spots where a thin soil has gathered in the hollows.

We halted under the palms crowning the inner brink. The trail wound down giddily ahead—so steep in places that ladders had been fastened to the rock. To right and left of us the cliffs were sheer walls of limestone, rising from a level little above that of the sea. The low hills of the interior, volcanic and fern covered, draining in every direction toward the foot of the *makatea*, have formed a circling belt of swamp land, on which all the taro of the island was grown. One could look down on the beds from where we stood,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

a mosaic of pale green, laid out by heathen engineers in days beyond the traditions of men.

Another time, perhaps, I will tell you of that afternoon—how we climbed down the trail and walked the dikes among the taro; how my escort increased to a merry company as the people began to come after food for the evening meal; of a boisterous swim in a pool beneath a waterfall; of how I found the remains of an ancient house, built of squared stone so long ago that over one end of it the wooded earth lay two yards deep.

Toward evening, in the bush at the edge of the taro swamps, I came upon a large house, built of bamboo and pandanus in the native fashion. A man was standing framed in the doorway—a tall, white man, dressed in pajamas of silk. His gold-rimmed spectacles, gray beard, and expression of intelligent kindness were vaguely academic—out of place as the cultivated voice which invited me to stop. The boys and girls escorting me squatted on their heels outside; a brace of pretty children, shy and half naked, scurried past as I entered the house. My host waved his hand toward a mat. There was only one chair in the room, standing before a table on which I saw a small typewriter and a disordered heap of manuscript. Otherwise the place was unfurnished except for books, ranged in crude bookcases, tier upon tier, stacked here and there in precarious piles, standing in rows along the floor.

“I am glad to see you,” he said, as he offered me a cigarette from a case of basketwork silver; “it is not often that a European passes my house.”

I shall not give his name, or attempt to disguise

The Land of Ahu Ahu

him with a fictitious one; it is enough to say that he is one of the handful of real scholars who have devoted their lives to Polynesian research. I had read his books, published long before, and wondered—more than once—whether he still lived and where he hid himself. The years of silence had been spent (he told me) in a comparative study of the ocean dialects, through which he hoped to solve the riddle of the Pacific—to determine whence came the brown and straight-haired people of the islands. Now, with the material in hand, he had chosen Ahu Ahu as a place of solitude, where he might complete his task of compilation undisturbed.

“On the whole,” he said, with agreeable readiness to speak of his work, “I am convinced that they came from the west. The Frenchman’s theory that the race originated in New Zealand, like the belief that they migrated westward from the shores of America, is more picturesque, more stirring to the imagination; but the evidence is too vague. If one investigates the possibilities of an eastward migration, on the other hand, one finds everywhere in the western islands the traces of their passage. Far out in the Orient, in isolated groups, off the coast of Sumatra, about Java and Celebes, and in the Arafura Sea, I can show you people of the true Polynesian type. Even in such places, where the last migration must have passed nearly two thousand years ago, scraps of evidence remain—a word, a curious custom, the manner of carrying a basket. These things might seem coincidences if the trail did not grow warmer as one travels east.

“Though no trace of their blood is left, New Guinea must at one time have been a halting place in the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

migration. Papua it is called, and one finds the word current in Polynesia, meaning a garden, a rich land. The natives of New Guinea are as unlike the people of the eastern Pacific, I should say, as the average American or Englishman, and yet throughout New Guinea there is a most curious cropping out of Polynesian words, pointing to a very ancient intercourse between the races. Consider the word for woman among the Polynesians. In Rarotonga, it is *vaine*; in Tahiti, *vahine*; in the Marquesas, *vehine*; in Hawaii, *wahine*; in Samoa, *fafine*. The same root runs through the dialects of Papua. In Motu, woman is *habine*; in Kerepunu, *varine*; in Aroma, *babine*; and in Motu-motu it is *ua*, which in this part of the Pacific means, variously, female, seed, and rain. I could cite you dozens of similar examples. Now and then one comes across something that sets one's imagination to work . . . as you must know, the word for sun in the islands is *ra*, but in Tahiti they have another word, *mahana*. In New Guinea, thirty-five hundred miles away, and with all Melanesia between, the tribes of the South Cape call the sun *mahana*. What a puzzle it is!

“Though it may be the merest coincidence, that *ra* has a flavor of Egypt. I wonder if there could be a connection? I used to know a girl in Tahiti whose strange and rather beautiful name—hereditary as far back as the records of her family went—was that of a queen of Egypt who ruled many hundreds of years before Christ. But I mustn't ride my hobby too fast.

“It is a pity you can't stop on Ahu Ahu for a time—there are not many islands so unspoiled. I've grown very fond of the place; I doubt if I ever leave it permanently. If you are interested in ghosts, you had

The Land of Ahu Ahu

better change your mind. I have a fine collection here; the house is built on the site of a tumble-down *marae*. There is our white rooster, the spirit of an old chief, which appears during the new moon—perfectly harmless and friendly, but the people rather dread him. Then we have a ghostly pig, very bad indeed; and a pair of malignant women, who walk about at night with arms and long hair entwined, and are suspected of ghastly appetites. I shall not say whether or not I have seen any of these; perhaps it is living too much alone, but I am not so skeptical as I was. . . .”

It was not easy to part with such a host, but the sun was low over the *makatea*, and the prospect of crossing the dikes among the taro and scaling the cliff by dark drove me at last to take reluctant leave.

Lamps were shining in the village when I returned; in some of the houses I heard the voice of the father, reading aloud solemnly from the Bible in the native tongue; in others, the people were assembled to chant their savage and melancholy hymns. Tari was alone on the veranda, smoking in his absent-minded fashion, and motioned me to sit down beside him. I told him how I had spent the afternoon. When I had finished he puffed on in silence for a time.

“It is a strange place, Ahu Ahu,” he said at last. “My mother-in-law has finished her prayers, sung her *himines*, and put away the family Bible. Now she has gone to the house of one of her pals for a session with old Rakamoana. Like the land itself, the people are relics of an elder time—pure heathen at heart.”

CHAPTER V

A Memory of Mauké



WE sighted Mauké at dawn. The cabin lamp was still burning when the boy brought my coffee; I drank it, lit a cigarette, and went on deck in a *pareu*. The skipper himself was at the wheel; half a dozen men were in the shrouds; the native passengers were sitting forward, cross-legged in little groups, munching ship's biscuit and gazing ahead for the expected land.

The day broke wild and gray, with clouds scudding low over the sea, and squalls of rain. Since we had left Mangaia, the day before, it had blown heavily from the southeast; a big sea was running, but in spite of sixty tons of copra the schooner was reeling off the knots in racing style, running almost free, with the wind well aft of the beam, rising interminably on the back of each passing sea, and taking the following slope with a swoop and a rush. We had no log; it was difficult to guess our position within a dozen miles; the low driving clouds, surrounding us like a curtain, made it impossible to see more than a few hundred yards. Until an observation could be obtained, the landfall was a matter of luck and guesswork. Our course had been laid almost due north-northeast—to

A Memory of Mauké

pass a little to the west of Mauké—which gave us the chance of raising Mitiaro or Atiu if we missed the first island; but ocean currents are uncertain things, and with a horizon limited to less than half a mile, nothing would be easier than to slip past the trio of low islands and into the stretch of lonely ocean beyond. Every trading skipper is accustomed to face such situations; one can only maintain a sharp lookout and hold on one's course until there is an opportunity to use the sextant, or until it becomes obvious that the land has been passed.

A squall of rain drove down on us; for five minutes, while we shivered and the scuppers ran fresh water, our narrow circle of vision was blotted out. Then suddenly, with the effect of a curtain drawn aside, the clouds broke to the east, flooding the sea with light. A shout went up. Close ahead and to starboard, so near that we could see the white of breakers on the reef, was Mauké—densely wooded to the water's edge, a palm top rising here and there above the thick bush of ironwoods. Next moment the curtain descended; gray clouds and rearing seas surrounded us; it was as though we had seen a vision of the land, unreal as the blue lakes seen at midday on the desert. But the skipper was shouting orders in harsh Mangaian; the schooner was swinging up into the wind; the blocks were clicking and purring as half a dozen boys swayed on the mainsheet.

Presently the land took vague form through the mist of squalls; we were skirting the reef obliquely, drawing nearer the breakers as the settlement came in view. A narrow boat passage, into which an ugly surf was breaching, had been blasted through the hard coral

Faery Lands of the South Seas

of the reef; a path led up the sloping land beyond, between a double row of canoe houses to the bush. A few people were gathering by the canoe houses; it was evident that we had just been sighted, and that it would be some time before a boat could put out, if, indeed, the boatmen were willing to risk the surf. Meanwhile we could only stand off and on until they came out to us, for the skipper had no intention of risking his ship's boat and the lives of his men on such a forbidding shore. "*Arari!*" he sang out, dwelling long on the last syllable of this Cook Island version of "hard alee." The schooner rounded into the wind with a ponderous deliberation calculated to make the nerves of a fair-weather sailor twitch; she seemed to hesitate, like a fat and fluttering grandmother; at last, after an age of bobbing and ducking into the head sea, while boom tackles were made fast and headsails backed, she made up her mind, and filled away on the port tack.

Riley, the American coconut planter, who was recruiting labor for the season on his island, turned to me with a wink. "If this old hooker was mine," he remarked in a voice meant to reach the skipper's ears, "I'd start the engine every time I came about; she can't sail fast enough to keep steerageway!"

The skipper sniffed a British sniff; they are old friends. "If this damn fine schooner was yours," he observed, without turning his head, "she'd have been piled up long ago—like as not in broad daylight, on an island a thousand feet high."

Riley chuckled. "Too early for an argument," he said. "Let's go below and have a drink."

I have not often run across a more interesting man

A Memory of Mauké

than Riley. Thrown together, as he and I have been, in circumstances which make for an unusual exchange of confidence, I have learned more of him in two months than one knows of many an old acquaintance at home. At thirty-five years of age he is a living object lesson for those who bewail the old days of adventure and romance, and wish that their lives had been cast in other times. His blood is undiluted Irish; he has the humor, the imagination, the quick sympathy of the race, without the Irish heritage of instability. Born in South Boston and reared with only the sketchiest of educations, he set out to make his way in the world at an age when most boys are playing marbles and looking forward with dread to the study of algebra. For fifteen years he wandered, gathering a varied background of experience. He worked in mills; he drifted west and shipped as cabin boy on vessels plying the Great Lakes; he drifted farther west to become a rider of the range. Finally he reached San Francisco and took to the sea. He has been a sealer, an Alaska fisherman, an able-bodied seaman on square-riggers sailing strange seas. He has seen Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope; he speaks of the ports of India, China, Africa, the Java Sea, as you would speak of Boston or New York.

In the days when a line of schooners ran from San Francisco to Tahiti, touching at the Marquesas on the way, he felt a call to the South Seas, and shipped for a round trip before the mast. When he returned to San Francisco a change seemed to have come over him; the old, wandering life had lost its charm—had gone flat and stale. Like many another, he had eaten of the wild plantain unaware. The evenings of carousal

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ashore no longer tempted him; even the long afternoons of reading (for reading has always been this curious fellow's chief delight), stretched on his bed in a sailor's boarding house, had lost their flavor—the print blurred before his eyes, and in its place he saw lands of savage loveliness rising from a warm blue sea; shadowy and mysterious valleys, strewn with the relics of a forgotten race; the dark eyes of a girl in Tai-o-Hae.

Remember that Riley was both a sailor and an Irishman—a rough idealist, keenly susceptible to beauty and the sense of romance. It is stated that the men who live romance are seldom aware of it; this may be true, though I doubt it—certainly in Riley's case the theory does not work out. He is the most modest of men, untainted by a trace of egoism; in his stories, superbly told with the Irish gift for circumstantial detail and dramatic effect, the teller's part is always small. And yet as one listens, thrilled by the color and artistry of the tale, one is all the while aware that this man appraises his memories at their full value—reviews them with a ripened gusto, an ever-fresh appreciation. In short, he is one of those fortunate, or unfortunate, men for whom realities, as most of us know them, do not exist; men whose eyes are incapable of seeing drab or gray, who find mystery and fresh beauty in what we call the commonplace.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Riley was aboard the next schooner bound south for the islands. Nukuhiva knew him for a time, but the gloom and tragedy of that land—together with an episode of domestic infelicity—were overpowering to a man of his temperament. From the Marquesas he went to Tahiti, and his wanderings ended in the Cook group, six hundred

A Memory of Mauké

miles to the west. Perhaps the finding of his journey's end wrought the change, perhaps it was due to his rather practical Tahitian wife—in any case, the wanderer ceased to rove, the spendthrift began to save and plan. In the groups to the eastward he had picked up a smattering of coconut lore; it was not long before he got a berth as superintendent of a small plantation. With a native wife and the Irishman's knack for languages, he soon mastered the dialect of his group; he is one of a very few men who speak it with all the finer shadings. This accounts in part for his success with labor—the chief difficulty of the planter throughout Polynesia. To one interested as I am in the variations of this oceanic tongue, it is a genuine pleasure to talk with Riley. In school he learned to read and write; beyond that he is entirely self-educated. A good half of his earnings, I should say, in the days when he followed the sea, were spent on books; a native intelligence enabled him to criticize and select; he has read enormously, and what he has read he has remembered. Each time a new subject attracted him he hastened to the book shops of San Francisco, or Liverpool, or Singapore, and gathered a little fore-castle library of reference. Like most intelligent men in this part of the world, he has grown interested in the subject of Polynesian research; it is odd to hear him discuss—with a strong accent of South Boston and the manner of a professor of ethnology—some question of Maori chronology, or the variations in a causative prefix. Once he made clear to me a matter often referred to in print, but which I had never properly understood. He was speaking of the language of Tahiti.

“When you hear a Tahitian talk,” he said, “it

Faery Lands of the South Seas

sounds different, but really it's the same as Hawaiian, or Marquesan, or Rarotongan, or New Zealand Maori. Tahiti is the oldest settled place, and the language has kind of rotted away there. Nowadays the Tahitian has lost the strong, harsh sounds of the old lingo, the *k* and *ng*; in place of them there is simply a catch between two vowels. If you know Rarotongan and understand the system of change, you can get on all right in Tahiti. Take our word *akatangi*—to play a musical instrument. *Tangi* means 'wail' or 'weep'; *aka* is the old causative prefix; the combination means 'cause to weep.' Now let's figure that word out in Tahitian. First we've got to take out the *k* and *ng*; that leaves a bad start—it doesn't sound good, so the Tahitians stick on an *f* at the beginning. That's all there is to it; *fa'ata'i* is the word. It makes me laugh to think of when I first came down here. I was working in Tahiti, and when I came home in the evening my girl would look up from her sewing and sing out, 'O Riley!' 'For the love of Mike,' I'd tell her, 'don't you know my name yet? It's Riley, not O'Riley!' Finally I caught on; I'd been fooled on the same proposition as Cook and all the rest of them. You remember they called the island Otahiti. That O is simply a special form of the verb used before personal pronouns and proper nouns. The old navigators, when the canoes came out to meet them, pointed to the land and asked its name. 'O Tahiti' said the natives ('It is Tahiti'). My girl didn't mean to call me O'Riley at all; she was simply saying, 'It's Riley.'"

A serious white man, particularly when he is able to recruit and handle native labor, is always in demand in the islands; it was not long before Riley's talents

A Memory of Mauké

were recognized; now he is manager and part owner of an entire atoll. I have listened with a great deal of interest to his accounts of the life there. Every year, at about Christmas time, a schooner comes to load his copra and take his boys back to their respective islands. Not a soul is left on the atoll; Riley boards the schooner with his wife and takes passage to Papeete for a couple of months of civilization. When the time is up he makes a tour of the Cook group to recruit twenty or thirty boys for the new season, and is landed on his island with a nine months' supply of medicine, provisions, and reading matter. He is the only white man on the atoll; one would suppose such a life deadly monotonous and lonely, but just now he is pining to get back. It is really the pleasantest of lives, he says; enough routine in keeping the men properly at work, superb fishing when one desires a touch of sport, plenty of time to read and think, the healthiest climate in the world, and a bit of trouble now and then to give the spice a true Irishman needs.

Riley is a man of medium size, with thick brown hair and eyes of Celtic dark blue, perpetually sparkling with humor. I have never seen a stronger or more active man of his weight; on his atoll he spends an hour every day in exercise, running, jumping, working with dumbbells and Indian clubs. From head to foot he is burnt a deep, ruddy brown—a full shade darker than the tint of his native wife. Sometimes, he says, he works himself into such a pink of condition that he aches to pick a fight with the first comer, but I fancy he finds trouble enough to satisfy another man. Once a huge, sullen fellow from the Gambier group attempted to spear him, and Riley called all of his men in from

Faery Lands of the South Seas

their work, appointed the foreman referee, and beat the two-hundred-and-twenty-pound native—fierce and lithe and strong as a tiger—slowly and scientifically, to a pulp. On another occasion, a half-savage boy, from a far-off island of the southern Paumotus, took a grudge against the manager and bided his time with the cunning of a wild animal. The chance came one afternoon when Riley was asleep in the shade behind his house. The Paumotan stole up with a club and put him still sounder asleep with a blow on the head that laid his scalp open and nearly fractured his skull. Half a dozen kicks from the ball of a toughened foot stove in the ribs on one side of his chest; with that, the native left his victim, very likely thinking him dead. Riley's wife, from whom I got the story, was asleep in the house at the time; toward evening she went to look for her husband, and found him stretched out, bloody and unconscious, on the sand. In spite of her agitation—her kind are not much use in a crisis—she managed to get him to the house and revive him. Riley's first act was to drink half a tumbler of whisky; his second, to send for the foreman. The Paumotan boy had disappeared; overcome by forebodings of evil, he had taken a canoe and paddled off to hide himself on an uncleared islet across the lagoon. Riley gave the foreman careful instructions; early in the morning he was to take all the boys and spend the day, if necessary, in running down the fugitive, who under no circumstances was to be injured or roughly handled.

They brought the boy in at noon—deadly afraid at first, sullen and relieved when he learned his punishment was no worse than to stand up to the manager before the assembled plantation hands. It must have

A Memory of Mauké

been a grievous affair; Tetua could scarcely describe it without tears. Riley was still sick and dizzy; his ribs were taped so tightly that he could breathe with only half his lungs, and a two-inch strip of plaster covered the wound on his head. The Paumotan was fresh and unhurt; he outweighed his antagonist by twenty pounds, and fought with confidence and bitterness. The Kanaka is certainly among the strongest men of the world, a formidable adversary in a rough-and-tumble fight. It went badly with Riley for a time; the boy nearly threw him, and a blow on his broken ribs almost made him faint, but in the end—maddened by pain and the thought of the treacherous attack—he got his man down and might have killed him if the foreman and half a dozen others had not intervened.

Riley's island is a true atoll—a broad lagoon inclosed by an oval sweep of reef along which are scattered islets of varying size. Many people must have lived on it in the past; everywhere there are traces of man's occupation. A dozen inhabitants were there within the memory of living men, but the dead outnumbered the living too heavily—the place became unbearable to them, and in the end a schooner took them away.

The outlying Cook Islands are places full of interest. I determined, when I began this letter, to give you a real account of Mauké—the island itself, its people, the number of tons of copra produced annually, and other enlightening information. But somehow, when one begins to write of this part of the world it seems a hopeless task to stick to a train of facts—there are too many diverging lines of fancy; too many intangible stimuli to thought, stirring to the imagination.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Our landing on Mauké was a ticklish business. Like **Mangaia**, **Mitiaro**, and **Atiu**, this island is of mixed volcanic and raised-coral origin—the pinnacle of a submerged peak, ringed with millions of tons of coral, and without any lagoon worthy of the name. The polyps have built a sort of platform around the land, low inshore and highest—as seems usually the case—just before it drops off into the sea. Breaching across the outer ridge, the surf fills a narrow belt of shallows between it and the shore; the result is a miniature edition of a lagoon—a place of rocky pools where children wade knee-deep, on the lookout for crayfish and baby octopus. On the outer edge the reef is steep, too, dropping off almost at the perpendicular. It is difficult to realize, when one has been brought up on the friendly coasts of America, that if a boat capsizes off these reefs one must swim offshore and wait to be picked up—that it is wiser to chance the sharks than to attempt a landing in the surf, for the sea is breaking along the summit of a sunken cliff—jagged and sharp as broken glass, poisonous as the venom of a snake.

They came out to us in a whaleboat; Riley, the supercargo, and I were the first to go ashore. As we pulled away from the schooner a high-pitched argument began. One of the principal men of the island had come out as a passenger and was sitting beside me. He insisted that as they had got off safely from the boat passage it was best to return the same way. The boat steerer disagreed; it was all very well to put out from the passage, with a score of men to hold the boat until the moment came, and launch her out head-on to the breakers, but now the situation was different; the passage was narrow; it must be entered

A Memory of Mauké

just so, and a mishap might have unpleasant consequences in such a surf. The steersman had the best of it; he took us a quarter of a mile beyond the passage, and let his men rest on their oars off a place where the reef seemed a little lower than elsewhere.

Each time we swung up to the crest of a swell I got a look at the surf, and the prospect was not reassuring. Once or twice, as the backwash poured off in a frothy cascade, I caught a glimpse of the coral—reddish-black, jagged and forbidding. Little by little we drew near the land until the boat lay just where the waves began to tower for the final rush; the oarsmen backed water gently—the boat steerer turned his head nervously this way and that, glancing at the reef ahead and at the rearing water behind. I thought of a day, many years before, when my father had taken me for a first experience of the “chutes,” and our little boat seemed to pause for an instant at the summit of the tower before it tilted forward and flew down the steep slope to the water—ininitely far off and below. The feeling was the same—fear mingling with delight, an almost painful exhilaration.

All of us, saving the watchful figure in the stern, were waiting for a signal which would make the oarsmen leap into activity, the passengers clench their teeth and grip the rail. Suddenly it came—a harsh shout. Six oars struck the water at once; the whale-boat gathered way; a big sea rose behind us, lifted us gently on its back, and swept us toward the reef. Next moment I saw that we had started a breath too late. We were going like the wind, it was true, but not tilted forward on the crest as we should have been; the wave was gradually passing beneath us. Riley

Faery Lands of the South Seas

glanced at me and shook his head with a humorous turndown of the mouth. It was too late to stop—the men were pulling desperately, their long oars bending at every stroke. When the sea broke we were slipping down into the trough behind; as we passed over the edge of the reef the wave was beginning its backward wash. There were shouts; I found myself up to my waist in a foaming rush of water, struggling with might and main to keep my footing and to hold the boat from slipping off into the sea. We stopped her just on the brink; her keel grated on the coral; another sea was coming at us, towering high above our heads. Riley, the supercargo, and I leaped aboard in response to a sharp command. The boys held her stern-on to the last; as they scrambled over the sides the sea caught us, half swamping the boat and lifting her stern high in the air. She tilted wildly as her bow crashed on the coral, but a rare piece of luck saved her from turning broadside on. Next moment we were over the reef and gliding smoothly into the shallow water beyond. As I drew a long, satisfying breath I heard Riley chuckle. “I think I’ll get a job diving for shell,” he remarked. “I’ll swear I haven’t breathed for a good three minutes!”

When we stood on the beach a dozen men came forward, smiling, to greet their friend Rairi. With a decently pronounceable name—from the native standpoint—Riley has got off easily; I never tire of wondering what these people will call a white man. They seem to prefer the surname if it can be pronounced; if not, they try the given name, and Charley becomes Teari, or Johnny, Tioni. If this fails, or if they take a dislike to one, the fun begins. I have a friend who,

A Memory of Mauké

unless he leaves the islands, will be called Salt Pork all his life; and I know another man—a second-rate colonial of the intolerant kind—who goes blissfully about his business all unaware that hundreds of people know him by no other name than Pig Dung. No doubt you have noticed another thing down here—the deceptive simplicity of address. In these eastern islands the humblest speaks to the most powerful without any title of respect, with nothing corresponding to our “mister” or “sir.” At first one is inclined to believe that here is the beautiful and ideal democracy—the realization of the communist’s dream—and there are other things which lead to the same conclusion. Servants, for one example, are treated with extraordinary consideration and kindness; when the feast is over the mistress of the household is apt as not to dance with the man who feeds her pigs, or the head of the family to take the arm of the girl who has been waiting on his guests. The truth is that this impression of equality is false; there are not many places in the world where a more rigid social order exists—not of caste, but of classes. In the thousand or fifteen hundred years that they have inhabited the islands the Polynesians have worked out a system of human relationships nearer the ultimate, perhaps, than our own idealists would have us believe. Wealth counts for little, birth for everything; it is useless for an islander to think of raising himself in a social way—where he is born he dies, and his children after him. On the other hand, except for the abstract pleasure of position, there is little to make the small man envious of the great; he eats the same food, his dress is the same, he works as little or as much, and the relations

Faery Lands of the South Seas

between the two are of the pleasantest. There is a really charming lack of ostentation in these islands, where everything is known about everyone, and it is useless to pretend to be what one is not. That is at the root of it all—here is one place in the world, at least, where every man is sure of himself.

We were strolling up the path between the canoe houses when Riley stopped me. "Come and have a look," he said; "this is the only island I know of where you can see an old-fashioned double canoe."

There were two of them in the shed we entered, under a roof of battered galvanized iron—long, graceful hulls fashioned from the trunks of trees, joined in pairs by timbers of ironwood laid across the gunwales and lashed down with sinnet. They were beautifully finished—scraped smooth and decorated with carving. In these craft, my companion told me, the men of Mauké still voyage to Atiu and Mitiaro, as they had done for generations before Cook sailed through the group. There is an ancient feud between Mauké and Atiu; it is curious how hard such grudges die. The men of Atiu were the most warlike of all the Cook Islanders; even in these times of traders and schools and missionaries no firearms are allowed on the island. Time after time, in the old days, they raided Mauké, stealing by night upon the sleeping villages, entering each house to feel the heads of the sleepers. When they felt the large head of a warrior they seized his throat and killed him without noise; the children and women—the small heads and the heads with long hair—were taken back alive to Atiu. Terrible scenes have been enacted under the old ironwoods of Mauké, when the raiders, maddened with the

A Memory of Mauké

heat of killing, danced in the firelight about the opened ovens and gorged on the bodies of the slain; for the Cook-Islanders, excepting perhaps the people of Aitutaki, were cannibals as fierce as the Maoris of New Zealand or the tawny savages of the Marquesas. Why should Aitutaki have bred a gentler and finer people? The group is not widely scattered as islands go; there must have been fighting and intermarriage for ages past. Yet any man who has been here long can tell you at a glance from which island a native hails; even after my few weeks I am beginning to have an eye for the differences. The Mangaian is certainly the most distinct, recognizable at once by his dark skin, his wide, ugly mouth, his uncouth and savage manner. The full-blooded Rarotongan, who will soon be a rarity, is another type—handsome in a square-cut leonine way, with less energy and far more dignity of presence. The people of Aitutaki are different still—fair as the average Tahitian, and pleasing in features and manner; I have seen girls from that island who would be called beautiful in any country. These differences are not easy to account for, it seems to me, when one considers that the islanders are all of one race, tracing their ancestry back to common sources and speaking a common tongue.

The trader, a friend of Riley's, took us to his house for lunch. The day was Sunday and a feast was already preparing, so we were spared the vocal agonies of the pig. Times must be changing—I have seen very few traders of the gin-drinking type one expects to find in the South Seas; nowadays they seem to be rather quiet, reflective men, who like to read and play their phonographs in the evening, and drink excellent

Faery Lands of the South Seas

whisky with soda from a sparklet bottle. This one was no exception; I found him full of intelligence and a dreamy philosophy which kept him content in this forgotten corner of the world. He was young and English; there were cricket bats and blazers in his living room, and shelves filled with the kind of books one can read over and over again. He was pessimistic over Riley's chances of getting men—the people of Mauké were growing lazier each year, he said, and seemed to get along with less and less of the European things for which, at one time, they had worked. As for copra, they no longer bothered much with it; the nuts were left to sprout under the palms. The taro patches were running down; the coffee and breadfruit dropped off the trees unpicked; the oranges, which brought a good price when a vessel came to take them off, were allowed to drop and rot.

As we sat smoking after lunch, a native boy came in, with a vague air of conspiracy, to hold a whispered conversation with Riley. When he had gone the American winked at our host and turned to me.

“There's a beer tub going full blast out in the bush,” he said. “I think I'll drop in on them and see if I can pick up a man or two. You'd better come along.”

Liquor is prohibited to the natives throughout the Cook Islands; even the white man must buy it from the government in quantities regulated by the judgment of the official in charge. The manufacture of anything alcoholic is forbidden, but this latter law is administered with a certain degree of tolerance. Fortunately for everyone concerned, the art of making palm toddy has never been introduced; when the Cook-Islander feels the need of mild exhilaration he takes

A Memory of Mauké

to the bush and brews a beverage known as orange beer. The ingredients are sugar, orange juice, and yeast—the recipe would prove popular, I fancy, in our own orange-growing states. The story goes that when the Cook Island boys went overseas to war they found a great drought prevailing in their eastern field of action—Palestine, I think it was. But there were oranges in plenty, and these untutored islanders soon showed the Tommies a trick that brought them together like brothers. I have tasted orange beer at all stages (even the rare old vintage stuff, bottled two or three months before) and found it not at all difficult to take; there are worse varieties of tippie, though this one is apt to lead to fighting, and leaves its too-enthusiastic devotee with a headache of unusual severity.

We found fifteen or twenty men assembled under an old utu tree; a dance ended as we drew near, and the cup was being passed. Two five-gallon kerosene tins, with the tops cut off and filled with the bright-yellow beer, stood in the center of the group. Women are never present on these occasions, which correspond, in a way, to Saturday evenings in a club at home. A sort of rude ceremonial—a relic, perhaps, of kava-drinking days—is observed around the beer tub. The oldest man present, armed with a heavy stick, is appointed guardian of the peace, to see that decency and order are preserved; the natives realize, no doubt, that any serious disturbance might put an end to their fun. The single cup is filled and passed to each guest in turn; he must empty it without taking breath. After every round one of the drinkers is expected to rise and entertain the company with a dance or a song.

Riley was welcomed with shouts; he was in a gay

Faery Lands of the South Seas

mood and when we had had our turns at the cup he stripped off his tunic for a dance. He is a famous dancer; unhampered by the native conventions, he went through the figures of *heiva*, *otea*, and *ura*—first the man's part, then the woman's—while the men of Mauké clapped their hands rhythmically and choked with laughter. No wonder Riley gets on with the people; there is not an ounce of self-consciousness in him—he enters into a bit of fun with the good-natured abandon of a child. As for dancing, he is wonderful; every posture was there, every twist and wriggle and flutter of the hands—what old Bligh called, with delightful, righteous gusto, the “wanton gestures” of the *heiva*.

Riley had told his friends on the beach that he was on the lookout for labor; by this time, probably, the whole island knew he was on his way to the atoll and that he needed men. Before we took leave of the drinkers three of them had agreed to go with my companion. The sea was calmer now, and, since Riley's wife was on the schooner, we decided to go aboard for dinner. Four more recruits were waiting by the canoe houses to sign on—it was odd to see their response to the Irishman's casual offer when half the planters of the group declare that labor is unobtainable.

The whaleboat was waiting in the passage. It was evening. The wind had dropped; the sky overhead was darkening; out to the west the sun had set behind banks of white cloud rimmed with gold. The oarsmen took their places; friendly hands shot us out in a lull between two breakers; we passed the surf and pulled offshore toward where the schooner was riding an easy swell, her lights beginning to twinkle in the dusk.

Rutiaro



CHAPTER VI

Rutiaro



HANCE began to move of set purpose in Papeete, on the day I was to sail with the one-hundred-and-ten-ton schooner, *Caleb S. Winship*, for the Cloud of Islands. I was on my way to the water front, and, having plenty of time, walked leisurely, thinking of the long journey so nearly at hand, of the strange and lonely islands I was to see, and wondering, as an Anglo-Saxon must when presented with a piece of good fortune, what I had done to merit it. Oro, the cabin boy of the *Winship*, was following with my luggage. He kept at some distance, a mark of respect, as I thought, until I saw him sublet his contract to a smaller boy. Then he retired to spend the unearned increment in watermelon and a variety of cakes sold at the Chinese stalls along the street. Not wanting him to think that I begrudged him his last little fling on shore, I became interested of a sudden in the contents of a shop window, and there I saw a boxful of marbles. In a moment Oro was forgotten. Papeete faded from view, and the warm air, fragrant with the odors of vanilla and roasting coffee, became more bracing. There was a tang in it, like that of early April, in Iowa, for example, at the beginning of the marble-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

playing season. Fifteen years dropped lightly from my shoulders and I was back at the old rendezvous in the imagination, almost as really as I had ever been in the flesh. The lumber yard of S. M. Brown & Son lay on the right hand and the Rock Island Railroad tracks on the left. Between, on a stretch of smooth cinder right of way, a dozen games were in full swing. There were cries of, "Picks and vents!" "Bunchers!" "Sneakers!" "Knucks down!" the sharp crack of expert shots; the crunch of cinders under bare and yet tender feet. Meadow larks were singing in a nearby pasture, and from afar I heard the deep whistle of the Rocky Mountain Limited as it came down the Mitchellville grade.

I bought the marbles—the whole box of them. They cost fifty francs, about four dollars American, as the exchange was then, but I considered the investment a good one. I knew that, no matter where I might be, to lift the lid of my box was to make an immediate and inexpensive journey back to one of the pleasantest periods of boyhood. Oro was awaiting me at the quay, and carried my small sea chest on board with an air of spurious fatigue. I gave him my purchase and told him to stow it away for me in the cabin, which he did with such care that I did not find it again until we were within view of Rutiario. The *Caleb S. Winship* was homeward bound then, from Tanao, where we had left Crichton, the English planter. Rutiario lying on our course, it was decided to put in there in the hope that we might be able to replace our lost deck cargo of copra, washed overboard in a squall a few days previously.

Neither Findlay's *South Pacific Directory* nor the

Rutiaro

British Admiralty Sailing Directions had much to say about the atoll. Both agreed that the lagoon is nine miles long by five broad, and that on June 29, 1887, the French surveying vessel, *St. Étienne*, found the tide running through a narrow pass at two knots per hour, the flood as swift as the ebb. It was further stated that in 1889 Her Majesty's ship, *Prince Edward*, anchored in eight fathoms, three hundred yards from shore in front of the village, which is situated on the most westerly island; and that a few pigs and chickens were purchased at a nominal price from the inhabitants. With this information I had to be content in so far as my reading was concerned. There was nothing of a later date in either volume, and the impression I had was that the atoll, having been charted and briefly described, had remained unvisited, almost forgotten, for a period of thirty-one years.

This, of course, was not the case. Tinned beef and kerosene oil had followed the flag there as elsewhere in the world. Religion, in fact, had preceded it, leaving a broad wake of Bibles and black mother-hubbards still in evidence among the older generation. But skippers of small trading schooners are rarely correspondents of the hydrographic associations, and the "reports from the field" of itinerant missionaries are buried in the dusty files of the religious journals, so that Rutiaro is as little known to the world at large as it has always been. Findlay's general remarks about it were confined to a single sentence, "A lonely atoll, numbering a population of between seventy-five and one hundred inhabitants." It certainly looked lonely enough on the chart, far out on the westerly fringe of the archipelago, more than six hundred miles from the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

nearest steamship route, and that one infrequently traveled. I sought further information from Tino-a-Tino, the supercargo, a three-quarters American despite his Tahitian name. He had been trading in the Low Islands for twenty years, and during that time had created a voluminous literature with reference to their inhabitants. But it was all of an occupational nature and confined to the ledgers of the Inter-Island Trading Company. I found him at his usual task in the cabin, where he gave me some specimen compositions for criticism.

“I wish you’d look them over,” he said. “These copra bugs drive a man wild. They get in your eyes, in your liquor, in your mouth—Lord! What a life!”

The cabin was filled with unsacked copra to the level of the upper tier of bunks. One had to crawl in on hands and knees. The copra bugs were something of a nuisance, and the smell and heat oppressive. I had traveled on more comfortable vessels, with tennis courts on the boat decks and Roman swimming baths below—but they didn’t touch at Rutiaro.

I went through his accounts, verifying long lists of items, such as:

To Terii Tuahu, Dr.,

1 dozen beacon lanterns. at 480 frs. . . . Frs. 480

To Ohiti Poene, Dr.,

12 sacks Lily-Dust flour. at 300 frs. . . . Frs. 3600

To Low Hung Chin, Dr.,

1 gross Night-King flash lamps. at 3600 frs. . . . Frs. 3600

The work of checking up finished, we went out for a breath of air. The atoll lay abeam and still far distant; a faint bluish haze lifted a bare eighth of an inch above

Rutiaro

the circle of the horizon. Behind us, rain fell in a straight wall of water from a single black cloud which cast a deep shadow over the path we had come. Elsewhere the sky was clear and the sea the incredible blue of the tropics. Tino broke a long silence.

“Look here,” he said. “What is it that interests you in these islands? I’ve never known anyone to visit them for pleasure before. Is it the women, or what?”

Under pressure, I admitted that Nature seemed to have spent her best effort among the Paumotuans in fashioning the men.

“You’re right,” said Tino. “The women are healthy enough, of course, but they don’t set your heart beating a hundred to the minute. They have fine hands and white teeth, and you won’t find such black hair in all the world as you find in these atolls. But that’s the size of it. You can’t praise them any further for looks. Maybe you haven’t noticed their ears, because they always cover them up with their hair; but they’re large, and their feet and ankles—tough as sole leather and all scarred over with coral cuts. That is well enough for the men, but with the women it’s different. Makes you lose your enthusiasm, don’t it?”

I had seen a good many striking exceptions in our wanderings, but I agreed that, in the main, what he said was true.

“Well, if it isn’t the women, what else is there to be interested in? Not the islands themselves? Lord! When you’ve seen one you’ve seen the lot. Living on one of them is like living aboard ship. Not room to stretch your legs. They’re solid enough, and they

Faery Lands of the South Seas

don't sink; but in a hurricane I'd a heap rather take my chances out to sea with the *Winship* than to be lashed to the stoutest coconut tree in the whole group. Now you take Rutiaro. It was washed over seventeen years ago and all but twenty of the people killed. They are back to seventy-five now, but wait till the next bad blow down that way. They'll drown like rats just as they did before.

"Well, we won't have to step long," he added, grouchily. "I'll take what copra they have and get out. It's a God-forsaken hole. They only make about twenty-five tons a year. The island could produce three times that amount under decent management. They're a lazy, independent lot, at Rutiaro. You can't get 'em to stir themselves."

I asked him what they had to gain by stirring themselves.

"Gain?" he said. "They have everything to gain. There are only two frame houses on the place. The rest of them are miserable little shelters of coconut thatch. I haven't sold them enough corrugated iron in ten years to cover this cockpit. You remember Takaroa and Niau and Fakahina? Well, there's my idea of islands. Nice European furniture—iron beds, center tables, phonographs, bicycles—"

A further catalogue of the comforts and conveniences of civilization which the inhabitants of Rutiaro might have and didn't convinced me that this was the atoll I had been looking for, and I regretted that our stay there was to be so brief. I did not begrudge the inhabitants of richer atolls their phonographs and bicycles. They got an incredible amount of amusement out of them; listened with delight to the strange

Rutiaro

music, and spent entire evenings taking turns with the bicycles, riding them back and forth from the lagoon beach to the ocean shore. But the frame houses were blots on the landscape, crude, barnlike structures, most of them, which offend the eye like factory chimneys in a green valley. Rutiaro had none of these things, and, having no interest in it from the commercial point of view, I awaited impatiently our arrival there.

At ten o'clock we were three miles to windward of the village island. It lay at the narrower end of the lagoon, the inner shore line curving around a broad indentation where the village was. The land narrowed in one direction to a ledge of reef. At the farther end there was a small *motu* not more than three hundred yards in length by one hundred broad, separated from the main island by a strip of shallow water. Seen from aloft, the two islands resembled, roughly, in outline, an old-fashioned, high-poooped vessel with a small boat in tow. I could see the whole of the atoll from the mainmast crosstrees, the lagoon, shimmering into green over the shoals, darkening to an intense blue over unlit valleys of ocean floor; a solitude of sunlit water, placid as a lake buried in the depths of inaccessible mountains. I followed the shore line with my glasses. Distant islands, ledges of barren reef, leaped forward with an effect of magic, as though our atom of a vessel, the only sail which relieved the emptiness of the sea, had been swept in an instant to within a few yards of the surf. Great combers, green and ominous looking in the sunlight, broke at one rapidly advancing point, toppled and fell in segments, filling the inner shallows with a smother of foam. Beyond it lay the broad fringe of white, deserted beach,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

the narrow forest of shrub and palm, the empty lagoon, a border of misty islands on the farther side. I had seen the same sort of a picture twenty times before, always with the same keen sense of its desolate beauty, its allurements, its romantic loveliness. Tino had said, "When you've seen one you've seen them all," and an old skipper once told me that "the atolls are as much alike as the reef points on that sail." It is true. They are as monotonous as the sea itself and as fresh with varying interest.

The village was hidden among the trees, but I saw the French flag flying near a break in the reef which marked the landing place for small boats. Farther back, a little knot of people were gathered, some of them sitting in the full glare of the sun, others in the deep shade, leaning against the trees in attitudes of dreamy meditation. Three girls were combing their hair, talking and laughing in an animated way. They were dressed in all their European finery, gowns of flowered muslin pulled up around their bare legs to prevent soiling. A matronly woman in a red wrapper had thrown the upper covering aside and sat, naked to the waist, nursing a baby. I put down my glasses, feeling rather ashamed of my scrutiny, as though I had been peeping through a window at some intimate domestic scene. The island leaped into the distance; the broad circle of foam and jagged reef narrowed to a thread of white, and the *Caleb S. Winship* crept landward again under a light breeze, an atom of a ship on a vast and empty sea. Eight bells struck, a tinkling sound, deadened, scarcely audible in the wide air. I heard Tino's voice as though coming from an immense distance: "Hello, up there! *Kai-kai's* ready!" I said:

Rutiaro

“All right! I’m coming,” and was surprised at the loudness of my own shout. But I waited for a moment to indulge myself in a last reflection: “It is thirty-one years since the *Prince Edward* put in here. Excepting a few traders and missionaries, there isn’t probably one man in one hundred thousand who has ever heard of this atoll; not one in a million who has ever seen it or ever will see it. What a piece of luck for me!” Then I saw Oro at the galley door with a huge platter of boiled beef and sweet potatoes. The sight of it reminded me that I was very hungry. As I climbed down to the deck I was conscious of the fact that a healthy appetite and a good digestion were a piece of luck, too, and that as long as one could hold it the lure of islands would remain, and one’s love of living burn with a clear flame. Jack, the monkey, seemed to divine my thought, to agree with it. As Oro, the food bearer, passed him, he reached down from his perch in the rigging, seized the largest sweet potato on the platter, and clambered out of reach. Assured of his safety, he fell to greedily, looking out wistfully toward the land.

The pass was at the farther end of the lagoon, and in order to save time in getting the work ashore under way, the supercargo and I, with three of the sailors, put off in the whaleboat, to land on the ocean side of the village. Half a dozen men rushed into the surf, seized and held the boat as the backwash poured down the steep incline at the edge of the reef. Among them was the chief, a man of huge frame, six feet two or three in height. Like the others who assisted at the landing, he was clad only in a *pareu*, but he lost none of his dignity through his nakedness. He was fifty-five

Faery Lands of the South Seas

years old, as I afterward learned, and as he stood bidding us welcome I thought of the strange appearance certain of the chief men in America or France or England would make under similar circumstances, deprived of the kindly concealment of clothing. What a revelation it would be of skinniness or pudginess! What an exhibition of scrawny necks, fat stomachs, flat chests, flabby arms! To be strictly accurate, I had seen some fat stomachs among elderly Paumotuans, but they were exceptions, and always remarkable for that reason. And those who carried them had sturdy legs. They did not give one the uneasy feeling, common at home, at the sight of the great paunches of sedentary men toppling unsteadily along a strip of crimson carpet, from curb to club doorway.

Wherever one goes in Polynesia one is reminded, by contrast, of the cost physically to men of our own race of our sheltered way of living. There on every hand are men well past middle life, with compact, symmetrical bodies and the natural grace of healthy children. One sees them carrying immense burdens without exertion, swimming in the open sea for an hour or two at a time while spearing fish, loafing ashore with no greater apparent effort for yet longer periods. Sometimes, when they have it, they eat enormous quantities of food at one sitting, and at others, under necessity, as sparingly as so many dyspeptics. It would be impossible to formulate from their example any rules for rational living in more civilized communities. The daily quest for food under primitive conditions keeps them alert and sound of body, so that, whether they work or loaf, feast or fast, they seem always to acquire health by it.

Rutiaro

There had been no boats at Rutiaro in five months and the crowd on the beach was unfeignedly glad to see us. The arrival of a schooner at that remote island was an event of great importance; the sight of new faces lighted their own with pleasure, which warmed the heart toward them at once. We had brought ashore a consignment of goods for Moy Ling, the Chinese storekeeper, and when the handshaking was over they gathered around it as eagerly as a group of American children at a Christmas tree. Even the village constable seemed unconscious of any need for a show of dignity or authority. The only badge of his office was a cigarette-card picture of President Poincaré, fastened with a safety pin to his old felt hat. He neglected his duties as a keeper of order, and was one of the most excited of Moy Ling's helpers with the cargo. He kept patting him affectionately on the back, saying, "*Maitai! maitai!*" which in that situation may be freely translated as, "You know me, Moy Ling!" And the old Chinaman smiled the pleasant, noncommittal smile of his countrymen the world over.

Tino's was the only sour face on the beach. He moved through the crowd, giving orders, grumbling and growling half to himself and half to me. "I told you they were a lazy lot," he said. "They've seen us making in for three hours, and what have they been doing? Loafing on the beach, waiting for us instead of getting their copra together! Moy Ling is the only one in the village who is ready to do business. Five tons all sacked for weighing. He's worth a dozen Kanakas. Well, I'll set 'em to work in quick time now. You watch me! I'm going to be loaded and out of here by six o'clock."

Faery Lands of the South Seas

But chance, using me as an innocent accomplice, ordered it otherwise. It was Sir Thomas Browne who said, "Those who hold that all things are governed by fortune had not erred had they not persisted there." He may be right, although I don't remember now where his own nonpersistence lay. But there are some things, some events, which chance or fortune—whatever one wishes to call it—governs from the outset with an amazing show of omnipotence. Tracing them back, one becomes almost convinced of a fixed intent, a far-sighted, unwavering determination in its apparently haphazard functioning. It is clear to me now that, because I had been fond of playing marbles as a boy, I was to be marooned, fifteen years later, on a fragment of land, six thousand miles from the lumber yard of S. M. Brown & Son. Tino had no more to do with that result than I did. He merely lost his temper because chance disorganized his plans for an early departure; tried to quench his anger in rum, and became more furious still because he was drunk. Then off he went in the *Caleb S. Winship*, leaving me stranded ashore. I can still hear his parting salutation which he roared at me though a megaphone across the starlit lagoon, "You can stay—" But this is anticipating. The story moves in a more leisurely fashion.

As I have said, my box of marbles came to light again only a few hours before we reached Rutiaro. I took them ashore with me, thinking they might amuse the children. They had a good knowledge of the technic of shooting, acquired in a two-handed game common among the atolls, which is played with bits of polished coral. But theirs had always seemed to me a tame pastime, lacking the interest of stakes to be

Rutiaro

won or lost. I instructed them in the simple rules of "bull-ring" and "Tom's-dead," which they quickly mastered. Then I divided the marbles equally among them and gave them to understand that the winner held his gains, although marbles, like trade goods, might be bartered for. I emphasized that feature of the game because of a recollection remaining from my own marble-playing days, of the contempt in which boys were held who refused to hazard their marbles in a test of skill. They refused to play "for keeps," and the rest of us had nothing to do with them. The youngsters of Rutiaro were not of that stamp. They took their losses in good part. When I saw that I left them to themselves and went for a walk through the village. I knew—at least I thought I did—that our stay was to be brief and I wanted to make the most of it.

I followed the street bordering the lagoon, past the freshly thatched houses with their entryways wide to the sun and wind, and came at length to a small burying ground which lay in an area of green shadow far from the village. There were a dozen or more graves within the inclosure, some of them neatly mounded over with broken coral and white shell, others incased in a kind of sarcophagus of native cement to keep more restless spirits from wandering abroad. Most of them were unmarked. Two or three had wooden headboards, one of which was covered with a long inscription in Chinese. Beneath this the word "Repose" was printed in English, as though it had some peculiar talismanic significance for the Chinaman who had placed it there. It was the grave of a predecessor of Moy Ling's. I fell to thinking of him as I sat there, and of all the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Chinamen I had met in the earlier days, lonely, isolated figures, most of them, without family or friends or the saving companionship of books. What was it that kept them going? What goal were they striving toward through lives which held so little of the comfort or happiness essential to the rest of humankind? Repose? A better end than that, surely. The air rang with the sound of the word, the garish sunlight fell pitilessly on the print of it. To most men, I believe, with the best of life still before them, there is something terrible, infamous, in the thought of the unrelieved blackness of an endless, dreamless sleep. I turned from the contemplation of it; let my thoughts wander in a mist of dreams, of half-formed fancies which glimmered through consciousness like streaks of sunlight in a dusty attic. These vanished at length and for a time I was as dead to thought or feeling as Moy Ling's predecessor, sleeping beside me.

I was awakened by some one shaking me by the shoulder. A voice said, "*Haere i te pai!*" ("Come down to the boat!") and a dark figure ran on before, turning from time to time to urge me to greater speed. It was almost night, although there was still light enough to see by. I remembered that Tino had told me to be at the copra sheds at five. The tide would serve for getting through the pass until eight, but I hurried, nevertheless, feeling that something unusual had happened. Rounding a point of land which cut off the view from the village and the inner lagoon, I saw the schooner, about three hundred yards off shore, slim and black against a streak of orange cloud to the northward. She was moving slowly out, under power; the whaleboat was being hoisted over the side, and at

Rutiaro

the wheel I saw the familiar silhouette of the supercargo.

I shouted: "Hi! Tino! Wait a minute! You're not going to leave me behind, are you?"

A moment of silence followed. Then came the answer with the odd deliberation of utterance which I knew meant Tahiti rum:

"You can stay there and play marbles till hell freezes over! I'm through with you!"

What had happened, as nearly as I could make out afterward, was this: my box of marbles which I had brought ashore for the amusement of the children, interested the grown-ups as well, particularly the hazard of stakes in the games I had shown them. Paumotuans have a good deal of Scotch acquisitiveness in their make-up. They coveted those marbles—they were really worth coveting—and it was not long until play became general, a family affair, the experts in one being pitted against those in another, regardless of age or sex. Tino's threats and entreaties had been to no purpose. All work came to an end, and the only copra which got aboard the *Winship* was Moy Ling's five tons, carried out by the sailors themselves. Evidently Puarei, the chief, had been one of the most enthusiastic players. He was not a man to be bulldozed or browbeaten. He had great dignity and force of character, for all his boyish delight in simple amusements. What right had Tino to say that he should not play marbles on his own island? He gave me to understand, by means of gestures, intonation, and a mixture of French and Paumotuan, that this was what the supercargo had done. At last, apparently, Tino had sent Oro on an unsuccessful search for me. He thought,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

I suppose, that, having been the cause of the marble-playing mania, I might be able and willing to check it. Barked there, he went on board in a fit of violent temper and had not been seen again, although his voice was heard for an hour thereafter. Of a sudden anchor was weighed and I was left, as he assured me, to play marbles with the inhabitants of Rutiaro for an impossibly long time.

Most of these details I gathered afterward. At the moment I guessed just enough of the truth not to be wholly mystified. The watery sputtering of the *Winship's* twenty-five horse-power engine grew faint. Then, with a ghostly gleam of her mainsail in the starlight, she was gong. I was thinking, "By Jove! I wouldn't have missed this experience for all the copra in the Cloud of Islands!" I was glad that there were still adventures of that sort to be had in a humdrum world. It was so absurd, so fantastically unreal as to fit nothing but reality. And the event of it was exactly what I had wanted all the time without knowing it. There was no reason why I shouldn't stop at Rutiaro. To be sure, I was shortly to have met my friend Nordhoff at Papeete, but our rendezvous was planned to be broken. We were wandering in the South Pacific as opportunity and inclination should direct, which, I take it, is the only way to wander.

For a few moments I was so deeply occupied with my own thoughts that I was not conscious of what was taking place around me. All the village was gathered there, watching the departing schooner. As she vanished a loud murmur ran through the crowd, like a sigh of wind through trees—a long-drawn-out Polynesian, "Aue!" indicative of astonishment, indignation,

Rutiaro

pity. Paumotuan sympathies are large, and I had been the victim of treachery, they thought, and was silently grieving at the prospect of a long exile. They gathered around, patting me on the back in their odd way, expressing their condolences as best they could, but I soon relieved their minds on that score. Then Huirai, the constable with the cigarette-card insignia, pushed his way through with the first show of authority I had seen him make.

"I been Frisco," he said, with an odd accent on the last syllable. He had made the journey once as a stoker on one of the mail boats. Then he added, "You go to hell, me," his eyes shining with pride that he could be of service as a reminder of home to an exiled American. He was about to take charge of me, in view of his knowledge of English, but the chief waved him away with a gesture of authority. I was to be his guest, he said, at any rate for the present. He began his duties as host by entertaining me at dinner at Moy Ling's store. I was a little surprised that we did not go to his house for the meal until I remembered that the Chinaman had received the only consignment of exotic food left by the *Winship*. Puarei ordered the feast with the discrimination of a gourmet and the generosity of a sailor on shore leave for the first time in months. We had smoked herring for *hors-d'œuvre*, followed by soup, curried chicken and rice, edible birds' nests flavored with crab meat, from China, and white bread. For dessert we had small Chinese pears preserved in vinegar, which we ate out of the tin—"Woman Brand Pears," the label said. There was a colored picture on it of a white woman, in old-fashioned puffed sleeves and a long skirt, seated in a garden,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

while a Chinaman served her deferentially with pears out of the same kind of a container. Underneath was printed in English: "These pears will be found highly stimulating. We respectfully submit them to our customers." That was the first evidence I had seen of China's bid for export trade in tinned fruit. "Stimulating" may not have been just the word, but I liked the touch of Chinese courtesy which followed it. It didn't seem out of place, even coming from a canning factory.

Puarei gave all his attention to his food, and consumed an enormous quantity. My own appetite was a healthy one, but I had not his capacity of stomach; furthermore, he ate with his fingers, while I was handicapped from the first with a two-prong fork and a small tin spoon. I believe they were the only implements of the sort on the island, for the village had been searched for them before they were found. It was another evidence to me of the unfrequented nature of Rutiaro, and of its slender contact, even with the world of Papeete traders. At most of the islands we had visited, knives and forks were common, although rarely used except in the presence of strangers. The onlookers at the feast—about half the village, I should say—watched with interest my efforts to balance mouthfuls of rice on a two-prong fork. I could see that they regarded it as a ridiculous proceeding. They must have thought Americans a strange folk, checking appetite and worrying digestion with such doubtful aids. Finally I decided to follow the chief's example and set to with my fingers. They laughed at that, and Puarei looked up from his third plate of rice and chicken to nod approval. It was a strange

Rutiaro

meal, reminding me of stories I had read as a boy, of Louis XV dining in public at Versailles, with a roomful of visitors from foreign courts looking on; whispering behind fans and lace cuffs; exchanging awestruck glances at the splendor of the service, the richness of the food, and the sight of majesty fulfilling a need common to all humankind. There was no whispering among the crowd at the Chinaman's shop, no awestruck glances other than Moy Ling's, at the majesty of Puarei's appetite. I felt sorry for him as he trotted back and forth from his outdoor kitchen, bringing in more food, thinking of his depleted stock, smiling with an expression of wan and worried amiability. Louis XV would have given something, I'll venture, for that old Paumotuan chief's zest for food, for the kingly weight of bone and muscle which demanded such a store of nourishment. He pushed back his chair at length, with a sign of satisfaction, and a half-caste girl of seventeen or eighteen removed the empty dishes.

Paumotuan hospitality is an easy, gracious thing, imposing obligations on neither host nor guest. Dinner over, I told Puarei that I wanted to take a walk, and he believed me. I was free at once, and I knew that he would not be worrying meanwhile about my entertainment. I would not be searched for presently, and pounced upon with the dreaded: "See here! I'm afraid you are not having a good time," of the uneasy host. I was introduced to no one, dragged nowhere to see anything, free from the necessity of being amused. I might do as I liked—rare and glorious privilege—and I went outside, grateful for it, and for the cloak of darkness which enabled me to move about

Faery Lands of the South Seas

unobserved. It lifted here and there in the glow of supper fires, or a streak of yellow lamplight from an open doorway. I saw family groups gathered around their meals of fish and coconuts, heard the loud intake of breath as they sucked the *miti* sauce from their fingers. Dogs were splashing about in the shallows of the lagoon, seeking their own supper of fish. They are a strange breed, the dogs of the atolls, like no other that I have ever seen, a mixture of all breeds one would think, a weird blending of good blood and bad. The peculiar environment and the strange diet have altered them so that they hardly seem dogs at all, but, rather, semiamphibious animals, more at home in the sea than on land. They are gentle-mannered with their masters and with strangers, but fierce fighters among themselves. I sat down behind a clump of bushes, concealed from the light of one of the smoldering supper fires, and watched a group of Rutiaroan dogs in their search for food. They had developed a sort of team work in the business, leaped toward the shore all together with a porpoise-like curving of their bodies, and were as quick as a flock of terns to see and to seize their prey.

Returning from my walk, I found the village street deserted and all of the people assembled back of Moy Ling's shop. He was mixing bread at a table while one of the sons of his strange family piled fresh fuel on the fire under a long brick oven. It was a great event, the bread making, after the long months of dearth, and of interest to everyone. Mats were spread within the circle of the firelight. Puarei was there, with his wife—a mountain of a woman—seated at his side. She was dressed in a red-calico wrapper, and her

Rutiaro

long black hair fell in a pool of shadow on the mat behind her. She was a fit wife for a chief, in size, in energy, in the fire and spirit living in the huge bulk of flesh. Her laughter came in a clear stream which it was a delight to hear. There was no undertone of foreboding or bitter remembrance, and the flow of it, as light-hearted as a child's, heightened the merry-making mood of the others. There was a babble of talk, bursts of song, impromptu dancing to the accompaniment of an accordion and the clapping of hands. As I looked on I was minded of an account I had read of the Paumotuans in which they were described as "a dour people, silent, brooding, and religious." Religious some of them assuredly are, despite a good deal of evidence to the contrary, and they are often silent in the dreamy way of remote island people whose moods are drawn from the sea, whose minds lie fallow to the peace and the beauty of it. But "dour and brooding" is very far from the truth.

I took a place among them as quietly as possible, for I knew by repeated experience how curious they are about strangers, and first meetings were usually embarrassing. Without long training as a freak with a circus, it would try any man's courage to sit for an hour among a group of Paumotuans while he was being discussed item by item. There is nothing consciously brutal or callous in the manner of it, but, rather an unreflecting frankness like that of children in the presence of something strange to their experience. I knew little of the language, although I caught a word here and there which indicated the trend of the comment. It was not general, fortunately, but confined to those on either side of me. Two old grandmothers

Faery Lands of the South Seas

started a speculation as to whether or not I had any children, and from this a discussion rose as to which of the girls of Rutiario would be best suited as a wife for me. I was growing desperate when Chance, the god-father of all wanderers, intervened again in my favor.

Moy Ling's fire was burning brightly and it occurred to several of the youngsters to resume their marble playing. I saw Puarei's face light with pleasure, and he was on his feet at once with his stake in the ring. Others followed, and soon all those who had marbles were in the sport. I understood clearly then how helpless Tino had been. I could easily picture him rushing from group to group, furious at the thought of his interests being neglected through such childish folly. Those marbles were more desirable than his flour and canned goods, which he stood ready to exchange for copra. The explanation of this astounding fact may have been that no one thought he would go off as he did, and to-morrow would do just as well for getting down to business. Since he had gone, there was an end of that. It was futile to worry about the lost food. Certainly it was forgotten during the great tournament which took place that evening. Moy Ling worked at his bread making unnoticed. His fire died down to a heap of coals, but another was built and the play went on. Puarei was a splendid shot, in marble playing as in other respects, the best man of the village; but there was a slip of a girl who was even better. During the evening she accumulated nearly half of the entire marble supply, and at length these two met for a test of skill. It was a long-drawn-out game. I had never seen anything to equal the interest of both players and spectators; not even at

Rutiaro

Brown's lumber yard when the stakes were a boy's most precious possessions, cornelian stone taws. No one thought of sleep except a few of the old men and women, who dozed off at intervals with their heads between their knees.

The lateness of the hour—the bizarre setting for a game so linked with memories of boyhood, combined to give me an impression of unreality. I had the feeling that the island and all the people on it might vanish at any moment, and the roar of the surf resolve itself into the rumble of street traffic in some gray city. And, though it were the very city where marbles are made, where in the length or breadth of it could there be found anyone who knew the use of them, with either the time or the inclination to play? I might search it, street by street, to the soot-stained suburbs; I might go on to the green country, perhaps; visit all the old-time marble-playing rendezvous from one coast to the other, with no better success. And, though I passed through a thousand villages of the size of Rutiaro, could an evening's amusement be provided in any one of them, for men, women, and children, at an outlay of four dollars, American? The possibility would not be worth considering. People at home live too fast in these days, and they want too much. I could imagine Tino, in a sober mood, giving a grudging assent to this. "But, man!" he would have added, "I wish they had more of their marble-making enthusiasm at Rutiaro. I would put in here three times a year and fill the *Winship* with copra to within an inch of the main boom every trip."

Moy Ling had enough of it for the whole island, it seemed to me. His ovens were opened as the tourna-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ment came to an end, and for half an hour he was kept busy passing out crisp brown loaves and jotting down the list of creditors in his account book. It must have been nearly midnight. The crowd began to disperse. Puarei joined me, smiling ruefully, holding out empty hands. He had lost all of his marbles to a mite of a girl whom he could have put in his vest pocket had he owned one. His wife teased him about it on the way home, laughed heartily at his explanations and excuses. They discussed the events of the day long after the other members of the household had retired to their mats on the veranda. At last I heard their quiet breathing, and a strip of light from the last quarter moon revealed them asleep, two massive heads on the same pillow. I lay awake for a much longer time, thinking of one thing and another—of my friend Crichton at Tanao, the loneliest atoll in the world I should say; of the *Winship* far out to sea, homeward bound with one hundred and forty tons of copra in her hold; of Tino with his fits of temper, and his passion for trade which blinded him to so much of the beauty and the joy of life. But, after all, I thought, it is men like Tino who keep wheels turning and boats traveling the seas. If he were to die, his loss would be felt; there would be an eddy in the current of life around him. But men like Crichton or myself—we should go down in our time, and the broad stream would flow over our heads without a ripple to show where we had been, without a bubble rising to the surface to carry with it for a moment the memory of our lives. It was not a comforting thought, and I tried to evade it; but I realized that my New England conscience was playing a part in these reflections and was not to be

Rutiaro

soothed in any such childish manner. "How much copra have you ever produced or carried to market?" it appeared to say. I admitted that the amount was negligible. "How do you mean to justify your presence here?" was the next question, and before I could think of a satisfactory answer, "What good will come of this experience, either to yourself or to anyone else?" That was a puzzler until I happened to think of Findlay's *South Pacific Directory*. I remembered that his information about Rutiaro was very scant, the general remarks confined, as I have already said, to a single sentence, "A lonely atoll, numbering a population of between seventy-five and one hundred inhabitants." As a sop to my conscience, it occurred to me that I might write to the publishers of that learned work, suggesting that, in the light of recent investigations, they add to that description, "Fond of playing marbles."



CHAPTER VII

A Debtor of Moy Ling



PUAREI'S house stood halfway down the village street at Rutiario, facing a broad indentation from the lagoon. The Catholic church adjoined it on one side, the Protestant church on the other. Neither of them was an imposing structure, but they towered above the small frame dwelling of the chief with an air of protection, of jealous watchfulness. On sunny days they shaded his roof in turn; and, when it rained, poured over it streams of water, through lead pipes projecting from their own ampler roofs—a purely utilitarian function, since the drainage from the three buildings furnished the fresh-water supply of the settlement. If the showers were light the overflow from the largess of the rival churches, plashing on the sheets of corrugated iron, filled the house with a monotonous murmur, like the drowsy argument of two soft-voiced missionaries; but during a heavy downpour the senses were stunned by the incessant thunder, as though one were inclosed in an immense drum, beaten with nonsectarian vigor by all the Salvation Armies in the world.

It was during such a deluge, one day in early spring, that I lay on the guest bed in Puarei's one-room house,

A Debtor of Moy Ling

watching Poura, his wife, who had washed my linen with her own hands and was then ironing it. It was not, strictly speaking, linen. The articles were three—a sleeveless guaze singlet, a cotton handkerchief, and a faded khaki shirt. A pair of khaki trousers, a pair of canvas tennis shoes, and a pandanus hat completed my wardrobe. Since I needed the whole of it when going abroad about the island, it was necessary to go to bed on washing day, and to wait there until the laundering was finished, and such repairs made as constant wear had caused and further wear demanded. How to replenish it and to meet other simple urgent needs gave me cause for some concern, and I was going over the problem as I lay on Puarei's guest bed. It was toward the end of my second week at Rutiaro, and already I was beginning to look decidedly shabby. My shoes were rotted out with sea water, and both shirt and trousers, which were far from new at the time of my arrival, gave evidence of early dissolution. Poura had washed, sewed on buttons, drawn seams together, but the garments were chronically ailing, as hopeless of effective repair as an old man far gone in senile decay. Poura was becoming discouraged about them, and I knew that she must be wondering why I didn't buy some fresh ones. I had a very good reason for not doing so—I had no money. I had been left at Rutiaro without so much as a twenty-five-centime piece, and the Banque de l'Indo-Chine was six hundred miles away.

It would not occur to either Puarei or his wife that I was in need of funds. Theirs was one of the more primitive atolls of the Low Archipelago, where all white men are regarded as mysteriously affluent. If, instead of being marooned at Rutiaro through Tino's fit of

Faery Lands of the South Seas

temper, I had been discovered a mile outside the reef, making toward the land clad only in a pair of swimming trunks, upon reaching it my rescuers would have expected me, as a matter of course, to take a bulky parcel of thousand-franc notes from beneath that garment. I had, in fact, made a secret inventory of my wealth after the sudden departure of the *Caleb Winship*, hoping there might be a forgotten bank note in one of my trousers pockets. What I found was a cotton handkerchief, a picture post card of the Woolworth Building, and a small musical instrument called an *ocharina*, or, more commonly, a sweet-potato whistle. The handkerchief I needed; the post card seemed of no practical use as a means of barter; and, while I might have given up the *ocharina*, it had but a slight monetary value, and Moy Ling, the Chinese storekeeper of the village, was not interested in it. I didn't offer it to him outright. Instead, I played on it, in front of his shop, "The March of the Black Watch," which I could render with some skill. Thereafter every youngster on the island coveted the instrument, but Moy Ling made no offers and the prospect of a wardrobe was as far away as ever.

His supply of European clothing was limited, but ample to supply my wants. He found for me three undershirts, size forty-four, two gingham outer shirts of less ample proportions, a pair of dungaree overalls, and a pair of rope-sole shoes. I asked him to put these articles aside and went off to reflect upon ways and means of opening a credit account with the canny Chinaman. There was one possible method open to me; I might adopt the *pareu* as a costume. I could buy three of them for the price of one undershirt, and

A Debtor of Moy Ling

I believed that Moy Ling would trust me to that extent. Nearly all of the natives wore *pareus*. They had put aside their trousers and shirts and gingham dresses now that I was no longer a stranger to them, and were much more comfortable in their simple, knee-length garments, those of the men reaching from the waist, those of the women twisted tightly under the arms. Simple and convenient though it was, I felt that it would be absurd for me to assume that style of dress, since I was not accustomed to it. Furthermore, I remembered the ridiculous appearance of Americans and Europeans I had seen at Tahiti—queer people from all sorts of queer places, who come and go through the capital of French Oceania. They rushed into *pareus* the moment of their arrival at Papeete, and before a week had passed were more primitive in a sophisticated way than the Tahitians themselves. I had no desire to join the ranks of the amateur cannibals, even though there was some excuse for it at Rutiario; and I knew that the Paumotuans would have more respect for me if I dressed after the manner of my own race.

But how obtain clothing without money—without divulging to anyone that I had no money? The question dinned through my brain with annoying persistence, like the thunder of falling water on Puarei's iron roof. Would it, after all, be best to confide in the chief? I could tell him of my bank account at Papeete, and he knew, of course, that the *Caleb Winship* had left me without a word of warning, taking my sea chest with her. I was tempted to make a confession of my predicament, but pride or a kind of childish vanity prevented me.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

“No, by Jove!” I said. “I’ll be hanged if I do! Puarei, his wife—all the rest of them—expect me to live up to their traditional conceptions of white men. I am supposed to be mysteriously affluent, and I owe it to them to preserve that myth in all its romantic glamour.”

I had no feeling of guilt in making this decision; rather, a sense of virtue, like that of an indulgent father upon assuring his children that there is a Santa Claus. I decided to be not only mysteriously, but incredibly, affluent. Therefore, when the rain had passed I put on my mended garments and went to Moy Ling’s shop.

I found him splitting coconuts in front of his copra shed, and beckoned to him in a careless way. He came forward, smiling pleasantly as usual, but there was a shrewd glitter in his eyes which said, quite as plainly as words, “Honorable sir, I bow before you, but I expect an adequate monetary return for the service.” I was not intimidated, however, and when he brought forth the articles I had selected earlier I waved them aside—all of them excepting the rope-sole shoes, the only male footgear of any kind on the island. I explained that I had not before seen the bolt of white drill—the most expensive cloth in his shop—and that I wanted enough of it to make four suits. I saw at once that I had risen in his estimation about 75 per cent, and, thus encouraged, I went on buying lavishly—white-cotton cloth for underwear and shirts; some pencils and his entire supply of notebooks for my voluminous observations on the life and character of the Paumotuans; a Night-King flash lamp; a dozen silk handkerchiefs of Chinese manufacture; a dozen pairs of earrings and four locket and chains;

A Debtor of Moy Ling

ten kilos of flour and two of coffee; three bottles of perfume in fancy boxes; four large bolts of ribbon—enough to reach from one end of the village to the other; side and back combs for women, superbly ornamented with bits of colored glass; a bolt of mosquito netting; a monkey wrench; two Beacon lanterns; a pandanus mat; and one bow tie already made up, the kind sold at home in “gents’ furnishings” shops.

At the beginning I had no thought of going in so recklessly. But as I went from article to article the conviction grew upon me that the deeper I plunged the greater the impression I should make upon Moy Ling, and it was essential that I should convince him that my mythical wealth was real. He became more and more deferential as my heap of purchases increased in size. I made no inquiry as to the price of anything, believing that to be in keeping with the mysteriously affluent tradition. At my back I heard a hum of excited conversation. The shop was filled with people. I felt the crush behind me, but took no notice of it and went on with my passionless orgy of spending: two bolts of women’s dress goods; four pocketknives; a can of green paint and another of white—but details are tiresome. It is enough to say that I bought lavishly, and selected odds and ends of things because Moy’s shop contained nothing else. He had a large supply of food, but in other respects his stock was low, and when I had finished, some of his shelves were almost bare. On one there remained only a box of chewing gum. An inscription printed on the side of it read: “Chew on, MacDuff! You can’t chew out the original mint-leaf flavor” of somebody’s pepsin gum—words to that effect. That product of American epicurean-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ism is to be found, strangely enough, at nearly every Chinaman's store in the Low Archipelago. I bought twenty packages of it, since there were no other confections to be had, and distributed them among the children. The youthful MacDuffs chewed on for some thirty seconds and then swallowed, believing, in their unenlightened way, that gum is a sort of food. I had read of monkeys dying in zoos because of the same practice; but, in so far as I know, there were no ill effects from it at Rutiaro, either then or later.

I succeeded very well in impressing Puarei. He was astonished at the number of my purchases; and Poura said, "Au-e!" shoed out the mint-breathed porters who carried them to the house, and sat down in the doorway, her enormous body completely blocking the entrance. On the veranda the conversation crackled and sparkled with conjecture. I could hear above the others the voice of Paki, wife of the constable, enumerating the things I had bought. It sounded odd in Paumotuan—a high-pitched recitative of strange words, most of them adapted from the English since all of the articles were unknown to the natives before the coming of the traders—*faraoa* (flour), *ripine* (ribbon), *peni* (pencil or pen), *taofe* (coffee), etc.

I myself was wondering what use I could make of some of my wealth. The flour I would give to Puarei, and his ten-ton cutter was badly in need of paint. Poura would be glad to have the dress goods for herself and her girls, for the Rutiaroans put aside their *pareus* on Sunday and dressed in European costume. I could also give her the mosquito netting as a drapery for the guest bed. I had, in fact, bought it with that end in mind, for on windless nights, particularly after

A Debtor of Moy Ling

a rain, the mosquitoes were a fearful nuisance. Puarei's household was used to them, but I tossed and tumbled, and at last would have to paddle out on the lagoon and stay there till morning. The coffee, likewise, was for my own use, Puarei believing that the drinking of either tea or coffee was forbidden by his variety of the Christian religion. Tobacco, too, was a product of evil, and the use of it made broad the way to hell. It is impossible to believe that any missionary would wander so far to preach such theology. What had happened, very likely, was that one of the more austere churchmen who visit Rutiaro at rare intervals had condemned those white man's comforts as injurious to health. He must have been severe in his denunciation, for Puarei had got the idea that abstinence from the enjoyment of them was exacted in a sort of amendment to the Ten Commandments. I did my best to corrupt him, for breakfast at his house was to me a cheerless meal. His faith was not to be shaken, however, although he admitted that coffee drinking might not damn me, since I had been taught to believe that it would not.

I was thinking with pleasure of his tolerance and of the comforting beverage I should have the following morning when I remembered that mine was green Tahiti coffee which must be taken to Moy Ling for roasting. His shop was deserted. I could see it at the end of the sunlit street, steaming with moisture after the rain. The open doorway was a square of black shadow. It lightened with a misty glimmer as I watched, and suddenly Moy flashed into view. He ran quickly down the steps, halted irresolutely, and stood for a moment, shading his eyes with his hand,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

looking in the direction of Puarei's house. Then he turned, mounted the steps again, and vanished slowly in the gloom. I was uneasy, knowing what he was thinking; but an island less than three miles long, with an average width of four hundred yards, offers a poor refuge for a faint-hearted debtor. And so, having stowed my other purchases under the guest bed, I took the bag of coffee and returned to Moy's store, hoping that I might quiet his fears by increasing my obligation to him.

When one is without them, clothing, coffee, tobacco, and other such necessities assume a place of exaggerated importance, which is the reason why the memories of the earlier part of my stay at Rutiaro are tinged with the thought of them. But I had not come to the Low Islands to spend all of my time and energy in the mere fight for a comfortable existence. I could have done that quite as well at home, with greater results in the development of a more or less Crusoe-like resourcefulness. At Rutiaro the life was strange and new to me, and I found the days too short for observing it and the nights for reflecting upon it. My first interest, of course, was Puarei's household—the chief, his wife, two sons, and three daughters all housed in that one-room frame building. The room was commodious, however, about twenty-five feet by fifteen, and on the lagoon side there was a broad veranda where Poura and her daughters did much of their work and passed their hours of leisure. Behind the house was a large cistern, built of blocks of cemented coral, and a small outkitchen made of the odds and ends of packing cases and roofed with thatch.

I wondered at Puarei's preference for a board box

A Debtor of Moy Ling

covered with corrugated iron, to the seemly houses of the other Rutiaroans. He thought it a palace, and, being a chief, the richest man of the atoll, it was in keeping with the later Paumotuian tradition that he should have a white man's kind of dwelling. Unsightly though it was without, the economy of furnishing gave the interior an air of pleasant spaciousness, like that of the island itself with its scarcity of plant life and of trees other than the coconut. There was no European furniture with the exception of a sewing machine and the guest bed, an old-fashioned, slatted affair which looked strange in that environment. On it was a mattress of *kspok* and two immense pillows filled with the same material. The linen was immaculate, and the outer coverlet decorated with hibiscus flowers worked in silk. I had no hesitation in accepting the bed, for it would not have held Puarei and his wife. The slats would have given away at once under their weight, and Poura assured me that the children preferred sleeping on their mats on the veranda. The rest of the furnishings were like those of the other houses—two or three chests for clothing; pandanus mats for the floor; paddles, fishing spears, and water glasses stacked in a corner or lying across the rafters. An open cabinet of native manufacture held the toilet articles of the women—a hand mirror, a few combs, and a bottle of unscented coconut oil, the one cosmetic of the Low Islands, which was used by all members of the family. There were also several articles of jewelry such as the traders sell, some fishing hooks of pearl shell, and, on a lower shelf, a Tahitian Bible. The walls were hung with branches of curiously formed coral, hat wreaths and necklaces of shell wrought in beautiful and intricate

Faery Lands of the South Seas

designs. There were no pictures other than the open windows looking out on the lagoon in one direction, and in the other, across the level, shaded floor of the island toward the sea.

We spent but little time indoors. All of the cooking was done in the open, and we had our food there, sitting cross-legged around a cloth of green fronds. The trees around us furnished the dishes. I had not used my tin spoon and the two-pronged fork since the evening of my arrival, and learned to suck the *miti* sauce from my fingers with as loud a zest as any of them. Usually we had two meals a day at Rutiaro, but there was no regularity about the time of serving them. We ate when we were hungry and food was to be had, sometimes in the middle of the afternoon, and as late as ten in the evening. That is one reason why I remember so well the feasts prepared by Poura and her daughters, and served by them, for they never sat down to their own food until we had finished. Feasts of a simple kind, but, by Jove! how good everything tasted after a day of fishing and swimming in the lagoon or out at sea. I didn't tire of coconuts as quickly as I had feared I should; and the fish were prepared in a variety of ways—boiled, roasted over hot stones, grilled on the coals, or we ate them raw with a savor of *miti* sauce. Puarei's dog, one of the best fishers of the island, was the only member of the family discriminating in his requirements. He often came up while we were at dinner, with a live fish in his mouth, which he would lay at Poura's feet, looking at her appealingly until she cooked it for him. Sometimes, to tease him, she threw it away, but he would bring it back, and, no matter how hungry he might be, refuse to eat it raw.

A Debtor of Moy Ling

The sea furnished occasional variety of diet in the way of turtles and devilfish; and I contributed rice, tinned meat, and other preserved food which I bought of Moy Ling whenever I imagined his confidence in me was beginning to falter. That was a risky procedure, only to be undertaken on the days when I was so filled with animal spirits that I more than half believed in my wealth, in my power to draw money or anything else I wanted out of the clear, dry air of Rutiaro.

One thing I had wanted from the first, above all others—a house. The idea of imposing indefinitely upon Puarei's hospitality was distasteful, and no boats were expected within five or six months. I had not, in years, lived for so long a period at any one place. Here was an opportunity I had often dreamed of for having a home of my own. I should have to ask the chief for it, and at first thought the request seemed a large one. Then, too, how could I say to him with any show of logic: "Puarei, I am not willing to bother you longer by occupying the guest bed in your house. Therefore, will you please give me a house to myself?" He might think I had peculiar ideas of delicacy. But further reflection convinced me that, while I could not ask him for a pair of trousers—not even for so trifling a thing as a shirt button, since he would have to purchase it at Moy Ling's store—I might legitimately suggest the gift of a house. It would cost only the labor of making it, and that was not great. At Rutiaro houses were built in less time than was needed to sail across the lagoon and back. The inhabitants might reasonably have adopted the early Chinese method of roasting pig by putting the carcasses in their dwellings and setting fire to the thatch. It would have been a

Faery Lands of the South Seas

sensible procedure, employed at times when the old thatch needed renewal. Nothing permanent would have been destroyed except the framework of poles, and that could be replaced as easily as firewood could be cut for a Maori oven.

The upshot of the matter was that I was given not only a house, but an island of my own to set it on—I who had lived much of my life up four or five flights of stairs, in furnished rooms looking out on chimney pots and brick courts filled with odors and family washings. The site was a small *motu* lying at the entrance to the lagoon, four miles from the village island. It had a name which meant, “The place where the souls were eaten.” Once, a man, his wife, and two children went there to fish on the reef near the pass. All of them were taken ill of some mysterious disease, and died on the same day. As their souls left their bodies they were seized and eaten by some vindictive human spirits in the form of sea birds. The legend was evidently a very ancient one, and the events which it described had happened so long ago that fear of the place had largely vanished. Nevertheless, the chief tried to persuade me to choose another site; and Poura, when she learned that I wanted to live on the Soul-Eaters’ Island, was deeply concerned. Neither of them could understand why I should want to live away from the village island. I wince, even now, when I think of the appalling tactlessness of that request; but the fact is that the Paumotuans themselves, by their example, had got me into the vicious habit of truth-telling in such matters. There is no word in their language for tact. They believe that a man has adequate, although sometimes hidden, reasons for doing what he wants to

A Debtor of Moy Ling

do, and they understand that it explains seemingly uncourtly behavior.

I had accepted, almost unconsciously, their own point of view, so that it didn't occur to me to invent any polite falsehoods. But my knowledge of Paumotuans was more limited than Paurei's knowledge of French, and how was I to explain my desire for so lonely a place as the Soul-Eaters' Island? The Paumotuans, from their scarcity of numbers, the isolation of their fragments of land, the dangers of the sea around them, are drawn together naturally, inevitably. How make clear to them the unnatural gregariousness of life in great cities? Suddenly I thought of my picture post card of the Woolworth Building. I told them that in America many people, thousands of them, were cooped together in houses of that sort. I had been compelled to spend several years in one and had got such a horror of the life that I had come all the way to the Cloud of Islands, searching for a place where I might be occasionally alone.

While the post card was passing from hand to hand, Huirai, the constable, loyal friend in every emergency, gave color to my explanation by describing—for the thousand and first time, I suppose—his adventures in San Francisco. Dusk deepened, the last ghostly light faded from the clouds along the northern horizon, and still he talked on; and the idlers on the chief's veranda listened with as keen interest as though they had never heard the story before. Poura, who was at work on my new wardrobe, lit a lamp and placed it on the floor beside her, shading it from her eyes with a piece of matting. The light ran smoothly over her brown hands, and the mountain of shadow

Faery Lands of the South Seas

behind her blotted out the forms of the trees. Now and then she put down her work and gazed intently in Huirai's direction. His voice rose and fell, thrilled with excitement, died away to a deep whisper of awe as he told of the wonders he had seen, the street cars, the lofty buildings, the elevators which rose to an immense height as swiftly as a coconut would fall, the trains, the motors, the ships, the pictures which were alive. He imitated sounds with amazing fidelity, and his gestures, vaguely seen in the gloom, were vividly pictorial of the marvels he had met with in his travels.

The story ended abruptly and Huirai sat down, conscious of the effect he had produced. No one spoke for a long while. Then the chief, who was sitting beside me, broke the silence with that strange Polynesian exclamation of wonder too great for words, "Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah!" uttered with distinct, rapid precision, like the staccato of machine-gun fire. He laid his hand on my knee affectionately, with an air of proprietorship; and at the contact a feeling of pride rose in me, as though I were the planner of the cities, the magician whose brain had given birth to the marvels Huirai had described. But conceit of that kind may be measurably reduced by a moment of reflection, and I remembered that the extent of my contribution to my native land was that I had left it. Small cause for vanity there. However, I had no mind for another tussle with my conscience. I had been the indirect cause of eloquence in Huirai and of enjoyment in his auditors. That was enough for one evening on the credit side. On the other side, to Puarei, to Poura, to his children, and to all the kindly, hospitable people of Rutiario I was under an obligation which I could never hope to cancel.

A Debtor of Moy Ling

But they didn't expect me to cancel it. I was not even under the necessity of showing appreciation. Just as there is no word in their language for "tact," there is none approaching our word "gratitude" in meaning. To a man in my position, owner of Soul-Eaters' Island, and of a house to be built there the following day, that was something to be grateful for.

The Chinese language is richer, I believe, in terms implying obligation. I was reminded, less pleasantly, of another account on the debit side, by the flare of a match which lit up for a moment the pensive, cadaverous face of Moy Ling.



CHAPTER VIII

An Adventure in Solitude



I AWOKE sometime during the latter part of the night with the bemused presentiment that a longed-for event was approaching or in the process of happening. Hands had passed lightly over my face—either that or I had dreamed it—and I heard a faint shout coming from the borderland between sleeping and waking. Puarei's guest bed, with its billowy mattress of kapok, seemed strangely hard, which led to the discovery that I was not lying on a bed, but on a mat in the corner of an empty room. The floor was covered with crushed krora shell which made a faint radiance in the gloom, and a roof of green thatch was alight with the reflections of moving water. I was trying to puzzle out whose house this could be when I heard the shout again, clearly this time, in a pause of silence between deafening claps of thunder. From nearer at hand came the sound of subdued laughter. Something elfish, light-hearted in the quality of it, stirred a dim memory and there flashed into mind the lines of an old poem:

Come, dear children, come out and play.
The moon is shining as bright as day.
Up the ladder and over the wall—

An Adventure in Solitude

Raising my head quickly, I saw through the open doorway their perfect illustration. The wall was the smooth wall of the sea, with a waning moon rising just clear of it, sending a path of light to the strip of white beach in front of the house. The palm trees bordering the shore swarmed with children who were throwing down nuts. One ancient tree, its stem a fantastic curve, held its foliage far out over the water at a point where the floor of the narrow outer lagoon shelved steeply toward the reef some fifty yards distant. Both boys and girls were shinning up the trunk, one after the other, diving from the plumed top, dropping feet foremost, jumping with their hands clasped around their knees into the foaming water—the wreckage of huge combers which broke on the reef pouring across it into the inner shallows. A second group had gathered in the moonlit area just before the doorway. Several youngsters were peering intently in my direction. Others were playing a sort of hand-clapping game to the accompaniment of an odd little singsong. A small girl, with a baby riding astride her hip, walked past, and I saw another, of ten or twelve, standing at the edge of the track of shimmering light, holding a coconut to her lips with both hands. Her head was bent far back and her hair hung free from her shoulders as she drained the cool liquid to the last drop.

Imagine coming out of the depths of sleep to the consciousness of such a scene! I was hardly more sure of the reality of it than I had been of the shout, the touch of hands. It was like a picture out of a book of fairy tales, but one quick with life, the figures coming and going against a background of empty sea where the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

long swell broke in lines of white fire on a ledge of coral. I remembered where I was, of course: in my own house, which stood on the ocean side of a small *motu* known in the Paumotuan legend as "The island where the souls were eaten." The house had been built for me only the day before by the order of Puarei, chief of the atoll of Rutiario; and the *motu* was one of a dozen uninhabited islands which lay on the thirty-mile circumference to the lagoons.

It was ordered—by chance, which took me there, perhaps—that I was never to see the place in the clear light of usual experience, but rather through a glamour like that of remembered dreams—a long succession of dreams in which, night after night, events shape themselves according to the heart's desire, or even more fantastically, with an airy disregard for any semblance to reality. So it was, waking from sleep on the first night which I spent under my own roof. I was almost ready to believe that my presence there was not the result of chance. Waywardness of fancy is one of the most godlike of the attributes of that divinity, but the display of it is as likely as not to be unfriendly. Here there seemed to be reasoned kindly action. "Providence," I said to myself—"Providence without a doubt; a little repentant, perhaps, because of questionable gifts in the past." A whimsical Providence, too, which delighted in shocking my sense of probability. What could those children be doing on Soul-Eaters' Island in the middle of the night? I, myself, had left the village island, four miles distant, only a few hours earlier, and at that time everyone was asleep. There was not a sound of human activity in the settlement; not a glimmer of light to be seen anywhere excepting in

An Adventure in Solitude

Moy Ling's, the Chinaman's, shop, and on the surface of the lagoon where lay the misty reflections of the stars. "Perhaps," I thought, "these are not earthly children. Maybe they are the ghosts of those whose souls were eaten here so many years ago." I was more than half serious in thinking of that possibility. Stranger things had happened on islands not so far removed from the world of men.

I dressed very quietly and went to the door, taking care to keep well in the shadow so that I might look on for a moment without being seen. My doubts vanished at once. Not only the children had come out to play; fathers and mothers, as well. Tamitanga was there and Rikitia and Nahea and Pohu and Tahere and Hunga; Nui-Tane and Nui-Vahine, Tamataha, Manono, Havaiki; and I saw old Rangituki, who was at least seventy and a grandmother several times over, clapping her hands with others of her generation and swaying from side to side in time to the music of Kaupia's accordion. All the older people were grouped around Puarei, who was seated in an old deck chair, a sort of throne which was carried about for him wherever he went. Poura, his wife, lay on a mat beside him, her chin propped on her hands. Both greeted me cordially, but offered no explanation for the reason of the midnight visit. I was glad that they didn't. I liked the casualness of it, which was quite in keeping with habits of life at Rutiario. But I couldn't help smiling, remembering my reflections earlier in the evening. I believed then that I was crossing the threshold of what was to be an adventure in solitude, and was in a mood of absurdly youthful elation at the prospect. "I was to delve deeply, for the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

first time, into my own resources against loneliness. I had known the solitude of cities, but there one has the comfortable sense of nearness to others; the refuge of books, pictures, music—all the distractions which prevent any very searching examination of one's capacity for a life of retirement. At Soul-Eaters' Island I would have no books, no pictures, excepting a colored post card of the Woolworth Building which had won me this opportunity; and for music I was limited to what I could make for myself with my *ocharina*, my sweet-potato whistle which had a range of one octave. Thus scantily provided with diversions, I was to learn how far my own thoughts would serve to make a solitary life not only endurable, but pleasant."

So I had dreamed as I paddled down the lagoon, with my island taking form against the starlit sky to the eastward. It was one of those places which set one to dreaming, which seem fashioned by nature for the enjoyment of a definite kind of experience. Seeing it, whether by day or by night, the most gregarious of men, I am sure, would have become suddenly enamored of his own companionship and the most prosaic would have discovered a second, meditative self which pleads for indulgence with gentle obstinacy. But, alas! my own unsocial nature gained but a barren victory, being robbed, at the outset, of the fruits of it, by the seventy-five convivial inhabitants of Rutiaro. Here within six hours was half the village at my door, and Puarei told me that the rest of it, or as many as were provided with canoes, was following. Evidently he had suggested the invasion. My new house needed warming—or the Paumotuan equivalent to that festival—so they had come to warm it.

An Adventure in Solitude

Preparations were being made on an elaborate scale. The children were gathering green nuts for drinking and fronds for the cloth at the feast. Women and girls were grating the meat of ripe nuts, pressing out the milk for the *miti haari*; cleaning fish; preparing shells for dishes. Some of the men and the older boys were building native ovens—eight of them, each one large enough for roasting a pig. All of this work was being carried out under Puarei's direction and to the accompaniment of Kaupia's accordion. I wish that I might in some way make real to others the unreal loveliness of the scene. It must be remembered that it took place on one of the loneliest of a lonely cloud of islands which lay in the midmost solitude of an empty ocean. The moonlight must be remembered, too, and how it lay in splinters of silver on the motionless fronds of the palms as though it were of the very texture of their polished surfaces. And you must hear Kaupia's accordion, and the shouts of the children as they dove into the pool of silvered foam. The older ones, out of respect to me, I think, wore wisps of parou cloth about their loins, but the babies were as naked as on the day they were born. Tereki was standing among these five-and-six-year-olders, who were too small for the climb to the diving place, taking them up, sometimes two at once, and tossing them into the pool among the others, where they were as much at home as so many minnows. Watching them, I thought with regret of my own lost opportunities as a child. I felt a deep pity for all the children of civilization who must wear clothing and who never know the joy of playing at midnight, and by moonlight too. Mothers' clubs and child-welfare organizations would do well to

Faery Lands of the South Seas

consider the advisability of repealing the old "to bed at seven" law, the bugbear of all children. Its only merits, if it may be so called, is that it fosters in children, a certain melancholy intellectual enjoyment in such poems as, "Up the ladder and over the wall," where the forbidden pleasures are held out to them as though they were natural ones—which most of them are, of course—and quite possible of attainment.

I was sorry that Tino, supercargo of the *Caleb S. Winship*, could not be present to see how blithely the work went forward. He had called the people of Rutiario a lazy lot, and he was right—they were lazy, according to the standards of temperate climates. But when they worked toward an end which pleased them their industry was astonishing. Tino's belief was that man was made to labor, whether joyfully or not, in order that he might increase his wealth, whether he needed it or not, and that of the world at large. I remember meeting somewhat the same point of view in reading the lives and memoirs of some of the old missionaries to the islands. It seems to have irked them terribly, finding a people who had never heard that doleful hymn, "Work, for the Night Is Coming." They, too, believed that the needs of the Polynesians should be increased, but for ethical reasons, in order that they should be compelled to cultivate regular habits of industry in order to satisfy them. Although I didn't agree with it, Tino's seemed to me the sounder conviction. The missionaries might have argued as reasonably for a general distribution of Job-like boils, in order that the virtues of patience and fortitude might have wider dissemination. But neither trade nor religion had altered to any noticeable extent the habits

An Adventure in Solitude

of life at Rutiaro. The people worked, as they had always done, under the press of necessity. Their simple needs being satisfied, their inertia was a thing to marvel at. I have often seen them sitting for hours at a time, moving only with the shadows which sheltered them. There was something awe-inspiring in their immobility, in their attitude of profound reverie. I felt at times that I was living in a land under a perpetual enchantment of silence and sleep. These periods of calm—or, as Tino would say, laziness—were usually brought to an end by Puarei. It was a fascinating thing to watch him throwing off the enchantment, so gradual the process was and so strange the contrast when he was thoroughly awakened and had roused the village from its long sleep. Then would follow a period of activity—fishing, copra making, canoe building, whatever there was to do would be done, not speedily, perhaps, but smoothly, and fasts would be broken—in the case of many of the villagers for the first time in two or three days. My house was built during such a period. I was still living with Puarei on the village island, wondering when, if ever, I was to have the promised dwelling. Then one afternoon, while I was absent on a shell-gathering expedition, the village set out *en masse* for Soul-Eaters' Island, cut the timbers, branded the fronds, erected, swept, and garnished my house, and were at the settlement again before I myself had returned. That task finished, here they were back for the warming festival, and the energy spent in preparing for it would have more than loaded Tino's schooner with copra. I couldn't flatter myself that all of this was done solely to give me pleasure. They found pleasure in it too, and, furthermore, I

Faery Lands of the South Seas

knew that an unusually long interval of fasting called for compensation in the way of feasting.

Puarei was in a gay mood. Religion sat rather heavily upon him sometimes—by virtue of his Papeete schooling, he was the chief elder of his church; but once he sloughed off his air of Latter Day Saintliness he made a splendid master of revels; and he threw it aside the moment the drums began to beat, and led a dozen of the younger men in a dance which I had not seen before. It was very much like modern Swedish drill set to music, except that the movements were as intricate and graceful as they were exhausting. Three kinds of drums were used—one, an empty gasoline tin, upon which the drummer kept up a steady roll while the dance was in progress. The rhythm for the movements was indicated by three others, two of them beating hollowed cylinders of wood, while a third was provided with an old French army drum of the Napoleonic period. The syncopation was extraordinary. Measures were divided in an amazing variety of ways, and often when the opportunity seemed lost the fragments joined perfectly just as the next one was at hand. The music was a kaleidoscope in sound, made up of unique and startling variations in tempo, as the dance moved from one figure to the next.

At the close of it Kaupia took up her accordion again, and dancing by some of the women followed. At length, Rangituki, grandmother though she was, could resist the music no longer. The others gave way to her, and in a moment she was dancing alone, proudly, with a sort of wistful abandon, as though she were remembering her youth, throwing a last defiance in the teeth of Time. Kaupia sang as she played to an air

An Adventure in Solitude

which had but four changes in it. The verse was five words long and repeated endlessly.

*Tu fra to potta mi,
Tu fra to potta mi.*

Both the words and the air had a familiar sound. They called to mind a shadowy picture of three tall, thin women in spangled skirts, all of them beating tambourines in unison and dancing in front of a painted screen. I couldn't account for the strange vision at first. It glimmered faintly, far in the depths of subconscious memory, like a colored newspaper supplement, lying in murky water at the end of a pier. Suddenly it rose into focus, drawn to the surface by the buoyant splendor of a name—the Cherry Sisters. I remembered then a vaudeville troupe which long ago made sorry capital of its lack of comeliness; and I saw them again on the island where the souls were eaten as clearly as ever I had as a youngster, knocking their tambourines on bony elbows, shaking their curls, and singing

“Shoe, fly, don't bother me,”

in shrill, cracked voices. Kaupia's version was merely a phonetic translation of the words. They meant nothing in the Paumotuan dialect; and—old woman though she was—Rangituki's dance, which accompanied the music, played in faster and faster time, was in striking contrast to the angular movements of the Cherry Sisters, tripping it in the background, across the dim footlights of the eighteen nineties.

Other canoes were arriving during this time, and at

Faery Lands of the South Seas

last a large canoe, which had put off from the ocean side of the village island, was seen making in toward the pass. It was loaded with pigs and chickens, the most important part of the feast, and had been eagerly awaited for more than an hour. Shouts of anticipation went up from the shore as the boat drew in with its wished-for freight; but these were a little premature. There was a stretch of ugly, broken water to be passed, where the swift ebb from the lagoon met the swell of the open sea. The canoe was badly jostled in crossing it, and some of the chickens, having worked loose from their bonds, escaped. Like the dogs of the atolls, the chickens are of a wild breed, and they took the air with sturdy wings. The chase from the shore began at once, but it was a hopeless one. Soul-Eaters' Island is five hundred yards long by three hundred broad, and there is another, on the opposite side of the pass, which is more than a mile in extent. We made frantic efforts to prevent them from reaching it. We threw sticks and stones, tried to entice them with broken coconuts, the meat temptingly accessible. It was to no purpose. They had been enticed before; their crops were full, and several hours of captivity had made them wary. Furthermore, like all Polynesian chickens, they seemed to have a racial memory of what they had been in other times, in less congenial environments—of the lean days when they had been caught and eaten at will, chased by dogs, run down by horses. They were not so far from all that as to have lost conscious pride in their regained prerogative of flight. The last we saw of them they were using it to splendid advantage over the rapid stream which separated the two islands. One old hen, alone, remained perched in the top of a

An Adventure in Solitude

coconut tree on Soul-Eaters' Island. She was in no hurry to leave. She knew that she could follow the others whenever she liked, and she knew that we knew it. She seemed drunk with a sense of freedom and power, and cackled proudly, as though more than half convinced that the nuts clustered in the nest of foliage beneath her were eggs which she had laid.

Knowing the wholesomeness of the Paumotuan appetite, I could understand why the loss of the chickens was regarded seriously. A dozen of them remained, and we had eight pigs weighing from one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds each, to say nothing of some fifty pounds of fish. All of this was good, in so far as it went, but there was a gloomy shaking of heads as we returned from our fruitless chase. Not that the Paumotuans are particularly fond of chicken; on the contrary, they don't care greatly for fowl of any sort, but it serves to fill odd corners of their capacious stomachs. It was this they were thinking of, and the possible lack, at the end of the feast, of the feeling of almost painful satiety which is to them an essential after-dinner sensation. In this emergency I contributed four one-pound tins of beef and salmon, my entire stock of substantial provisions for the adventure in solitude; but I could see that Puarei, as well as the others, regarded this as a mere relish—a wholly acceptable but light course of *hors-d'œuvre*. Fortunately there was at hand an inexhaustible reservoir of food—the sea—and we prepared to go there for further supplies. I never lost an opportunity to witness those fish-spearing expeditions. Once I had tried my hand as a participant and found myself as dangerously out of my element as a Paumotuan would be at

Faery Lands of the South Seas

the joy stick of an airplane. I saw a great many fish, but I could not have speared one of them if it had been moored to the bottom, and after a few absurd attempts was myself fished into the boat, half drowned. I lay there for a few minutes, gasping for breath, my ear drums throbbing painfully from the attempt to reach unaccustomed depths.

The experiment convinced me that fish spearing in the open sea is not an easily acquired art, but one handed down in its perfection through at least twenty generations of Low Island ancestors. It is falling into disuse in some of the atolls where wealth is accumulating and tinned food plentiful; but the inhabitants of Rutiaro still follow it with old-time zest. They handle their spears affectionately, as anglers handle and sort their flies. These are true sportsman's weapons, provided with a single unbarbed dart, bound with sinnet to a tapering shaft from eight to ten feet long. Their water goggles, like their spears, they make for themselves. They are somewhat like an aviator's goggles, disks of clear glass fitted in brass rims, with an inner cushion of rubber which cups closely around the eyes, preventing the entrance of water. When adjusted they give the wearer an owlish appearance, like the horn-rimmed spectacles which used to be affected by American undergraduates. Thus equipped, with their *pareus* girded into loin cloths, a half dozen of the younger men jumped into the rapid current which flows past Soul-Eaters' Island and swam out to sea.

Tohetika, Tehina, Pinga (the boat steerer), and I followed in a canoe. Dawn was at hand and, looking back, I saw the island, my house, and the crowd on the beach in the suffused, unreal light of sun and fading

An Adventure in Solitude

moon. In front of us the swimmers were already approaching the tumbled waters at the entrance to the pass. Upon reaching it they disappeared together, and I next saw them far on the other side, swimming in a direction parallel to the reef, and some fifty yards beyond the breaking point of the surf. When we joined them the sun was above the horizon and they were already at the sport. They lay face down on the surface of the water, turning their heads now and then for a breath of air. They swam with an easy breast stroke and a barely perceptible movement of the legs, holding their spears with their toes, near the end of the long shaft. Riding the long, smooth swell, it was hard to keep them in view, and they were diving repeatedly, coming to the surface again at unexpected places.

Through the clear water I could see every crevice and cranny in the shelving slope of coral; the mouths of gloomy caverns which undermined the reef, and swarms of fish, as strangely colored as the coral itself, passing through them, flashing across sunlit spaces, or hovering in the shadows of overhanging ledges. It was a strange world to look down upon and stranger still to see men moving about in it as though it were their natural home. Sometimes they grasped their spears as a poniard would be held for a downward blow; sometimes with the thumb forward, thrusting with an underhand movement. They were marvelously quick and accurate at striking. I had a nicer appreciation of their skill after my one attempt, which had proven to me how difficult it is to judge precisely the distance, the location of the prey, and the second for the thrust. A novice was helpless. He suffered under the heavy pressure of the water, and the long holding of his breath

Faery Lands of the South Seas

cost him agonized effort. Even though he were comfortable physically he might chase, with as good result, the dancing reflections of a mirror, turned this way and that in the sunlight.

As they searched the depths to the seaward side the bodies of the fishers grew shadowy, vanished altogether, reappeared as they passed over a lighter background of blue or green which marked an invisible shoal. At last they would come clearly into view, the spear held erect, rising like embodied spirits through an element of matchless purity which seemed neither air nor water. The whistling noises which they made as they regained the surface gave the last touch of unreality to the scene. I have never understood the reason for this practice which is universal among the divers and fishers of the Low Islands, unless it is that their lungs, being famished for air, they breathe it out grudgingly through half-closed teeth. Heard against the thunder of the surf, the sounds, hoarse or shrill, according to the wont of the diver, seemed anything but human.

We returned in an hour's time with the canoe half filled with fish—square-nosed *tinga-tingas*, silvery *tamures*, brown spotted *kitos*, *gnareas*; we had more than made good the loss of the chickens. The preparations for the feast had been completed. The table was set or, better, the cloth of green fronds was laid on the ground near the beach. At each place there was a tin of my corned beef or salmon; the half of a coconut shell filled with raw fish, cut into small pieces in a sauce of *miti haari*—salted coconut milk—and a green coconut for drinking. Along the center of the table were great piles of fish, baked and raw; roast pork and chicken; mounds of bread stacked up like cannon

An Adventure in Solitude

balls. The bread was not of Moy Ling's baking, but made in native fashion—lumps of boiled dough of the size and weight of large grape fruit. One would think that the most optimistic stomach would ache at the prospect of receiving it, but the Paumotuan stomach is of ostrichlike hardihood and, as I have said, after long fasting it demands quantity rather than quality in food.

It was then about half past six, a seasonable hour for the feast, for the air was still cool and fresh. The food was steaming on the table, but we were not yet ready to sit down to it. Fête days, like Sundays, required costumes appropriate to the occasion, and everyone retired into the bush to change clothing. I thought then that I was to be the only disreputable banqueter of the lot, and regretted that I had been so eager to see my new house. Not expecting visitors, I had come away from the village with only my supply of food. Fortunately, Puarei had been thoughtful for me. I found not only my white clothing, but my other possessions—bolts of ribbon, perfume, the cheap jewelry, etc., which I had bought, on credit, of Moy Ling. And the house itself had been furnished and decorated during the hour when I was out with the fish spearers. There was a table and a chair, made of bits of old packing cases, in one corner; and on the sleeping mat a crazy quilt and a pillow with my name worked in red silk within a border of flowers. Hanging from the ceiling was a faded papier-maché bell, the kind one sees in grocers' windows at home at Christmas time. This was originally the gift of some trader; and the pictures, too, which decorated the walls. They had been cut from the advertising pages of some

Faery Lands of the South Seas

American magazine. One of them represented a man, dressed in a much-advertised brand of underwear, who was smiling with cool solicitude at two others who were perspiring heavily and wishing—if the legend printed beneath was true—that their underwear bore the same stamp as that of their fortunate comrade. There was another, in color, of a woman smiling across a table at her husband, who smiled back while they ate a particular brand of beans. The four walls of my house were hung with pictures of this sort, strung on cords of coconut fiber—Huirai's work, I was sure, done out of the kindness of his heart. He was merely an unconscious agent of the gods, administering this further reproof for my temerity in seeking consciously an adventure in solitude. As I changed my clothing I pondered the problem as to how I could get rid of the gallery without giving Huirai offense, and from this I fell to thinking of the people smiling down at me. Is our race made up, in large part, of such out-and-out materialists, whose chief joy in life lies in discovering some hitherto untried brand of soup or talcum powder? Do they live, these people? They looked real enough in the picture. I seemed to know many of them, and I remembered their innumerable prototypes I had met in the world I had left only the year before. "Well, if they are real," I thought, "what has become of the old doomsday men and women who used to stand at street corners with bundles of tracts in their hands, saying to passers-by, 'My friend, is your soul saved?'" No answer came from the smiling materialists on all sides of me. They smiled still, as though in mockery of my attempt to elude them in whatsoever unfrequented corner of the world; as though life were merely the

An Adventure in Solitude

endless enjoyment of creature comforts, the endless, effortless use of labor-saving devices. One man, in his late fifties, who really ought to have been thinking about his soul, had in his eyes only the light of sensual gratification. He was in pajamas and half shaven, announcing to me, to the world at large: "At last! A razor!"

The sight of him offering me his useful little instrument put an end to my meditation. I rubbed ruefully a three days' growth of beard, thinking of the torture in store for me when I should next go to Pinga for a shave. He was the village barber, as well as its most skillful boat steerer. His other customers were used to his razor and his methods, and their faces were inured to pain; for had not their ancestors, through countless generations, had their beards plucked out hair by hair? I, on the other hand, was the creature of my own land of creature comforts. The anticipation of a shave was agony, and the realization—Pinga sitting on my chest, holding my head firm with one immense hand while he scraped and rasped with his dull razor—that was to die weekly and to live to die again. I got what amusement I could from the thought of the different set of values at Rutiario. I had only to ask for a house, and Puarei had given me one, with an island of my own to set it on. He thought no more of the request than if I had asked him for a drinking coconut. But not all the wealth of the Low Island pearl fisheries, had it been mine to offer, could have procured for me a safety razor with a dozen good blades.

I heard Puarei shouting, "*Haere mai ta maa!*" and went out to join the others, my unshaved beard in woeful contrast to my immaculate white clothing.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

But my guests, or hosts, had the native courtesy of many primitive people, and I was not made conscious of my unreaped chin. Furthermore, everyone was hungry, and so, after Puarei had said grace for the Church of Latter Day Saints, and Huirai a second one for the Reformed Church of Latter Day Saints, and Nui-Tano a third as the Catholic representative, we fell to without further loss of time.

The enjoyment of food is assuredly one of the great blessings of life, although it is not a cause for perpetual smiling, as the writers of advertisements would have one believe. According to the Low Island way of thinking, it is not a subject to be talked about at any length. I liked their custom of eating in silence, with everyone giving undivided attention to the business in hand. It gave one the privilege of doing likewise, a relief to a man weary of the unnatural dining habits of more advanced people. It may be a trifle gross to think of your food while you are eating it, but it is natural and, if the doctors are to be believed, an excellent aid to digestion. Now and then Puarei would say, "*Ē mea maitai, tera*" ("A thing good, that"), tapping a haunch of roast pork with his forefinger. And I would reply, "*Ē, é mea maitai roa, tera*" ("Yes, a thing very good, that"). Then we would fall to eating again. On my right, Hunga went from fish to pork and from pork to tinned beef, whipping the *miti haari* to his lips with his fingers without the loss of a drop. Only once he paused for a moment and let his eyes wander the length of the table. Shaking his head with a sigh of satisfaction, he said, "*Katinga ahuru katinga*" ("Food and yet more food"). There is no phrase sweeter to Paumotuan ears than that one.

An Adventure in Solitude

Huirai, the constable, was the only one who made any social demands upon me. As already related, he had once made a journey from Papeete to San Francisco as a stoker on one of the mail boats and was immensely proud of the few English phrases which he had picked up during the voyage. He didn't know the meaning of them, but that made no difference. He could put on side before the others, make them believe that he was carrying on an intelligent conversation. "What's the matter?" "Oh yes!" "Never mind" were among his favorite expressions—unusually mild ones, it seemed to me, for one who had been associated with a gang of cockney stokers; and he brought them out apropos of nothing. He was an exasperating old hypocrite, but a genial one, and I couldn't help replying to some of his feints at conversation. Once, out of curiosity, wondering what his reply would be, I said, "Huirai, you're the worst old four-flusher in the seventy-two islands, aren't you?" He smiled and nodded, and came back with the most telling of all his phrases, "You go to hell, me." On that occasion it was delivered with what seemed something more than mere parrotlike aptness of reply.

Clipped to his undershirt he wore a fountain pen, which was as much a part of his costume on those dress occasions as his dungaree trousers and pandanus hat. It had a broken point, was always dry, and, although Huirai read fairly well, he could hardly write his own name. No matter. He would no more have forgotten his pen than a French soldier his *Croix de guerre*. But he was not alone in his love for these implements of the *popaa's* (white man's) culture. There was Havaiki, for example, who owned a small

Faery Lands of the South Seas

folding camera which he had bought from some trader. The two men were very jealous of each other. Huirai had traveled and had a fountain pen, but Havaiki's camera was a much more complicated instrument. There had never been any films for it, but he was quite satisfied without them. The camera stood on a shelf at his house, an ever-present proof of his better title to distinction. His chief regret, I believe, was that he couldn't wear it, as Huarai did his pen. But he often carried it with him on Sundays and went through the pretense of taking pictures. Some of the more sanguine still believed that he would one day surprise the village by producing a large number of magnificent photographs.

A further account of the feast at Soul-Eaters' Island would be nothing more than a detailed statement of the amount of food consumed, and it would not be credited as truthful. It is enough to say that it was a Latter Day miracle, comparable to the feeding of the five thousand, with this reversal of the circumstances—that food for approximately that number was eaten by twenty-two men. At last Puarei sat back with a groan of content and said, “*Aué! Paia 'huru paia to tatou.*” It is impossible to translate this literally, but the exact meaning is, ‘We are all of us full up to the neck.’ It was true. We were. That is, all of the men. The women and children were waiting, and as soon as we gave them place they set to on the remnants. Fortunately, there was, as Hunga had said, food and yet more food, so that no one went hungry. At the close of the feast I saw old Rangituki take a fragment of coconut frond and weave it into a neat basket. Then she gathered into it all of the fish bones and hung the

An Adventure in Solitude

basket from one of the rafters of my house. Rangituki was pure heathen, one of the unredeemed of the Rutiarians, but I noticed that some of the Catholics and Latter Day Saints, even the Reformed Saints of the later Latter Day persuasion, all in good standing in their churches, assisted her in making the collection. I had observed the same practice at other islands. At the beginning of a meal thanks were given to the God of Christians for the bounty of the sea; but fisherman's luck was a matter of the first importance, and, while the old gods might be overthrown, there seemed to be a fairly general belief that it would not do to trifle with immemorial custom.

It was midmorning before the last of the broken meats had been removed and the beach made tidy. The breeze died away, and the shadows of the palms moved only with the imperceptible advance of the sun. It was a time for rest, for quiet meditation, and all of the older people were gathered in the shade, gazing out over a sea as tranquil as their minds, as lonely as their lives had always been and would always be. I knew that they would remain thus throughout the day, talking a little, after the refreshment of light slumbers, but for the most part sitting without speech or movement, their consciousness crossed by vague thoughts which would stir it scarcely more than the cat's-paw ruffled the surface of the water. No sudden, half-anguished realization of the swift passage of time would disturb the peace of their reverie; no sense of old loss to be retrieved would goad them into swift and feverish action.

A land crab moved across a strip of sunlight and sidled into his hole, pulling his grotesque little shadow

Faery Lands of the South Seas

after him; and the children, restless little spirits, splashed and shouted in the shallows of the lagoon, maneuvering fleets of empty beef and salmon tins—reminders of the strange beginning of my adventure in solitude.



CHAPTER IX

The Starry Threshold



THE only visible reminder which I have now of my residence on “the island where the souls were eaten” is a pocket notebook of penciled comment, with a dozen pages, blank and fair, at the back—in themselves a reminder of the fragmentary nature of that adventure in solitude, of the blank pages at the close of every chapter of experience, awaiting the final comment which is never set down. It is a small notebook of Chinese manufacture, with a pretty fantasy of flowers woven through the word “Memoranda,” and butterflies with wings of gold-and-blue hovering over it, meant to suggest, perhaps, that one’s memories, however happy or however seemingly enduring, are as ephemeral as they and must soon fade and die. But I am not willing to accept such a suggestion, to believe that I can ever forget even the most trivial of the events which took place at Rutiario or at Soul-Eaters’ Island. By some peculiar virtue of their own they stand out with the vividness of portions of childhood experience which remains fixed in the memory when other more important happenings have been long forgotten.

The casual reader of the notebook would never guess this from the comment written there. Did he know

Faery Lands of the South Seas

the length and the nature of my residence at the atoll, he would be surprised, merely, that with so much leisure for observation there should be such poverty of recorded fact. I, myself, am surprised and a little appalled when I think how the weeks slipped by, leaving me nothing to show for them. I became a spend-thrift of time. I was under the delusion that my own just share of it had been immeasurably increased, that in some unaccountable way I had fallen heir to a legacy of hours and days which could never be exhausted. The delusion was of gradual growth, like the habit of reverie which fastens itself at last upon the most restless of wanderers among the atolls. In the beginning I was full of business. I remember with what earnestness of purpose I wrote on the first page of the notebook, "Rutiaro: Observations on Life and Character in the Low Archipelago." I had ambitious plans. I meant to go back and forth between my hermitage and the village island, notebook in hand, saying, "*Eaha tera?*" ("What is that?"), "*Nafea ia parau Paumotu?*" ("How do you say this in Paumotuan?"). And when I had learned the language and had completed my studies of flora and fauna I was to be the Boswell of the atoll, curious, tireless, not to be rebuked by the wind rustling the fronds of the palms nor by the voice of the sea when the wind was low, saying, "Sh-h-h, sh-h-h," on thirty miles of coral reef.

But I was rebuked—or so it seemed to me—and now, I fear, the learned monograph is never to be written. A faltering purpose is plainly indicated in the notebook. It becomes apparent in the first observation on "The Life and Character of the Paumotuans," which reads:

The Starry Threshold

Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is; where those immortal shapes
Of bright ærial spirits live ensphered
In regions mild, of calm and serene air.

The president of the Polynesian society would say, and rightly, no doubt, that this is not germane to the subject. But at the time I wrote it it was so accurately descriptive of the place where my house stood that it might have been embodied with scarcely the exchange of a word in an exact real-estate announcement of the location of my property. I set it down one evening in early summer, the evening of my first day's residence at Soul-Eaters' Island. The completion of my house had been celebrated with a feast, and toward midnight I was left alone, watching the departure of the last of the villagers, who were returning in their canoes along the ocean side of the atoll. The sea was as calm as I have ever seen it, and as they went homeward, dipping their paddles into the shining tracks of the stars, my guests were singing an old chant. It was one of innumerable verses, telling of an evil earth spirit in the form of a sea bird which was supposed to make its home on the *motu*, and at the end of each verse the voices of the women rose in the refrain which I could hear long after the canoes had passed from sight:

*"Aué! Aué!
Te nehenehe é!"*
("Alas! Alas!
How beautiful it is!")

a lament that a spirit so vindictive, so pitiless, should be so fair to outward seeming.

Standing at the starry threshold, listening to the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ghostly refrain, I translated its application—its meaning, too—from the bird to the island where, perhaps, I would one day see it in my rambles. I regretted that it was so inaccessible, so remote and hidden from the world, as though that were not more than half the reason for its untarnished beauty. It is a maudlin feeling, that of sadness at the thought of loveliness hidden from appraising eyes; and I am inclined to think that it springs, not so much from an unselfish desire to share it, as from a vulgar longing to say to one's gregarious fellows: "See what I have found! Can you show me anything to equal it in beauty, you dwellers in cities?" Whatever its source in this case, I was glad that it passed quickly. No tears stained my pillow, even though I knew that Rutiario could never be the goal of Sunday excursionists. But I was not quite easy in mind as I composed myself for sleep. I had made a poor beginning as a diarist. The first entry was fanciful and, furthermore, not my own. What original contribution to truth or beauty could I make as a result of the day's events? Finally I rose, lit my lamp, and wrote, underneath the *Comus* quotation:

"The Paumotuans are very fond of perfume. This is probably due to the fact that their islands, being scantily provided with flowers and sweet-smelling herbs, they take this means of satisfying their craving for fragrant odors."

Alas! Alas!
How erroneous it was!

that observation. But I thought when I made it that it was based upon a careful enough consideration of the

The Starry Threshold

facts. During the afternoon I had distributed some gifts among my guests, chiefly among the children. I had some bolts of ribbon and dress goods, some earrings and bracelets, thinly washed in gold, which I had bought, on credit, of Moy Ling, the Chinaman, and I had been saving them for just such an occasion as the feast at Soul-Eaters' Island. I also had a case of perfume which Moy had been very reluctant to part with—perfume and toilet waters in fancy bottles, with quaint legends printed on the labels—"June Rose," which the makers admitted had "as much body as higher-priced perfumes"; "Wild Violet: Like a faint breath from the forest floor"; "Khiva Bouquet: The Soul of the Exquisite Orient"; etc. This gift was greatly coveted. Pinga immediately took charge of the three bottles I had given his daughters and packed them carefully in a *pareu*, together with a bottle of bay rum presented to him by virtue of his office as village barber. Rangituki went among her grandchildren scolding and rating, until she had made a similar collection, and in a short time all of the perfume was in the hands of a few of the older people. This seemed to me rather high-handed procedure, but it was not my place to interfere with parental and grandparental authority. And it was as well, perhaps, that the children should be restrained. Otherwise they would have saturated their clothing and their hair, and the atoll would have smelled to heaven or very near it.

I thought no more of the episode until the following Sunday when I went to church at the village. A combined service of Latter Day Saints and the Reformed Church of Latter Day Saints was being held, an

Faery Lands of the South Seas

amicable arrangement which would have scandalized the white missionaries of those rival denominations. But at Rutiaro Saints and Reformed Saints live together peaceably enough and, being few in numbers, they often join forces for greater effect in the *himines*. The meeting was held in the Reformed church, a sightly structure built entirely of *niau*—the braided fronds of coconut palms—and the earthen floor was covered with mats of the same material. At one end of the room there was a raised platform and a deal table which served as a pulpit. The walls lengthwise were built to prop open outward, giving free circulation to the air and charming views of the shaded floor of the island and the blue waters of the lagoon.

The church was full, the men sitting on one side and the women on the other, according to island custom, and the children playing about on the floor between the benches. Many of the older people, too, sat on the floor with their backs to the posts which supported the roof. Interest lagged during the intervals between the singing, and although Huarai was preaching in his usual forceful, denunciatory manner, I found my own thoughts wandering on secular paths. Of a sudden it occurred to me that June Rose should be discernible among the women of the congregation if it had as much body as had been claimed for it. But I could not detect its presence nor did the faintest breath reach me from the forest floor. I was conscious only of the penetrating odor of drying copra which came through the open windows and the not unpleasant smell of coconut oil.

What had become of the perfume, I wondered. On Sunday, if at all, it should have been in evidence, for

The Starry Threshold

the women were in white dresses and before coming to church had made their most elaborate toilet of the week. But Huirai was warming to his theme and demanded attention, at least from me, not having heard him preach before. He had removed his coat and was perspiring and exhorting in a way which would have pleased the most devout and gloomy of missionaries. He had a peculiar oratorical manner. His face foretold clearly the birth of an idea. One could read there the first vague impulse in the brain which gave rise to it; see it gathering lucidity, glimmering, like heat lightning on a summer evening, in his cloudy mind, until it was given utterance in a voice of thunder, which rumbled away to silence as the light of creation died out of his eyes. Then he would stand motionless, gazing on vacancy, profoundly unself-conscious, as though he were merely the passionless mouthpiece of some higher power. The abruptness of his outbursts and his ferocious aspect when delivering them were disconcerting; and it was even worse when, at intervals, his eyes met mine. Even though he were in the midst of a sentence he would pause and his face would beam with a radiant smile, in striking contrast to the forbidding scowl of the moment before. Remembering his mission, he would then proceed in his former manner. Without understanding his discourse, one would have said that he was condemning all of his auditors, who had evidently been guilty of the most frightful sins. But this was not the case. His sentences were short and in the periods of silence between them I had time to make a translation.

“*Ua taparahi Kaina ia Abela* (Cain killed Abel). . . . Why did he kill him? . . . Because he was a bad man, a

Faery Lands of the South Seas

very bad man—(*taata ino roa*). . . . He was jealous of Abel, whom God loved because he willingly brought him gifts from his plantation. . . . Abel did not keep everything for himself. . . . He said to God, '*Teie te faraoa na Oe*' ('Here is bread for you'). . . . He gave other things, too, many things, and he was glad to give them."

Huirai talked at great length on this theme, the members of the congregation sometimes listening and sometimes conversing among themselves. They had no scruples about interrupting the sermon. While Huirai was awaiting further inspiration hymns were started by the women and taken up at once by the others. Pinga, who sang bass parts, rocked back and forth to the cadence, one hand cupped over his right ear, the better to enjoy the effect of the music. Rangituki, who went to the different churches in turn, because of the *himines*, had one of her granddaughters in her lap, and while she sang made a careful examination of the child's head, in search of a tiny parasite which favored that nesting place. Nui-Vahine sat with her breast bare, suckling a three-months-old baby. Old men and women and young, even the children, sang. Huirai alone was silent, gazing with moody abstraction over the heads of the congregation as he pondered further the ethical points at issue in the Cain and Abel story.

I had witnessed many scenes like this during the months spent in cruising among the atolls on the *Caleb S. Winship*—scenes to interest one again and again and to furnish food for a great deal of futile speculation. How important a thing in the lives of these primitive people is this religion of ours which has

The Starry Threshold

replaced their old beliefs and superstitions? It would be absurd to say, "how fundamental," for religious faith is of slow growth and it was only yesterday, as time is counted, that the ship *Duff*, carrying the first missionaries who had ever visited this southern ocean, came to anchor at Tahiti. One of Huirai's remarks called to mind an account I had read of that first meeting between Christian missionaries and the heathen they had come to save. It is to be found in the narrative of the *Duff's* three years' voyage in the south Pacific, published in 1799, by the London Missionary Society:

Sunday, March 5, 1797.

The morning was pleasant, and with a gentle breeze we had, by seven o'clock, got abreast of the district of Atahooroo, whence we saw several canoes putting off and paddling toward us with great speed; at the same time it fell calm, which, being in their favor, we soon counted seventy-four canoes around us, many of them double ones, containing about twenty persons each. Being so numerous, we endeavored to keep them from crowding on board; but, in spite of all our efforts to prevent it, there were soon not less than one hundred of them dancing and capering like frantic persons about our decks, crying, "*Tayo! Tayo!*" and a few broken sentences of English were often repeated. They had no weapons of any kind among them; however, to keep them in awe, some of the great guns were ordered to be hoisted out of the hold whilst they, as free from apprehension as the intention of mischief, cheerfully assisted to put them on their carriages. When the first ceremonies were over, we began to view our new friends with an eye of inquiry; their wild, disorderly behavior, strong smell of coconut oil, together with the tricks of the *arreoies*, lessened the favorable opinion we had formed of them; neither could we see aught of that elegance and beauty in their women for which they have been so greatly celebrated. This at first seemed to depreciate them in the estimation of our brethren; but the cheerfulness, good nature, and generosity of these kind people soon removed the momentary prejudices. . . . They continued to go about the decks till the transports of their joy gradually subsided, when many of them left us of their own accord. . . . Those who remained, in number

Faery Lands of the South Seas

about forty, being brought to order, the brethren proposed having divine service on the quarterdeck. Mr. Cover officiated; he perhaps was the first that ever mentioned with reverence the Saviour's name to these poor heathens. Such hymns were selected as had the most harmonious tunes—first, "O'er the Gloomy Hills of Darkness"; then, "Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow"; and at the conclusion, "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow." . . . The whole service lasted about an hour and a quarter.

How clear a picture one has of the scene, described by men whose purity of faith, whose sincerity of belief, were beyond question. But one smiles a little sadly at the thought of their austerity, their total lack of that other divine attribute—a sense of humor. "*Tayo! Tayo!*" ("Friend! Friend!") the Tahitians cried, and the missionaries, to requite them for their kindly welcome, organized a prayer meeting an hour and a quarter in length, and sang, "O'er the Gloomy Hills of Darkness." It was a prophecy, that song. The Tahitians and others of the Polynesian family have gone far on that road since 1797.

Of course one doesn't blame the missionaries for this; but it seems to me that the chief benefit resulting from the Christianizing process is that it has offset some of the evils resulting from the rest of the civilizing process. This was not the opinion of Tino, supercargo of the *Caleb S. Winship*, however. I remember a conversation which I had with him on the subject, when Rutiaro itself lay within view, but still far distant. For the sake of argument I had made some willfully disparaging remark about traders, and Tino had taken exception to it.

"You're wrong," he said. "You know as well as I do—or maybe you don't—what these people used to be: cannibals, and not so many years ago at that. I

The Starry Threshold

don't suppose you would call it a genteel practice? Well, what stopped it? I'll tell you what stopped it—tinned beef.”

That was a new angle of vision to me. I said nothing, but I thought I could detect a hint of a smile in his eyes as he waited for the statement to sink in.

“I have had some fun in my time,” he went on, “arguing this out with the missionaries. I say tinned beef and they say the four gospels. Can't be proved either way, of course. But suppose, right now, every trading schooner in the archipelago was to lay a course for Papeete. Suppose not one of them was to go back to the atolls for the next twenty-five years. Leave the people to themselves, as you say, and let them have their missionaries, with the Golden Rule in one hand and the Ten Commandments in the other. What chance would they have of dying a natural death? The missionaries, I mean. About as much chance as I have of getting old Maroaki at Taka Raro to pay me the eight hundred francs he owes me.

“What makes me laugh inside is that the missionaries are so serious about the influence they have had on the natives. I could tell them some things—but what would be the use? They wouldn't believe me. Just before we left Papeete this time I was talking to one of the Protestants. He told me that his Church had two thousand converts in French Oceania, while the Catholics had only around six hundred, I believe it was. I said that I knew how he could get that extra six hundred into his own fold, and probably a good many more if he wanted to. All he had to do was to charter my schooner, load her with Tahiti produce—bananas, mangoes, oranges, breadfruit; he needn't take

Faery Lands of the South Seas

a single gallon of rum unless he wanted to. Then we would make a tour of the islands, holding church festivals, with refreshments, at every one; and at the end of the cruise I would guarantee that there wouldn't be a Catholic left in all the Paumotus. He didn't take to the plan at all, and of course it did have one weak point—if the Brothers tried the same game they would have just the same success, and nobody could tell from one week to the next which were Protestants and which were Catholics.

“That's about what happened at Taka Raro the last time I was down there. The population is supposed to be divided about half and half between the Latter Day Saints and the Catholics. There are no missionaries living on the island. The head churches in Papeete send their men around when they can to see how things are going with their flocks. That is usually about once a year for each of them. Boats don't often put in at Taka Raro. I've been there only four times in ten years, myself, and the last time I brought down a young fellow from the Protestant crowd. He had been with me the whole cruise, holding services at the islands where I had put in for copra. I hadn't gone to any of them, but at Taka Raro I felt the need of some religion. I had spent the whole day chasing that Maroaki I spoke about. The old rascal has owed me that eight hundred francs since nineteen ten. He is an elder in his church too. The minute he makes out my schooner standing in toward the pass off he goes on important business to the far end of the lagoon. I went after him that day, with my usual luck. He wasn't to be found, and I came back to the village feeling a bit ruffled up.

The Starry Threshold

“It was just time for the meeting, and I decided that I might as well go as to loaf around finding that old hypocrite while my copra was being loaded. The church was packed when I went in. There wasn’t a Catholic in the village that evening. All of those who had been Catholics were taking part in the *himine* and singing the Protestant songs as well as the Latter Day Saints’. No one seemed to pay much attention to the sermon, though. The young missionary didn’t understand the language very well, and the preaching was hard for him. But he seemed to feel pretty good about the meeting, and when we left, the next day, he went down to the cabin to write a report of the progress his church had made at Taka Raro. He must have had a lot to say, for he was at it all the morning. He didn’t know that we passed the *Ata* just after we got out of the pass. That made me feel good, for Louis Germaine, her skipper, has been a rival of mine for years, and I had every kilo of dry copra there was on the island. I got the megaphone and was about to yell, ‘Good luck to you, Louis!’ when I saw that he had a missionary aboard, too—a priest with a knee-length beard and a black cloak; so I only waved my hand and Louis shook his fist and shouted something I couldn’t make out. I was going to the westward, stood close inshore, and passed the village from the outside an hour later. The priest hadn’t lost any time getting his congregation together. Since there was no copra to be bought, I suppose Louis told him he had to get a move on. There had been another religious landslide. I was sure of that from the singing, which I heard clear enough, the wind being offshore. Great singers these Paumotuans, and

Faery Lands of the South Seas

it doesn't make very much difference to them whether the song is 'Happy Day' or 'Jerusalem, the Golden.' Of course I didn't say anything to my missionary. As the old saying is, 'What you don't know won't hurt you.'"

This conversation with Tino was running through my mind as I strolled down the village island after the service. Tino, I decided, was prejudiced. His was the typical trader's point of view. I had heard many other incidents which bore him out in his findings, but they came usually from men interested in exploiting the islands commercially. Huirai's exposition of the old biblical story—was that merely the result of a prolonged tinned-beef crusade? Remembering the kind of sacrifice which was discussed, very likely on this very island, in the days of pure heathendom, such a conclusion seemed fantastical. No, one must be fair to the missionaries. Perhaps they were overzealous at times, oversanguine about the results of their efforts—so were all human beings in whatever line of endeavor; but their accomplishment had been undeniably great. Here were people living orderly, quiet lives. They didn't drink, although in the early days of their contact with civilization—until quite recently, in fact—there had been terrible orgies of intoxication. To overcome that was, in itself, a worthwhile accomplishment on the part of the Church. Only a few weeks before I had met Monsieur Ferlys, the administrator of the Paumotus, at Taenga. "The reign of alcohol is over," he had said to the islanders there—strange words, coming from the lips of a Frenchman. There was to be no more rum nor gin nor wine for any of the Paumotuans. Henceforth, any

The Starry Threshold

trader found selling it or any native drinking it was to be severely punished.

I continued my walk to the far end of the island and, selecting a shady spot, sat down to rest. The pressure of a notebook in my hip pocket interrupted my examination of the problem, "The missionary *versus* the trader as a civilizing influence." I was reminded that I had made no recent observations on the life and character of the Paumotuans, and the recollection was annoying. Was I never to be able to pursue, in indolence, my unprofitable musings? Why this persistent feeling that I must set them down in black and white? Why sully the fair pages of my notebook? Words, words! The world was buried beneath their visible manifestations, and still the interminable clacking of innumerable typewriters, the roar of glutted presses. In the mind's eye I saw magnificent forests being destroyed to feed this depraved appetite for words, which were piled mountain high in libraries; which encumbered all the attics in Christendom. Words, blowing about the streets and littering the parks on Sundays; filling the ash carts on Mondays. "No," I thought, "I will no longer be guilty of adding to the sum of words. I'll not write my learned monograph." But that inner voice, which itself is a creature born of many words—an artificial thing, however insistent its utterance—spoke out loud and clear: "You idler! You waster of your inheritance of energy! You throw-back to barbarism—write!"

"But why?" I replied. "Tell me that! Why?"

"Sir, because it is your vocation. And have you no convictions? Your grandfather had them, and your great-grandfather, and those missionaries of the *Duff*

Faery Lands of the South Seas

you have been thinking about. Ah! the decay of convictions in this age! The lack of that old sublime belief in something—anything! Now then, I have come down to you through a long line of ancestors, and I don't mean to die through lack of exercise. You may not believe in me, but you've got to obey me. Write!"

I know that I should have no peace until I did, so I drew forth my notebook and, in line with my thoughts of a moment before, wrote, underneath the last observation on perfume: "The sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages among these islands is now prohibited by law. It is strange to find such legislation in territory under French administration. Is the prohibition movement to become world-wide, then? Is the reign of alcohol doomed in all lands?"

Exhausted by the mental effort, but somewhat easier in conscience, I replaced the notebook in my pocket. It was pleasant then to let the mind lie fallow or to occupy it with the reception of mere visual impressions. At length, although I didn't sleep, I was scarcely more animate than the fluted shell lying close by on the beach or the *kopapa* bushes which formed a green inclosure around my resting place.

Something whirled through the air over my head and fell with a light splash in the water before me. I sat gazing at it without curiosity, hardly moved, so slowly does one come out of the depths of dreamless reverie. Little waves pushed the object gently shoreward until it lay, rolling back and forth in a few inches of clear water. "What!" I shouted. I didn't actually shout—I didn't open my lips; but the shock of astonishment seemed vocal—as loud as a blare of

The Starry Threshold

trumpets or a clash of cymbals. Before me lay a prettily fashioned bottle, half filled with sea water, and the label on it read, "Khiva Bouquet: The Soul of the Exquisite Orient." "Impossible!" I thought. "I am three miles from the village and no one lives at this end of the island." Then I heard voices or, better, one voice which I recognized as that of Rangituki. She was talking in a low monotone, her most effective manner when reciting one of her interminable stories of former days. Cautiously I pushed aside the bushes and looked through. Rangituki was sitting about twenty yards away, in the midst of a company of five. Pinga was one of them and Tevai another—both fathers of families and both much concerned, a few days earlier, lest their children should waste the perfume I had given them. Pinga took a pull at a bottle which I identified as belonging to Wild Violet. He made a wry face as he did it, but he took another and then another, before he set it down. The wind was toward me, and as the corks popped—or, more accurately, as stoppers were lifted—I was forced to admit that June Rose had body, impalpable, perhaps, but authentic.

I passed the furtive revelers unnoticed by going along the lagoon beach, keeping under the screen of *kopapa* bushes. Should I tell Puarei, the chief, of this evasion of the law? I decided that I would not, for he was a stern man and would punish the culprits severely. After all, on an island where there were so few distractions, what was a little perfume among friends?

All of which proves plainly enough, it seems to me, the folly of keeping a notebook; at any rate, the folly of jumping hastily to conclusions.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Or perhaps, more important than this, it gives further light on the vexed question, Does prohibition prohibit?

I find no other observations on Paumotuan life and character, under this date, unless the word, "*Mama-faaamu*," scribbled on the margin of a leaf, may be regarded as a discouraged hint at one; a suggestion for a commentary on a curious Polynesian relationship, when—and only when—I should have had time to gather all of the available data concerning it. This relationship has to do with the transfer of a child, or children, from the original blood parents to another set known as "feeding-parents." My interest in the practice dates from the moment when I made my first notebook reference to it, and it was aroused in a very casual, leisurely fashion. For this reason it will be best, I think, to tell the story of it in a leisurely way.

Returning to the village from the scene of the perfume orgy, I found the church still occupied, although the service was long over. The benches had been stacked in one corner; the mats shaken out and spread again on the floor, where fifteen or twenty people were reclining at ease or sitting native fashion—some of them talking, some sleeping, some engaged in light tasks such as hat weaving and the fashioning of pearl-shell fish hooks; others in the yet more congenial task of doing nothing at all. It was the practice, on Sunday, for the village to gather at the Reformed church, which they felt at liberty to use for secular as well as for sacred purposes, for it was a native-built structure, with walls and roof of thatch, like those of their own houses. The two other churches were never so used. They were frame buildings, in the

The Starry Threshold

European or American style of church architecture, with formal furnishings and windows of colored glass. To have done any sort of work in either of them would have been regarded as a serious offense, certain to be followed by unmistakable evidence of divine displeasure. As Tuina once told me, sores, illness, even death might result as a punishment for such desecration.

I was thinking of this and other primitive reactions to ecclesiastical furniture, and my hand was faltering toward my notebook pocket when Huirai's little daughter, Manava, entered the church, carrying a white cloth which she spread on the pulpit table. She returned a moment later with a tin of sardines, some boiled rice on a *kahaia* leaf, and a bowl of tea. I was Huirai's guest for the day, and had been anxiously awaiting some evidence that food was on the way; but I had not expected that it would be served in the church. I had not eaten a church dinner since boyhood, and, strangely enough, the memory of some of those early feasts came back to me while Manava was setting the table. As one scene is superimposed upon another on a moving-picture screen, I saw an American village of twenty years ago—a village of board sidewalks and quiet, shaded streets bright with dandelions, taking ghostly form and transparency among the palms of Rutiaro. Two small boys walked briskly along, ringing hand bells, and shouting, "Dinner at the Pres-by-terian church ri-i-i-ight awa-a-a-ay." The G. A. R. band—a fife, two tenor drums, and one bass—played outside the church where the crowd was gathering, and horses, attached to buggies and spring wagons, were pawing the earth around the hitching

Faery Lands of the South Seas

posts. Then Mrs. MacGregor appeared in the doorway, her kindly face beaming the warmest of welcomes. "Come on in and set down, folks. Everything's all ready." Members of the Ladies' Relief Corps—mothers of large families, used to catering for large appetites—hurried back and forth with platters of roast turkey and chicken, roast beef, mashed potatoes of marvelous smoothness and flakiness—with everything in the way of food which that hospitable Middle-Western country provides. I heard the pleasant talk of homely things, smelled the appetizing odors, saw plates replenished again and again. Throughout the length of the tables old-fashioned gravy boats sailed from cover to cover—but I spared myself further contemplation of the scene, further shadowy participation in a feast which cost the affluent but a quarter, and a bell ringer nothing at all. The vision faded, but before it was quite gone I heard a voice saying: "Land sakes! You boys ain't eating a thing! Have some more of these dumplings? What's the matter with your appetities? Ain't you feelin' well?" It seemed a thousand years away, that voice; and no doubt it was, and is, even farther than that.

Church dinners at Rutiaro were not such sumptuous affairs. They were not, in fact, an integral part of the community life. In so far as I know, this was the only one ever held there and was the result of Huirai's peculiar notions of the hospitality due a white man. I told him that I was not accustomed to dining in churches at home, even on Sunday, and, furthermore, that I liked companionship at table. But he was not convinced, and he refused to join me. He and his family had already eaten, he said; so I sat on a box

The Starry Threshold

at the pulpit table, partaking of a solitary meal, and got through with it as quickly as possible.

I smiled inwardly at the thought of the inheritance of prestige, granted me without question, at Rutiario, merely because I was the sole representative there of a so-called superior race. No white wasters had preceded me at the atoll. This was fortunate in a way, for it gave me something to live up to—the ideal Rutiarioan conception of the *popaa*—white man. Huirai was partly responsible for the fact that it was ideal. His tales of San Francisco—which, to the Paumotuan, means America—had been steadily growing in splendor. He seemed to have forgotten whatever he may have seen there of misery or incompetence or ugliness. All Americans were divinities of a sort. Their energy was superhuman; their accomplishment, as exemplified in ships, trains, buildings, automobiles, moving-picture theaters—beyond all belief unless one had actually seen those things. And the meanest of them lived on a scale of grandeur far surpassing that of the governor of the Paumotu at Fakavava. Yes, I had something to live up to at Rutiario. The necessity was flattering, to be sure, but it cost some effort and inconvenience to meet it. I didn't dare look as slack as I often felt, both mentally and physically. I could not even sit on the floor, or stretch out at my ease, when in a native house; and I was compelled, when eating, to resume the use of my two-pronged fork and the small tin spoon, although it was much simpler and easier to eat with my fingers as the rest of them did.

Having finished my meal, I took what comfort prestige permitted by placing my box by the wall and leaning back against a post. Takiero, a woman of

Faery Lands of the South Seas

barbaric beauty, was sitting near by playing, "Conquer the North" on my ocharina. I taught her the air in an unguarded moment and had been regretting it ever since. Hunga, her husband, lay at her side, his strong, fine limbs relaxed in sleep. I would have given all my gratuitous prestige as a *popaa* to have exchanged legs or shoulders or girth of chest with him. It was at about this time, as I remember it, that my thoughts turned to the subject of feeding-parents. Nui-Vahine was present, still—or again—nursing the three months' old baby. It belonged, as I knew, to Takiero, who appeared to be quite capable of nourishing it herself. Why had she given it to Nui-Vahine? And why had Hunga, the father of the child, consented to this seemingly unnatural gift? The transfer of parenthood had been made a month earlier, since which time Takiero and her husband had shown only a slight, proprietary interest in their offspring. Takiero sometimes dandled it on her knee, as any woman might the child of some one else; but no one would have guessed that she was the mother of it. Nui-Vahine fed, clothed, and bathed it, and her husband, Nui-Tane, was as fond of it as she herself. They kept the child at their house, and between them made as much fuss over it as though it were their own flesh and blood. What could have been the origin of this strange practice of parenthood by proxy? It was a common one throughout eastern Polynesia. I had seen a good many instances of it in the Cook islands, the Marquesas, and the Society group. Here was a subject worthy of an important chapter in the Life and Character monograph, and I decided that I might as well begin my researches at once.

The Starry Threshold

Takiero reluctantly left off her playing and placed herself in a receptive mood. Why, I asked, had she given her child to Nui-Vahine? Her reply was, because Nui-Vahine had asked for it. "But, see here, Takiero," I said, "I should think that you and Hunga would want to keep your own baby. It is none of my business, of course. I ask you only because I would like to get some information on this feeding-parent custom. Can't you feed it yourself? Is that the reason you gave it away?"

I blundered atrociously in asking that question. Without meaning to, I touched her pride as a woman, as a mother. Takiero looked at me for a moment without speaking. Then she tore open her dress and gave me absolute proof—not that I wanted it—of her ability to nurse her own or any other child. Following this, she went over to where Nui-Vahine was sitting, snatched the baby from her arms, and almost smothered it against her body. She fondled it, kissed it, covered it with her magnificent hair. I had never before seen such a display of savage and tender maternal passion.

By that time Nui-Vahine had recovered from her astonishment and came to the defense of her own. Her month of motherhood gave her claims to the child, apparently, and she tried to enforce them physically. Takiero stood her ground, her black eyes flaming and, holding the baby in one arm, pushed Nui-Vahine away with the other. I expected to see hair flying, but, luckily, both women found their tongues at the same moment. They were like—they were, in fact—two superb cats, spitting at each other. The torrent of words did not flow smoothly. It came in hot, short bursts, like salvos of machine-gun fire, and,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

curiously enough, it was almost pure Paumotuan, not the hybrid Paumotuan-Tahitian commonly used in their temperate speech. It bristled with snarling ng's, with flintlike k's from which fire could be struck in passionate argument. Other women took sides in the quarrel. Had I poked an inquisitive pencil into a wasps' nest the effect could hardly have been more disconcerting. Hunga was awakened by the angry voices and looked on with sleepy perplexity. Nui-Tane grinned reassuringly, as much as to say: "Don't be upset. You know what women are." Finally, Puarei, the chief, who had been an impassive spectator, belted out a command for silence. The tumult subsided at once, and the fury of the women with it. Five minutes later everything was as it had been before, Hunga was sleeping and Nui-Tane polishing a pearl-shell fish hook; Nui-Vahine had the baby and Takiero the ocharina. Neither of them showed the least resentment, either toward me or toward each other. In intensity and briefness the gust of passion which swept through the little church was precisely like the squalls of wind and rain which darken the seas of the Low Archipelago in the midst of the hurricane season, which burst almost from a clear sky and then as suddenly melt into pure sunlight again.

When I left the village to return to Soul-Eaters' Island Takiero was still playing the old border ballad on my ocharina. It had once been my favorite air for that instrument. I first heard it in northern France on a blustering winter evening when a brigade of English regiments was marching, under heavy shell fire, into one of the greatest battles of the war, to the music of pipes and drums. Humming the air now,

The Starry Threshold

although I still feel a tightening of the nerves, a quickening of the pulses, it is not because of the old set of associations. They have been buried forever beneath a newer set. The village at Rutiario comes into view, and I see Takiero, clutching a baby against her naked breast, standing in the midst of a crowd of turbulent women.

Should there be some other Polynesian scholar who wishes to pursue farther an inquiry into a curious practice of child adoption I would advise extreme caution at an atoll far on the southeasterly fringe of the Low Archipelago.

The place may easily be identified; for he will find there a young woman of barbaric beauty who will be playing "Conquer the North" on an ocharina.



CHAPTER X

Costly Hospitality



FOR an authentic test of one's capacity for solitude—or better, perhaps, for convincing proof of the lack of it—two conditions are essential: complete isolation—that goes without saying, of course; and the assurance that such isolation will not be broken into. At Soul-Eaters' Island I expected to find both of these conditions fulfilled. My house was four miles from the settlement, but in reality I had no more seclusion there than a hermit whose retreat is within easy walking distance of a summer hotel. Visitors came in canoes, in cutters; and as the pass and the reef on either side of it were a favorite fishing ground many of them came prepared to spend the day, or the night, or both.

It is as well, perhaps, that the event fell out as it did. If life is to keep its fine zest many wished-for experiences must be perpetually unrealized, and we perpetually following our alluring phantoms until we tumble headlong out of existence. Not having been put to the proof, I may still persuade myself that I am a lover of solitude, gifted for the enjoyment of it beyond other men. Meanwhile, at Soul-Eaters' Island, I had a further experience with Moy Ling, the Chinese store-

Costly Hospitality

keeper, which convinced me of very definite limitations in another direction.

Some time after I had taken up residence there the village came in a body to the adjacent island on the other side of the pass. During the year they moved in this way from one piece of land to another, collecting the ripe coconuts and making their copra on the spot. The land was not owned in common, but they worked it in common; and as house building was a simple matter, instead of going back and forth from the village, they erected temporary shelters and remained at each island in turn until the work there was finished. They were not unremitting toilers. After an hour or two of copra making in the cool of the early morning they were content to call it a day, and spent the rest of the time at more congenial occupations—swimming, fishing, visiting back and forth, talking forever of the arrival of the last trading schooner and the probable date of arrival of the next one.

During all of this time I kept open house, and since I was indebted to nearly all of my friendly visitors for past hospitalities I felt that it was necessary to make returns. Unfortunately, I had nothing to make returns with, except such supplies of provisions and trade goods as I was able to purchase on credit of Moy Ling. Fish were abundant in the lagoon, and a few minutes of fine sport each day more than supplied my wants; but I knew that fish was not acceptable to palates long accustomed to little else. Furthermore, having accepted, at the time of my arrival at Rutiaro, the role of the generous, affluent *popaa*, I had to carry it through. As previously related, although I had been left at Rutiaro unexpectedly, the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

inhabitants took it for granted that I had plenty of money. The possession of wealth in the form of bank-notes is regarded there as one of the attributes of a white man, as necessary to his comfort and convenience and as much a part of him as arms and legs. Pride prevented my disillusioning them at first when I was in desperate need of a new wardrobe; but it got me into a devil of a hole with Moy, and I dug myself in more deeply every day.

Having traded upon the native tradition of the mysterious affluence of all white men by opening up a credit account with the Chinaman I had to sustain his confidence in my ability to cancel it at once if I choose; and, feeling inwardly abject, it was all the more necessary to maintain a reassuring front in the face of his growing anxiety. It was growing. I could see that. He never actually dunned me, but I escaped the humiliating experience only by making additional purchases on so vast a scale, according to island standards, that even Moy seemed to be awed, for brief periods, into a stupefied acceptance of the mysteriously affluent myth. I, myself, was awed when I thought of the size of my bill. Trade goods carried across thousands of miles of ocean are more than usually expensive. A one-pound tin of bully beef cost nine francs, and other things were proportionally dear. The worst of it was that Moy's stock of supplies was much larger than I had at first supposed. He had a warehouse adjoining his store which was full of them, and so, with guests making constant demands upon my hospitality, I was forced to buy with the greater abandon as his confidence waned. But I returned from these encounters with a washed-out feeling, regretting

Costly Hospitality

that I had ever accepted guile as an ally and longing for relief from a state of affairs which I knew could not continue indefinitely.

Relief came in histrionic, eleventh-hour fashion. Providence saved me when I thought Pride was riding me to a starry fall. One evening I paddled across to the other island for further supplies. Huirai and his family had been staying with me for several days. Fishing was better on my side of the lagoon pass, he said, but I think his real purpose in coming had been to eat my, or, rather, Moy Ling's tinned beef. At any rate, when they returned I had nothing left. It was still fairly early, but no one was abroad in the village street. There was a light in Moy's shop, however, and looking through the open window I saw him sitting at a table with his adding machine before him. He was counting aloud in Chinese, his long, slim fingers playing skilfully over the wooden beads which slid back and forth on the framework with a soft, clicking sound, and as he bent over columns of figures the lamp light filled the hollows of his cheeks and temples with pits of shadow. In repose his face was as expressionless as that of a corpse. I felt my courage going as I looked at it. What chance had I of carrying through successfully this game of beggarman's bluff? How long could I hope to maintain the fiction of affluence before a man wise with the inherited experience of centuries of shopkeeping ancestors? I had a moment of panic, and before I realized what I was doing I had entered the shop and had asked for my bill.

Moy slip-slopped into his back room and returned with a large packet of old newspapers. He was a frugal soul and kept his accounts, as he ordered his life

Faery Lands of the South Seas

—with an eye to avoiding unnecessary expense. The journals were painted over with Chinese characters—the items of my various purchases. He arranged the lists in order, sat down to his counting machine again, and presently gave me the grand total. The amount was something over four thousand francs.

Thank Heaven for righteous anger! Thank Heaven for anger which is only moderately righteous. I knew that I had bought lavishly, but I had kept a rough estimate of the amount of my purchases, and I also knew that Moy had added at least 10 per cent to his legitimate profit. He had reasoned, no doubt, that a man who bought on mere whim, without asking the price of anything, would settle his obligation as thoughtlessly as he had incurred it. And I would of course. This was necessary if I were to live up to native tradition in the grand style. But when I saw how costly the game had become, and how thoroughly Moy had entered into the spirit of it, too, I felt indignant; and instead of confessing my predicament as I meant to do, I ordered another case of tinned beef and a bag of rice and left the shop without further talk.

This righteous wrath was all very well, but now that I had asked for my bill, I would have to settle it. How was this to be done? If only I had my sea chest which Tino, supercargo of the *Caleb S. Winship*, had carried away with him when he left me at Rutiaro! My pocketbook was in it, containing all of my money, more than enough to cancel the debt with Moy. I had rather an anxious time during the next few days. I remember entertaining as usual, but in a faint-hearted way; sleeping badly, and between times, walking up and down Soul-Eaters' Island, trying to subdue my

Costly Hospitality

pride to the point of confession. Then one afternoon, when I was sitting on the ocean beach, watching the surf piling up on the barrier reef, I became aware of a vessel, hull-down, on the horizon. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was like a far halloo from a world which I had almost forgotten existed. All through the afternoon she beat steadily to windward until at dusk she was about two miles distant, and I saw that she was one of the small schooners, without auxiliary power, which are used by Papeete trading companies for collecting copra at the less profitable atolls.

All the village came over to Soul-Eaters' Island, for the anchorage at this end of the atoll lay just behind it. The schooner was recognized. It was the *Potii Ravarava* which visited the atoll about once a year. She entered the pass with the turn of the tide, lighting her way by the fire which was burning in a primitive galley, a tin-lined box half filled with sand. I could see her native skipper at the wheel, a couple of sailors preparing to take in sail, and two native women sitting on the poop, with a great pile of luggage behind them. One of these was Tepera, daughter of Puarei, chief of the atoll, who had been sent to the Protestant school at Papeete nearly a year ago. The other was Tuarava, her aunt, with whom she had been living there. The crowd on the beach waited in deep silence while the schooner anchored and the sails were being furled. I remember that I could hear very plainly the far-off rumbling of the surf on the windward side of the atoll and the hissing of frying fish, or whatever it was, a native boy was cooking at the galley fire. Then the small boat was lowered and the women brought ashore with their luggage. Tepera went at once to her father

Faery Lands of the South Seas

and, putting her head on his shoulder, began to cry softly. Not a word was spoken. Tuarava and Poura, her sister, squatted on their heels close by, their arms around each other, moaning in the same softly audible way. The women then went in turn among all their relatives, having their little cry while the rest of the village looked on in sympathetic silence. When they had finished, a fire was lit on the beach and everyone gathered around to hear the news and to examine the schooner's cargo which was being put on shore. More trade goods for Moy Ling, I thought. Remembering my debt, I couldn't summon any great amount of interest in the scene. I was about to return to my house when Huirai came bustling up, carrying my sea chest. "You like this?" he said. What he meant was, "Is this yours?" but for once he misused his English with splendid relevancy. I sat down weakly on the box, holding a letter which he had thrust into my hand. No doubt of it. It was my box, and the letter was addressed to me in Tino's familiar handwriting. It read, in part, as follows:

We have just met the *Potii Ravarava* here at Hao. She is going to Rutiario within a few weeks, so I am sending your sea chest by her. Sorry I left you in that God-forsaken hole; but I was tight that evening, and pretty mad at the way you upset my plans with your marble-playing foolishness. Next morning, when I sobered up, I felt like going back for you. But we had a fair wind, and I had my cargo to think of. The price of copra is on the down grade, and I've got to get back to Papeete with mine before the bottom falls out of the market. You said once you wanted to see all you could of life in the Paumotus. Well, I guess you'll have your chance at Rutiario. If I was you I would come back on the *Potii Ravarava*. She only carries twenty-seven tons cargo, so she'll probably go direct to Papeete from there. I am also sending you an empty three-gallon demijohn. Fill this with

Costly Hospitality

water before you leave, if you come back on the *P. R. Miti*, her skipper, is a good sailor, but all he knows about navigation you could write on a postage stamp. I met him once about twenty miles south of Fakahina. He was cruising around looking for Angatau, which was seventy miles to the northeast. Well, he can't miss Tahiti if he gets within a hundred miles of it, so you better take a chance and come back with him. But don't forget to carry your own supply of fresh water. Sometimes these little native boats get becalmed, and it's no joke being thirsty at sea.

Yours,

TINO.

P. S.—Miti has a big bunch of letters for you, from your friend Nordhoff. I saw the packet. It looks as though it had been traveling some. Nordhoff, he says, is in Tahiti again. I'll probably see him there and will tell him to wait for you.

Give my regards to all the marble players.

Good old Tino! He did me nothing but good turns. Late that night when the rest of the villagers had crossed the pass I pried open the lid of the chest—having lost the key—and found my belongings just as I had left them—my camera; my binoculars and charts; and, most important of all, in the bottom of the chest, wrapped in a pair of trousers, my pocket-book. I didn't pay Moy until just before the departure of the schooner, and staged the final episode at an hour when his shop was filled with loungers. I came away with his receipted bill, one hundred and twenty francs, and the consciousness of having adequately safeguarded tradition.

We left Rutiario the following day. I did not realize until the moment of leave-taking how painful the farewells would be. As soon as they were over I went on board, crawled into the little cabin and, despite the cockroaches and copra bugs, remained there until the schooner had left the pass and was well out to sea.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

After our separation at Papeete, Nordhoff went on to the southwest. He wrote me from an island he called Ahu Ahu, and from there, apparently, he took passage to Rarotonga, the principal island of the Cook group. Long before the discovery of New Zealand Rarotonga was the goal of Polynesian mariners from the north and west—fearless explorers traveling in their double canoes across hundreds of leagues of ocean, guided by sun and stars, some of them arriving at their destination, many others, doubtless, perishing in search of it.

From Samoa—in the early centuries of our era—came the Karika family to reign in Rarotonga down to the present day; and Samoa is believed to have been the principal starting point of the voyagers which peopled the eastern Pacific. In the language of those old-time voyagers, *tonga* meant south, and they gave that name to the Friendly Islands. Farther to the west and south they came upon the Cook group—in those days, no doubt, the southernmost ends of the earth—and the high island of this group, the faint blot on the horizon which led the canoes to land, they called Rarotonga (Under the South).

Under the South



CHAPTER XI

His Mother's People



THE hurricane season ended in a fortnight of calm before the trade came up from the southeast, announcing its arrival with a three days' gale that caught our schooner among the outer islands of the group. It was by no means a great storm, yet the constant fury of the wind, unbroken by lull or gust, and the lines of huge breaking seas running under a cloudless sky impressed me more than anything I have experienced in ships. By day we lived in a world of blue-and-white—pale-blue sky; sea of a dark, angry blue; acres of white foam. To go on deck by night and watch the leaping ridges of salt water rear up to windward—formless, threatening, fringed with wan phosphorescence—was to revise any beliefs one might have had regarding the friendliness of nature.

On the evening of the second day we were laid-to under a rag of foresail, riding the seas obliquely, a few points off the wind. The schooner took them like an eider duck; it was so thick in the cabin that I slid back the hatch and squeezed through into the clean turmoil above. The mood of the Pacific was too impressive for pleasure, but I was glad at least of the fresh air and able to derive a species of awed enjoyment

Faery Lands of the South Seas

from what went on about me. It may have been fatigue, or carelessness, or inexperience—at any rate, the man at the wheel suddenly allowed the schooner to bear off; she was climbing the slope of a sea at the time—the crest of it caught her weather side with a crash and next instant a rush of solid water swept the decks. Thin and faint as the voices of sea birds above the roaring of the wind, the cries of native passengers drifted back, “*Aue! Aue!*”; the hatch slid back abruptly; the skipper burst on deck—bristling, gesticulating, clad in a waistcloth—to deliver an address in passionate Mangaian, insulting and only partially audible.

Under the swinging lamp in the cabin I found Tari—our singular and philosophic supercargo, whose calm no ordinary gale could disturb—bending over his books, a bottle and a glass in racks at his elbow. A mat was spread on the floor and on it—huddled under a quilt of bright patchwork—lay Apakura, his young native wife. Her feet were bound in a *pareu* and the quilt pulled over her head, for the cockroaches were everywhere. I entered my stateroom to lie down. A large cockroach, insolent and richly perfumed, trotted along the springs of the upper berth and halted just above my face. Waves of the hand had no effect on him—I had reasons for not wishing to crush him in his tracks. One of his comrades began a tentative nibbling at my hair—something tickled my foot—I started convulsively. The sudden rolls of the schooner flung me against her side; it was useless to try to sleep. As I sat down beside him, Tari closed his books and motioned me to fill a glass.

A faint noise of shouting came from on deck; the

His Mother's People

engine-room bell sounded a sudden and peremptory signal. The hatch opened with a gust of spray—the head of the skipper appeared dimly in the swaying light. “*Atitu*,” he shouted; “I’m going to run into the lee and stand off and on till this blows over.” The engine started and Tari and I went on deck for a glimpse of the land, looming close and vague in the starlight. Presently, as we took our seats in the cabin, the schooner ceased her violent pitching and began to ride a long, easy swell. Tari rose, stepped to where his wife lay sleeping, picked up the slender bundle in the quilt, and disappeared into his stateroom; next moment he was beside me again, uncorking a fresh bottle of rum.

“She’s had a bad time of it,” he said, “with a berth on the weather side; she was spilled on the floor half a dozen times before she gave up and came out here. I shouldn’t have let her come along—I had my doubts of the weather, but it was a chance to see the relatives she’s got scattered through the group. They’re constantly visiting one another; blood means a lot down here where they recognize degrees of consanguinity absurdly farfetched to our minds. First cousins are like brothers, second and third cousins considered members of one’s immediate family, and so on through the descendants of remote ancestors. When you stop to think of it, this respect for ties of blood—in the isolated communities of Polynesia—rests on a solid base.”

I asked him a question concerning the end of these island people—whether they will fade away and disappear, like our own Narragansett and Seminole, without leaving their mark on the supplanting race or

Faery Lands of the South Seas

whether they will be absorbed gradually, developing in the process of absorption a new type. Tari set down his glass.

“One thing is certain,” he replied—“if left to themselves they would soon be extinct. Wherever you go among the islands you will find couple after couple of full-blooded natives—young, strong, wholesome, and childless. No doubt the white man is partially to blame, but, for myself, I believe the race is worn out with isolation and old age. They are justified in their dread of being childless, but an infusion of European blood—however small—works a miracle; you must have noticed this, to me a most striking and significant fact. It is the cross of white and brown that is repopulating the islands to-day; one can venture a glimpse into the future and see the process of absorption complete—the Polynesian is not fated to disappear without leaving a trace behind . . . and perhaps it will be more than a trace, for half-caste children cling strongly to the distaff side.

“The question of half-castes is an interesting one, particularly to men like me—but it is a waste of time to struggle against nature; in the end the solution is nearly always the same. Varana’s children furnish the best example I have run across—you’ve never been to Rimarutu, I fancy; it is not often visited nowadays; probably you’ve never heard of Varana. And yet he was an extraordinary man, his life an almost unique study in extremes. Like everything real, the story has no beginning, unless one were able to trace back the strain that gifted the man with his exceptional temperament; as for an end, that is still working itself out on Rimarutu. It is, in fact, no story at all, but a bit of

His Mother's People

life itself—unmarked by any dominating situation, haphazard, inconclusive, grimly logical. No one can know the whole of it—the play of motives, the decisions, the pure chance—but I worked with Varana for years and have patched his story together after a fashion. Now and then, when the mood struck him, he used to speak of himself; sometimes at night when we were working his schooner from island to island; sometimes by day, as we lay smoking under the palms of a remote atoll, while the canoes of the divers dotted the lagoon. On those occasions I had glimpses of a man not to be judged by the standards of everyday life—a man actuated by motives as simple as they were incomprehensible to those about him. His death, if he is dead— But I will speak of that in its place.

“His real name was Warner—a big, blue-eyed man, slow-spoken and a little dreamy in manner, with an immense blond mustache and a serenity nothing could disturb. I never knew him to hesitate in making a decision or to speak unless he had something to say. All decent men liked him, and the natives, who were better able than a white man to fathom his simplicity, took to him from the first. He had been miserably out of place in England—squeezed through Cambridge, which he detested, unhappily married, done out of a fortune by the defaulting brother-in-law whose last debt he paid, and divorced just before he came out here.

“It is often observed that when an Englishman's feelings are hurt he travels, and in this respect Varana was not exceptional. One day, a little more than a generation ago, he stepped off the mail boat at Papeete—a rather typical English tourist, I fancy—dressed in

Faery Lands of the South Seas

tropical costumes from Bond Street and accompanied by an extraordinary quantity of luggage. At the club he ran across Jackson of the Atoll Trading Company—the old man liked him from the first and they used to spend the evenings together, lingering over their glasses, talking a little in low tones. A fortnight later Varana left as quietly as he had come—outbound in one of Jackson's schooners for a cruise through the Paumotus.

“It was the year of the hurricane at Motutangi. Varana's boat, commanded by a native skipper, had drifted through the group in a desultory way, touching at an island here and there to pick up a few tons of copra or a bit of shell. One can imagine the effect on a newcomer of those early days among the atolls—long sunlit days when gentle breezes filled the sails of the vessel skirting the shores of the lagoons—waters of unearthly peace and loveliness, bordered by leagues of green. And the nights ashore, when the moon rose at the end of a path of rippling silver, and the people gathered before their thatched houses to sing. . . . It was not long before Varana realized that he had found his anodyne.

“At home he had been a yachtsman of sorts; by the time they reached Motutangi the brown skipper was leaving a good part of the working of the schooner to his guest. They were diving in the lagoon that year at the end of a long *rahui* on the shell—a sort of closed season, scrupulously respected by the natives; half a dozen schooners were anchored off the village, where every house overflowed with people from the surrounding islands, and by day their canoes blackened the water above the patches of shell.

“The hurricane gave ample warning of its approach

His Mother's People

—Varana told me as much as that. He had spent the night ashore with a trader, whose old glass rose and fell spasmodically, sinking always a little lower, until it stood at a figure which sent the trader off, white and cursing, to break open a fresh case of gin. None of the divers went out at daybreak; with the other people, they stood in little frightened groups before the houses. The older men were already beginning to hack off the tops of the stout palms in which they planned to roost. By the time Varana came off in a canoe the schooners were double anchored, the wind was shifting uneasily in sharp gusts, and a tremendous surf was thundering on the outer beach. The native skipper, like the people ashore, knew perfectly well what was coming and, like most of his kind, his spirit broke in the face of a large emergency—before the feeling that the forces of nature were about to overwhelm him. Well, I've been through one hurricane—I can't say that I blame him much! Varana found him not exactly in a funk, but in a state of passive resignation, hoping vaguely that his two anchors would let him ride it out inside. The crew was clustered on the after deck, exchanging scared whispers. Varana, who had the instinct of a deep-water sailor, took in the situation at a glance, and next moment he had taken command of the schooner.

“Without a word of protest the men reefed, got sail on her, heaved up one anchor, and cut the other cable. Varana had very little to say about the rest—how he edged out through the pass and managed to claw off just as the cyclone struck Motutangi—but afterward the story went the rounds of every group. All the other schooners in the lagoon, as well as most of the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

people ashore, were lost. How Varana weathered it, without piling up his vessel on any one of half a dozen atolls, is a sort of miracle.

“A week later, when he had sailed his battered schooner—the only survivor of the disaster at Motutangi—into Papeete harbor, he found himself famous by nightfall, for the native captain gave him entire credit for the achievement. Old Jackson’s imagination was touched, or perhaps it was the destruction of so many rival schooners in the shell and copra trade—at any rate, he acted on impulse for once in his life, sent for Varana, and offered him a remarkably good berth with a fat screw attached. But the wanderer only smiled and shook his head—he had had a taste of the outer islands. It shakes one’s faith in Providence to realize that most men die without finding the place in life for which they were designed.

“It was old Jackson who told him of Rimarutu—probably during one of their almost silent evenings at the club. It was a mistake—Jackson thought—to believe that a man could shut himself off from the world; the mood would pass in time, but if Varana wished seriously to try it, he would find no better place than Rimarutu. There was some copra to be had and a little shell in the lagoon; the people numbered about two hundred, a quiet, pleasant lot, not given to wandering from their island. Varana had salvaged a few thousand pounds from the wreck of his affairs at home; Jackson helped him pick up a schooner at a bargain and load her with what was needed; there was some difficulty about a crew, but his uncanny gift with the natives got him three men content to follow his fortunes. On the morning when he shook hands with

His Mother's People

the old man, stepped aboard his boat, and sailed out of the harbor, Varana severed the last tie with the world he had known.

“I could tell you a good deal about his life on the island—I worked with him for nearly ten years. He began by renting a bit of land—for his store and copra shed—from the chief and setting himself to learn the language. The Polynesian is a shrewd judge of character; they saw that this man was just, kindly, fearless, and to be trusted. Those who had traveled a little declared Varana a phenomenon—a white trader who respected women and never lay on his veranda in a stupor, surrounded by empty bottles. He seemed to know instinctively the best way to take these people, with whom, from the very first, he found himself on terms of a mutual understanding. They regarded him with a mixture of liking and respect, not accorded us, perhaps, as often as we are apt to think; he worked with them, he played with them, and finally took a daughter of the island as his wife—yet it was characteristic that he never permitted himself to run barefoot and that even after twenty years of friendship the native entering Varana's house took off his hat. I remember Tupuna as a woman of thirty—tall, robust, and grave, with delicate hands and masses of bright, rippling hair; the years were kind to her—even in middle life she did not lose a certain quiet charm. Make no mistake—they were happily mated, this man, turned out by what Englishmen believe the highest civilization in the world, and the daughter of an island chief whose father had been a savage and an eater of men. She was not spoiled like so many traders' wives; when they had been on the reef she walked home

Faery Lands of the South Seas

behind, carrying the torches and the fish—but he felt for her an affection deep as it was undemonstrative, a strong attachment, proven at the end in his own extreme and romantic way.

“During the early years of his life on Rimarutu, Varana had enough to do with his store, his occasional trips for supplies, and his work for the betterment of the island people. He found them living on fish and coconuts, depending for all their luxuries on a dwindling production of copra. He showed them how to thin their palms, how to select nuts for new plantings, how to dry their copra with a minimum of effort. The shell in the lagoon was nearly exhausted; he persuaded the chiefs of the two villages to forbid diving for a term of years. After experiments conducted with Tupuna’s aid he set the men to catching flying fish, which swarmed in the waters about the island, and taught the women to split them, rub in salt, and dry them on lines in the sun. Rimarutu is high, as atolls go—five or six yards above the sea in spots; he laid out beds of *puraka taro*, and had pits dug on the high portions of the island, lined the bottoms with rock to keep the taproots from salt water, filled them with humus and topsoil—scraped up in handfuls—and planted breadfruit, mango, and lime, brought from the high islands to the north. At long intervals, when in need of something that only civilization could supply—paint, rigging, or a new set of sails—he went north with a cargo of copra and dried fish and took on a brief charter with Jackson. On these trips he visited scores of islands, and came to know the people of a thousand miles of ocean.

“It was not until his son was born that Varana

His Mother's People

began to think seriously of money. His daughters had given him no concern; he explained to me once his peculiar philosophy as to their future. Perhaps he was right. With their happiness in mind, he preferred to bring them up as island girls—without education or knowledge of the outside world and no greater prospects than those of their full-blooded playmates—rather than give them the chances of the usual half-caste: half-educated and partially Europeanized, whose most brilliant hope is marriage with a white man of the inferior sort. But the birth of Terii set the father to thinking.

“The child was about ten when I saw him first, a fine strong boy, very fair for a half-caste, with his father's eyes, a high carriage of the head, and skin touched with a faint bloom of the sun. Tupuna was immensely proud of him. I was a youngster then and new to the islands, but I had heard of Varana before Jackson introduced me to him. It was at Jackson's place, on the upper veranda, that he told me how he had leased Fatuhina; some one had spoken of my work. I had operated diving machines? He needed a man familiar with them, for he had leased an atoll with some big shell patches in the lagoon, and machines would be necessary to work the deeper portions. I was doing nothing at the time. I liked what I had heard of Varana, and I liked the man better still. In an hour we had come to an understanding. I worked with him, off and on, from that time until the beginning of the war.

“Without caring in the least for wealth, Varana had set out to make himself rich. Long before I knew him he had decided the question of his son: Terii was to

Faery Lands of the South Seas

have the same chances that his father had had before him—was to see both sides and choose for himself.

“Even Varana’s friends spoke of his luck; to my mind his success was inevitable. Regarded with an almost superstitious affection by the people of widely scattered groups, he possessed channels of information closed forever to the ordinary man. It was in this way that he learned of the shell in Fatuhina lagoon; perhaps he did not know that the native who approached him, one evening on a distant atoll, to speak casually of the matter and stroll away, had paddled across twelve miles of sea with no other object than to bring the news to Varana. When the *Gaviota* was beached he was the first to learn of it—that affair alone brought him a neat fortune; and when men had fine pearls to sell they saw him before they went to the Jews. By the time his son was twelve Varana was a rich man.

“I was on Rimarutu when he left to take the boy to England. Tupuna shed a few tears, but there was no scene—she knew he would return. ‘I go to take our son to my own land,’ he told her; ‘there will be six moons before I come.’ Five months later I was waiting with the schooner when he stepped off the mail boat. That night, as he lay on a mat on the afterdeck, dressed in a *pareu* and a pair of slippers, he spoke of England briefly in the midst of our talk on island matters. ‘Damned senseless treadmill,’ he remarked; ‘I can’t think how I stood it so many years.’ The ordinary man, who had left home under a cloud of misfortune to return twenty years later, after wanderings in distant lands, with a fortune and a beautiful child, would have lingered not without a certain relish. But Varana was different; he grudged every

His Mother's People

moment spent in civilization and lived only for the day when he would again take the wheel of his schooner and watch the ridges of Tahiti sink beneath the horizon.

“The years passed rapidly and tranquilly on Rimarutu. The days of Varana's activity were over; he was no longer young, though he kept his store and took the schooner out at long intervals for supplies. Then came the outbreak of the war.

“I was in Gallipoli when the letter reached me, written in the native language by Varana's old mate. It told a story fantastically unreal—incredible from the viewpoint of everyday life—and yet to me who knew him, as to the people of his island, the end of Varana seemed a natural thing, in keeping with what had gone before. Tupuna had fallen ill (the old man wrote) and had died suddenly and peacefully, as natives do. Varana stood beside her grave with no great display of grief, returned to his house and spent three days putting his affairs in order. On the fourth day he gave the mate a thick envelope of documents, called together the people of the island and bade each one of them farewell. When he turned to leave they did not disperse; the women had begun to sob—they felt already the desolation of a final parting. It was the hour of sunset, when the trade wind dies away and the lagoon lies like a mirror under an opalescent sky. . . . I can see in imagination those simple and friendly islanders, standing in little groups before the settlement—raising no voice in protest, moving no hand in restraint—while the man they loved walked to the ocean beach, launched a tiny canoe in the surf, and paddled out to the west. The nearest land in that

Faery Lands of the South Seas

direction is distant six hundred miles. When he had passed the breakers—they say—Varana did not once turn his head; the watchers stood motionless while the sky faded, their eyes fixed on the dot that was his canoe—a dwindling dot, swallowed up at last in the night.”

Tari ceased to speak. He was sitting propped on the lounge, arms folded, legs stretched out, eyes staring at the table. Without seeming aware of what he did, he filled his glass, raised it to his lips, and drank. Presently he emerged from his reverie to light a pipe.

“In due time,” he went on, “I had word from the lawyers, inclosing a copy of the will and informing me that I had been named executor with old Jackson, who seemed to have discovered the secret of eternal life. There was also a letter from Varana, written after Tupuna’s death—a friendly and casual note, with a mere line at the end, asking me to do what I could for his boy. The land Tupuna had brought him was to be divided equally among his daughters; all the rest was for Terii, saving his parting gift to me. Only one condition was attached—Terii must visit Rimarutu before inheriting the property of his father; once he had set foot on the island, he would be his own master, free to choose his path in life.

“The boy was nineteen when the war broke out; he joined up at once as a cadet in the Flying Corps. During the second year I began to hear of Lieutenant Warner—he had shot down a German plane near Zeebrugge; he had been wounded; he had received the Military cross. Once I saw his picture in the *Sphere*—a handsome lad, very smart in the old uniform

His Mother's People

of the R. F. C., with a jaunty cap over one eye and ribbons on his breast. This was the little savage whose shrill cries I used to hear at dawn, when he raced with his half-naked companions on the beach! At the end of the war he was Captain Terry Warner, a celebrity in a small way. . . . I felt a certain pride in him, of course. We had done our best to meet, but something always happened to prevent my getting a glimpse of him.

“I ran across him as I was homeward bound, leaving San Francisco for the islands. I had already gone aboard and was standing by the rail, watching the last of the luggage swing over the side in nets, when a motor drove up to discharge a party of men and women—fashionables of the city, from their looks. One of them, a lean, tanned boy, with the overcoat of a British officer over his civilian clothes, was saying good-by to the others, shaking hands and smiling very attractively. A little later, when the lines were being cast off, I saw him close beside me at the rail. A girl in blue was standing on the dock, waving up at him. ‘Good-by, Terry!’ she called. I looked closely; there could be no doubt—it was the son of Varana.

“We had long talks on the voyage south; the lad had not forgotten me. The memory of the old life—of the island, of his mother, of his father—would always be fresh in his mind, but he regarded those days as a distant and beautiful episode, now forever closed. He was going to visit Rimarutu for the last time—to bid farewell to those who remembered him. He had not forgotten the friends of his boyhood; there were many little presents in his boxes, and he told me that the schooner—reported sound as on the day of her launch-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ing—would be his gift to Varana's old mate. Afterward he would return to San Francisco, where opportunities had been offered him; he had brought letters to America and had been well received.

“The schooner was in port when we arrived. Varana's mate met us on the dock; there were tears in the old man's eyes as he took the boy's hands in his own and murmured in a trembling voice, ‘*O Terii iti e.*’ The tourists descending the gangplank looked with interest at the spectacle of Captain Warner, almost embracing an old barefoot *kanaka*, dressed in dungarees and a faded shirt, wrinkled brown face working with emotion. As Terii shook hands with the crew—some of them boys with whom he had played in childhood—I noticed that a phrase or two of the native came to his lips—twelve years had not been sufficient to blot out all memory of his mother's tongue.

“We had a long passage south, beating against the trade; Varana had installed an engine in the schooner, but time is cheaper than petrol in this part of the world. Terii delighted in handling the boat; there was salt water in his blood; and his father had seen to his training in navigation and the ways of the sea. With each new day I perceived symptoms of a change in the boy. White suits and canvas slippers gave way to pajamas and bare feet; finally the pajamas were replaced by a *pareu*, taken from the trade-room stock. The summers at home had not been wasted; I used to watch him at the wheel, working the schooner to windward, an eye on the canvas aloft, steering with the easy certain movements of a seaman born. He was in love with the schooner before we had been out a week, and he had reason—Frisco-built for the last

His Mother's People

of the pelagic sealing, Varana's boat was the fastest thing of her tonnage in the South Seas. More than once in our talks Terii seemed to forget the plans he had confided to me. . . . She needed a new foresail; the set of this one did not please him; he was going to have her copper renewed in places; she was getting dingy below; the cabin needed a touch of paint. At times, speaking of these things, he stopped short in the midst of a sentence and changed the talk to other subjects. The language came back to him surprisingly; he was able to understand and make himself understood before we raised the palms of Rimarutu.

"The mate took her in through the pass. It was late afternoon, cool and cloudless, with a gentle sea nuzzling at the reef. The island was like the memory of a dream—fresh green palms, snowy beaches, cat's-paws ruffling the lagoon in long, blue streaks—so beautiful that the sight of it made one's heart ache and the breath catch in one's throat. A dozen canoes put out to meet us from the first settlement; there were greetings from friends and relatives—embraces and tears. Terii lay silent, propped on his elbows and staring ahead, as we slipped across the lagoon; the island people spoke in tones so low that I could hear the crisp sound of the schooner's bows parting the landlocked water. The other village lay beyond the beach ahead of us, Varana's village, where Terii had been born—a place of dreams in the mystery of the evening light. It was not difficult to guess at the boy's thoughts—the moment was one of those which make up the memories of a lifetime. Every man has known them—rapture, pain, the enjoyment of supreme beauty, the flavor of exotic and unrepeatable experience; but not

Faery Lands of the South Seas

every man is permitted to taste such contrasts as this boy had known in twenty-four years of life. . . . I was a little envious, I think, of the rarity of that poignant home-coming.

“On the first evening, when we had greeted the people of the village, Terii was led away by his old aunt, Tupuna’s sister. Just before bedtime I saw them at his mother’s grave—a lonely shrine, roofed over in island fashion, where the light of a lamp shone on stunted bushes of frangipani. My eccentricities were not forgotten; they had spread my mat under the palms before Varana’s house, and toward midnight Terii came quietly and lay down close by. I was wakeful in a reverie, living over the old days with my friend, wondering, with the usual idle and somber doubt, if we were destined to meet again. Low over the palm tops a planet glimmered like a shaded lamp; the Milky Way arched overhead through a sky powdered with fixed stars—remote suns, about which revolve myriads of worlds like ours. . . . I rebelled at the thought that the strong soul of Varana should be snuffed out. Terii said nothing for a long time; I thought he had dropped off to sleep, but suddenly I heard his voice: ‘I have the strangest feeling to-night,’ he said, thoughtfully; ‘if my father were here I could believe that I had never been away, that everything since I left—England, school, my friends, the war—was no more than a dream. I can’t explain to you, but somehow this island seems the most real thing in the world. I’ve been talking with my aunt—I’d almost forgotten her name, you know—and I managed to understand a good bit of what she had to say. . . . There is no doubt she believes it herself. My father

His Mother's People

comes to her every now and then, she says, for a talk on family matters; last night he told her we would come to-day, and that I would stop here to take his old place among the people. It seems they are good enough to want me to stay—I almost wish I could.' . . .

“The drums were going at daybreak—the feast in Terii's honor was the greatest the island had known since heathen days. The entire population was on hand; the beach black with canoes; dozens of good-humored babies on mats under the trees, with small brothers and sisters stationed to fan the flies away. The people sat in long rows in the shade, strings of shell about their necks, their heads wreathed in hibiscus and sweet fern. Terii was placed between the chief of the other village and Tehina, the chief's daughter, a full-blooded Rimarutu girl of sixteen, barefoot, dressed in a white frock, with gold pendants in her ears and a thick, shining braid of hair. There is an uncommon charm about the women of that island—a stamp of refinement, a delicacy of frame and feature, remarked as long ago as the days of Spanish voyaging in the Pacific. Blood counts for something in Polynesia, and one needed only a glance at Tehina to know that the best blood of the island flowed in her veins; her ancestor—if tradition may be credited—was in the long canoe with Penipeni when the god pulled Rimarutu up from the bottom of the sea. I like those people, and in spite of the night's depression I managed to enjoy the fun—I even danced a bit! Finally I saw that the dancers were taking their seats; voices were lowered, heads were turned.

“Tehina was dancing alone to the rhythm of a

Faery Lands of the South Seas

hundred clapping hands. In twenty years of the islands I have never seen a girl step more daintily. Little by little she moved toward Terii until she stood directly before him, inviting him to dance, hands fluttering, swaying with an unconscious grace, smiling into his eyes. Every head turned; there were smiles, good-humored chuckles, nudges; they were proud of this girl and anxious that the son of Varana should dance with her. They had not long to wait. Next moment Terii had leaped to his feet and was dancing, with more enthusiasm than skill, to a long burst of cheers and clapping.

“When the canoes put off at nightfall I noticed that Tehina did not leave; she had stopped to visit her uncle, the parson of the village church. I saw Terii with her often during the days that followed—fishing on the lagoon, swimming in the cove, lying on mats in the moonlight where groups of young people were telling their interminable stories of the past. He seemed a little shy of me, and no longer exchanged confidences in the hour which precedes sleep. One evening, smoking and strolling alone after dinner, I passed the parson’s house and became aware of the vague figure of Terii, walking to and fro impatiently beside the veranda. He stopped—I heard the rattle of a coral pebble on the roof. A moment later Tehina glided like a phantom around the corner of the house, and they went off arm in arm along the path to the sea. I thought to myself that the lad was not doing badly after his twelve years away from the island, but the blood was in him, of course—there was instinct in his manner of tossing the pebble and in the unhesitating way he had led the girl toward the outer

His Mother's People

beach: the haunt of dreadful presences, a place no ordinary islander would visit after dark. I fancied him sitting there—the rumble of the surf in his ears, watching the lines of breakers rear up under the moon—with Tehina beside him, admiring and afraid. When his eye was not on her she would glance right and left along the beach and back toward the bush, half expecting to see some monstrous thing, crouched and watching with fiery eyes. As for the boy, one could only guess at the troubled flow of his thoughts, stirred by cross-currents of ancestry and experience. In her own environment Tehina was a girl to make any man look twice; for him, with his mother's blood and the memories of his childhood, she must have possessed a powerful appeal—the touch of her hand; her voice, soft and low-pitched, murmuring the words of a half-forgotten tongue; her dark eyes shining in the moonlight; the scent of the strange blossoms in her hair. It was the test, the final conflict Varana had foreseen. I had my own opinion of the result, and yet the other life pulled hard.

“The days passed in pleasant island fashion; the loading of the schooner went on; there was no mention of a change in plans. The chief came to take his daughter home, and when she had gone Terii spoke to me, not too convincingly, of his return to civilization. My trip to Rimarutu was a matter of pleasure alone; I was already planning to take this berth, and was not sorry when Terii announced one morning that we would sail north that afternoon. One seems perpetually saying good-by down here—these islands are havens of a brief call, of sad farewells, of lingering and regretful memory. Our parting from the people of

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Rimarutu was more than usually painful; they had hoped to the last that Terii would leave some word, some promise; but he remained silent, though I could see that the leave-taking was not without effect.

“Finally the last canoe put off for shore; the anchor came up, the motor started, and Terii steered across the lagoon for the pass. The sails were still furled, for there was a light head wind. I watched his face as he stood in silence at the wheel; there was a look in his eyes which made me sorry for the boy. We crossed the lagoon, glided past green islets, and drew abreast of the other village. The people lined the shore, fluttering handkerchiefs, shouting good wishes and farewells.

“Beyond the settlement the pass led out, blue and deep, between sunken piers of coral, where the surf thundered in patches of white. All at once the old mate sang out and pointed—a dot was on the water ahead of us, a swimmer moving out from land to cut us off. The son of Varana turned the wheel; the schooner swung inshore; I heard a quick command and felt the speed of the engine slacken.

“Terii was staring ahead with a strange intensity—instinct or premonition was at work. I looked again as we drew near; a cloud of dark hair floated behind the swimmer’s head; it was a woman—Tehina! Terii sprang to the rail. A moment later she had been lifted over the side and was standing beside him in the cockpit, dripping, trembling a little with cold and fear, doing her best to smile. The mate was pulling at Terii’s arm and pointing back toward the village. A whaleboat had put out from shore and was heading for us at the top speed of the rowers; it was the chief

His Mother's People

himself, I believe, who stood in the stern and whose shouts were beginning to reach our ears.

“At that moment Terii proved that he was his father's son. He glanced back once, and then, without the smallest interval of hesitation, his arm went about the wet shoulder of Tehina.

“‘Full speed ahead,’ he ordered in a cool voice.”

Tari poured rum into my glass, and tilted the last of the bottle into his own. The schooner was taking it easily with her engine at half speed, riding a gentle swell. The ship's bell rang twice, paused, and rang again—a sharp and mellow sound. It was long past midnight.

“If you ever get down to Rimarutu,” said Tari, as he rose to go on deck, “you will find Terii there—he bids fair to leave the island even less than Varana did.”

CHAPTER XII

In the Cook Group



WAS close to beginning this letter with a little fun at your expense; you would have been mystified—perhaps convinced that my haunted friends of Ahu Ahu were just a bit uncanny. It is really a pity not to do it! I should have begun with a vivid glimpse of a séance; the quiet moonlight outside, seen through an open door; the glimmer of a turned-down lamp in the house, revealing the rapt sightless face of the medium; the summoning of old Rakamoana from her sleeping place in the *marae*; the unnatural voice proclaiming the coming of the spirit.

Then I would have told how a message from the visitor was announced—for the strange white man vouched for by the mother of Apakura. “I see an island,” the ghostly voice might have gone on—“a little land surrounding a great lagoon. It is Nukuhina, in the far-off Sea of Atolls. A schooner lies at anchor in the calm water off the settlement; she does not move, for the lagoon is very still. A boat is putting off for shore, and in the stern sits a dear friend of the white man—a slender man, who gazes eagerly toward the shore with dark eyes like the eyes of our people. A crowd is gathered on the beach; the girls carry gifts

In the Cook Group

of necklaces and wreaths; and in the village the old women are preparing a feast. The man in the boat believes that this welcome is for the captain of the schooner, not knowing that this people was once a race of warriors, and that they are gathered to give *him* welcome—the first soldier from the army of France to visit their island since the war. The keel of the boat grates on the sand; a score of men seize her to pull her up; the women crowd about the stranger (*Aué!* They are good to look upon these girls of Nukuhina!), to throw their necklaces over his head and crown him with wreaths of flowers and shell. His face grows red; the old men smile; the girls laugh aloud. One, bolder than the rest, runs at him suddenly, puts her arms about him, and kisses him after the fashion of the white man. His face grows redder still; at that, the old men, too, laugh aloud. One after another, pushing and pulling to be first, the girls scramble to kiss him; he is overwhelmed, suffocated, and now his face is like fire, but he is not angry, for he smiles.”

Well, what do you think of Ahu Ahu magic? I really ought to refrain from telling you the truth, which—like the stuff of most spirit messages—is simple, unexpected, and disillusioning. When we got to Avarua I found S— there, over from Tahiti to buy cattle; before his departure the *Alouette* had turned up from the Paumotus, bringing word of your reception on Nukuhina.

I fancy you haven't had much time, in your progress through the Low Archipelago, for the pursuits of a landsman, so I'll give you an idea of how I've frittered away the days on Rarotonga.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Soon after our arrival there was a great stir over the coming of a shipload of parliamentary visitors from New Zealand, making a tour of the Cook Islands; a feast of welcome was to be given in Avarua, scores of pigs and hundreds of chickens were set aside for fattening, and the dancers of each village were to be seen rehearsing in the evenings. We drove to Avarua on the appointed day and found the government boat already anchored in the roadstead off the town—an anchorage dreaded by skippers, for unless the anchor strikes exactly on the summit of a sharp submerged peak, it will slide clean off soundings. Long before we reached the settlement the air had been vibrant with the sound of drums, the visitors were coming ashore, the dancing was in full swing.

The performance, of course, was a perfectly sophisticated one—like Papeete, Avarua is a small ocean metropolis, the capital of a group—but it interested me to see that the people, in spite of the efforts of the missionaries to make them ashamed of everything pertaining to heathen days, were not entirely without pride in the past. Each village was represented by a corps of dancers, men and women equally divided, and had its own drums and drummers, who furnished the sole music of the dance. The drums are of three varieties. The smallest are merely hollow sticks—six inches in diameter and a yard long—open on one side, and producing a loud, resonant click when struck with a bit of wood. There are others of medium size, standing on short legs and beaten with the hand, but the huge oldtime drums, suspended from the limbs of trees, interested me most of all. Imagine a five-foot section of the trunk of a big *Barringtonia*, carefully

In the Cook Group

hollowed out and smoothed, with the skins of wild goats stretched over the ends, and sides decorated with outlandish painting.

The big drums are struck with the heel of the hand—with such furious energy that the drummer streams perspiration and is soon exhausted. The deep pulsing sound of them carries for miles in still air; sometimes at night, when there was dancing in the villages, I have heard it far and near, rising, falling, throbbing, from Arorangi, from Titikaveka, and from Ngatangia, whence the ancients set out on their thousand-league voyages to the south.

I wish I could make you feel, as I have felt, the quality of this savage drumming. Monotonous and rhythmic sound, reduced almost to its simplest form, it is the ancestor of all music, toward which, perhaps, our modern dance music is a reversion. There is syncopation in it when the big drum halts at irregular intervals, and the time is carried by the clicking of hollow wood; but it is solemn and ominous—anything but the meretricious syncopation of ragtime. One feels in it an appeal to the primitive emotions, at once vague and charged with meaning; fear and madness are there, with cruelty, lust, triumph, and a savage melancholy.

Except in the case of the contingent from Manihiki—an atoll far off to the north—there was little variation in the dances, for which one can only say that they showed evidence of careful drilling. The women performed a variety of the dance common to all branches of their race—basically the same whether called *hula*, *hura*, or *ura*—but their motions were awkward and stiff, without the abandon and graceful movements of the arms to be seen in Hawaii or the Society Islands.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

The men, who carried long staves like spears, were freer in their motions, leaping, thrusting out their arms, and clattering their sticks in unison.

The costumes—unfortunately for the eye of a sensitive spectator—were slipped on over the wearer's best European clothes; a concession to the missionary point of view; but the beauty of some of the kilts, tunics and headdresses, and the trouble evidently taken in braiding them, showed that the Rarotongans have not wholly forgotten the past.

The dance was followed by speeches, and the speeches by a feast—all very conventional and uninteresting. I wonder if you are heartily fed up on baked pig. One needs a dash of Island blood to appreciate it after the twentieth time! Any other sort of meat would be welcome here where bully beef and pork are the staples. The need of a change of diet drives one to the lagoon; fishing becomes a practical as well as a sporting proposition.

During the proper phases of the moon we lead a most irregular life, for the hours from 3 to 5 A.M. are often the ones most profitable to spend on the reef, and the evenings are occupied with a search for hermit crabs. You have probably made the acquaintance of the hermit crab, but in case you have been too busy to give him the notice he deserves, I'll venture to dwell for a bit on his eccentricities. It was not a pure love of natural history that turned my attention to him; I have been obliged to study him—at least superficially—by the fact that he is the dainty preferred by all the fish of this lagoon, and his capture, therefore, an indispensable preliminary to every fishing expedition.

There must be several varieties of hermit crab—I

In the Cook Group

have counted three already: the ordinary small brown one called *kakara*, the huge red one found in deep water, and the black, hairy kind, whose pounded-up body is mixed with grated coconut to extract the oil. This latter is called *unga*; in the old days the lowest class of Rarotonga society was known by the same name—meaning, I suppose, that all of their property could be carried on their backs. The common variety is a good deal like the robber crab in habits; the natives go so far as to say that it is the same creature, in different stages of its existence. I doubt this theory, for while there are plenty of the little *kakara* on the volcanic islands, the robber crab is very rare; he lives on the atolls, and to my mind it is incredible that he should journey from island to island, through leagues of deep sea. Like his formidable relative, the *kakara* spends most of his time ashore, frequenting the bush along the water's edge, where he lies hidden throughout the day in a hole or under a pile of leaves. His first duty of the evening is a trip to salt water, for he seems to need a thorough wetting once in each twenty-four hours. After his bath he heads back for the bush to begin his nightly search for food—nearly any kind of edible refuse—a dead fish on the beach, the fallen fruit of a pandanus, a coconut, opened by rat or flying fox, and containing a few shreds of meat.

The size of the *kakara* can be judged from his shell, which may be as small as a thimble or as large as an orange. The creature inside is marvelously adapted to the life he leads. His soft and muscular body curls into the spiral of the shell and is securely anchored by a twist of the tail. The fore-end of the crab, which protrudes from the shell when he is in motion, reminds

Faery Lands of the South Seas

one of a tiny lobster; the same stalk eyes, the same legs, the same strong claws. When alarmed he snaps back into his mobile fortress, and you perceive that legs and claws fold into a flat armored barrier, sealing up perfectly the entrance of the shell. Sit still and watch him; presently the claws unfold cautiously and he emerges little by little, feelers waving and eyes peering about in a ludicrously apprehensive manner. Finally he gathers courage and starts off for the bush at his curious rolling gait.

One might suppose the hermit crab the least social of living things, but in reality he is gregarious and seems to enjoy the company of his friends. They wander in little bands; very often one finds two or three small ones perched on the back of a larger comrade and enjoying an effortless trip across the beach to the lagoon. One afternoon I came upon three of them traveling in single file; the last member of the party—a frail little chap—crunched under the heel of my boot before I saw him. I stopped a moment in regret and saw that the two other crabs were also stopping—warned, by I know not what obscure sense, that all was not well with their friend. They drew together as they halted, and went through a hasty and obviously anxious exchange of ideas—face to face, with feelers waving nervously. One was reminded irresistibly of a pair of fussy little old gentlemen, halted in the street to decide which should do an unpleasant errand. At length one of the two settled himself to wait, while the other faced about and shambled off briskly to the rear. A few seconds brought him to what was left of his unfortunate comrade; his eyes seemed to start from his head as he felt over the crushed wreck. A moment

In the Cook Group

later he turned and hastened back even faster than he had come. His arrival had an air of palpitating excitement; I fancied I felt transmitted to me a tiny thrill of horror at the news about to be communicated. This time the four antennæ fairly vibrated—I imagined the conversation going on an inch above the ground.

“My God!” announced the bearer of ill tidings, breathlessly. “Poor Bill is dead!”

“Bill dead!” exclaimed the other, shocked in spite of his incredulity; “but no, you must be wrong—what could have killed him?”

“I don’t know; he’s dead all the same—crushed and mangled—it upset me fearfully.”

“Come, come—you’ve been seeing things; he must have taken a short cut to the beach.”

“I tell you he’s dead; come and have a look if you don’t believe me.” So off they went together for a look at the corpse, and I left them to mourn their friend—perhaps to eat him.

If you want to see a curious sight get a hermit crab some day and pick up half a dozen empty shells of the size to fit him. Lay the shells on the sand in a circle a few inches across, extract the crab without hurting him from his house, and set him down naked among the empty shells. To get him out, by the way, is not so easy as it sounds, but you can do it by taking hold of his claws and maintaining a steady, gentle pull; in time the muscles of his tail will tire and his grip relax. You will be amused when you see his first attempts to walk without his shell, which weighs three or four times as much as the tenant; it is precisely as a man might act, set down on some planet where gravity is weaker than on our earth. Naked, helpless, and worried—*très*,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

très inquiet—the crab makes a dash for one of the shells, gives it a hasty inspection with his feelers, finds something not quite right, and hobbles off to the next one. Perhaps this suits him. He faces about, in goes his tail to take a grip on the whorls, he snaps in and out a few times as if trying the strategic possibilities of the new quarters, and next moment you will see him ambling off blissfully toward the bush.

The chase of the hermit crab is tame sport, no doubt, but not entirely without interest. One evening we set out just after dark, bucket and torch in hand—not the old South Sea torch of coconut leaf, but the modern tube of galvanized iron, filled with kerosene and plugged with burlap, which acts as a wick. The high beach is best at this hour, for one's quarry is beginning to emerge from the bush for the evening dip, and those that have passed will leave spoor in the soft coral sand. Here is the track of a small one, winding toward the water in eccentric curves and zigzags; follow it and you find him, motionless in the torchlight, hoping to escape notice. He goes into the pail with a clang—you can hear his feet scratching vainly at the smooth sides. There were not many about on this stretch of beach; they are uncertain in their habits and seem to be great wanderers. Here is the track of a monster, broad and corrugated like the trail of a miniature Whippet Tank; the spoor leads to the lagoon—no signs of him at the water's edge—he has doubled back. Lift up that rotten coconut frond . . . an *unga*, black, hairy, armed with a vicious pair of claws; you can hear him raging in the pail, a noise halfway between a whine and a growl—a crab with a voice!

In the Cook Group

A stroll of an hour or two along the beach usually procures enough bait for a day's fishing, and one turns inland to follow the road home. Sometimes, when the new moon has set behind the Avarua peaks and thick darkness settles over the bush—when the surf murmurs almost inaudibly in a stillness broken by the plunge of a fish in the lagoon, or the grating screech of a flying-fox, quarreling with his mates in the palm tops—one is not sorry when the lights of the plantation begin to glimmer through the trees.

We went to bed early that evening, for we had to be up long before daylight to catch the first of the flood tide, but these island nights are not meant for sleep—I was soon up again, to spend a couple of hours alone on the veranda. The feel of the air was like a caress; neither hot nor cold, and perfumed with the scents of strange flowers—waxen *Tiaré Tahiti*, sweet and heady frangipani, languorous Queen of the Night. In the mango tree behind the house a mynah twittered—a drowsy overture to one of their abrupt nocturnal choruses. They are quaint birds, the mynahs; introduced to the Islands many years ago, they have increased amazingly in this friendly environment, where they live in a state of half-domesticated familiarity with mankind. One sees them everywhere, hopping fearlessly about the streets of villages, fluttering to the table to finish the bread crumbs left after a meal, perched on the backs of cattle in the coconut groves. They are intensely gregarious, gathering in large flocks at sunset to roost in some thick-foliaged tree—orange, mango, or alligator pear. From time to time during the night, with an abruptness and perfect unison that make one suspect the presence of a feathered

Faery Lands of the South Seas

leader of the orchestra, the two or three hundred members of the colony burst into deafening song—a chorus which lasts perhaps twenty seconds, and stops as suddenly as it began.

At last I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and turned in; at intervals, before sleep came, I heard the far-off thud of a ripe coconut, or the faint slither and crash of an old frond, falling from a palm. We were awakened at three o'clock by the cook's announcement that coffee was ready; it is a pleasure to live where dressing is only a matter of slipping on a fresh singlet and hitching the *pareu* tight about one's waist. Each man carried a pair of old shoes, for even the leathery feet of a native must be protected before he ventures on the live coral. Half a dozen plantation boys followed us to the beach, along a path leading down an avenue of coconuts, the slender boles illuminated by the glare of torchlight. In five minutes we were under the dark ironwoods at the water's edge, where the canoes are hauled up; without waiting for us, the boys plunged into the lagoon—half swimming, half wading toward the reef—torches held aloft in their left hands.

The tide was very low; we had only a short paddle to the shallow water on the inner side of the barrier. It was dead calm—ideal weather for the spear—but there had been a storm somewhere to the south; lines of tall glassy combers, faintly visible in the starlight, were curling with the splitting reports of field artillery—crashing down on the reef until the coral beneath us seemed to tremble at each shock. The eastern sky had not yet begun to pale—the constellations glimmered with the soft glow of the tropics: the Southern Cross, Orion, and the Pleiades.

In the Cook Group

When the water was only knee-deep we moored the canoe to a coral mushroom and went overboard in bare legs and tucked-up *pareus*. Wading slowly, about twenty feet apart—the lagoon so still and clear that it was not easy to tell where air ended and water began—nothing moving in the circle of torchlight could escape notice. It was necessary to watch the bottom and walk warily; the reef is a honeycomb of holes and passages through which the sea boils in at certain tides. Many of these holes, only a few feet in diameter at the surface, lead deep down and out into the caverns lining the edges of the pass—the haunts of octopus and the man-eating rock-cod called *tonu*. A faint ripple revealed a big blue parrot fish skulking in the shadow of a boulder; one of the native boys slipped his spear close before he thrust with a skill that needs years to acquire. He killed the fish with a stab just where the head joins the body, and strung it on the strip of hibiscus bark at his waist.

These lagoons swarm with strange forms of life unknown in northern waters; until one learns one's way about there is a certain amount of danger in wading through the shallows along the reef. A sea scorpion passed close by us—a wicked-looking thing, all feelers and enormous fins; a touch of those spines would give you a nasty leg. An even more poisonous fish is found here—though fortunately not often: the *noo*, which lies buried in patches of coral sand. I have never seen one, and do not know its name in English, but the spines of its dorsal fin are said to be hollow like the fangs of a rattlesnake, and to inject a poison—when stepped on—that is apt to kill or cripple for life. The *totara*, or sea porcupine, is another odd

Faery Lands of the South Seas

creature, but not at all to be feared; at the approach of danger he blows himself up like a football, and once inflated, is proof against almost anything—I've seen a man hurl a heavy stone on one a dozen times without being able to burst him open. In a different way, the conger eels are nearly as hard to kill, particularly the big ones, which are no joke to handle when one is wading barelegged. One must be on the alert every moment—torch blazing, spear poised. One moment you jump on a mushroom of coral to avoid a pair of sea snakes, long, slender and spotted—active, fearless creatures whose bite is said to be a serious matter; a moment later you are slipping and scrambling at top speed to cut off some large fish, working his way through the shallows. One of the boys bagged a *patuki*—a young *tonu*; I was glad to have a look at the ugly little brute. He was only a foot long—a marvel of protective coloring, irregularly spotted and blotched so as to be nearly invisible against a background of coral. The size of the mouth, the power of the jaws, and the rows of cruel little teeth, convinced me that the full-grown fish must deserve the bad name given him by the pearl divers.

The light was gray and the cloud banks along the eastern horizon flushing pale rose when the boys extinguished their torches and set out across the lagoon, each one trailing a heavy string of fish. My host had had enough sport for once, but I love to be on the water at dawn, so when I had landed him I paddled out to the pass to fish for *titiara*. The current was slack and not a breath of wind stirred the lagoon. The light grew stronger; the contours of the island developed in sharp serrations against the sky; presently the sun rose.

In the Cook Group

I anchored the canoe in a fathom of water at the edge of the pass, allowing her to swing out over the depths. Through my water-glass I could examine the precipitous walls of the channel—fifty feet high, overhanging in places, seamed, pitted, broken by the dark mouths of caverns. Shoals of fish moved leisurely along the face of the coral—appearing and disappearing like nesting swallows, seen from a cliff-top: swinish parrot fish, bright blue and long as a man's arm; *taputapu*, spangled orange and black—stopping to nibble at the coral; slender pipefish; swift *nanue*; fish of extraordinary form and coloring—indescribable, perhaps undescribed. At last I saw what I was after—a school of *titiara*, working in from the sea.

I wonder if you know this fish; it is new to me, though I have been told that it exists in the northern Pacific. It is of the true game type—swift and raptacious—with the conformation of a mackerel, and related, I should say, to the pompano of American waters. The young ones, eight to ten inches long, and appearing at certain times of year, in great schools, are called *aturi*. When medium-sized—running from two pounds up to twelve—it is known as *titiara* in the Cook Islands; *paihere* in Tahiti and to the east. The fully grown fish, which attains a weight of a hundred pounds or more, is called *urua*. These different names for stages in the life of the same fish are interesting to me, for they illustrate the richness, in certain directions, of a language so poor in others. We have such terms in English, but they are rapidly becoming obsolete; I doubt, for example, if the average man at home knows that a young salmon is called a grilse, and a still younger one, a parr.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

One's outfit for this kind of fishing consists of a pail of hermit crabs, a couple of stones for crushing them, a hundred feet of stout cotton line, a single hook on a length of piano wire, and several dozen pebbles, to be used as sinkers. First of all you smash the shells of a few crabs, tear off the soft bodies for bait, and crush the claws and legs to a paste. This chum is thrown overboard little by little to attract the fish and keep them about the canoe. When a glance through the water-glass shows that the fish you want are gathered beneath you, a pebble is attached to the line by means of a special hitch, which can be undone by a jerk. Now you lower the line over the side until the bait is in the required position; a sharp pull frees the sinker, and you are ready for the first client. The theory of the detachable sinker is that it enables one to fish at a distance from the boat without having the hook rest on the bottom, where it is apt to foul in the coral.

On this occasion my sport was ruined by one of those tantalizing incidents which lend charm to every variety of angling. I had caught two fish and was lowering my line to try for a third, when the small fry gobbling my chum suddenly scattered and disappeared. Next moment a monstrous *titiara*—almost in the *urua* class—loomed up from the depths, seized my bait, and made off so fast that the line fairly scorched my fingers. My tackle was not designed for such game as this—there was nothing to do but try to play him; but when only a yard of line remained in my hands I was forced to check the rush. A powerful wrench, the line slackened dead, he was off, the light hook had snapped at the bend—and I had no other! The old, old story—it is never the fingerlings that get away.

In the Cook Group

Cut into filets and soaked for six hours in lime juice, my two fish made a raw *hors d'œuvre* of the most delicate kind. I took a plate of it to the house of a neighbor who had asked me to dinner, and this old-timer in the South Seas pronounced it of the very first order. You would enjoy knowing him: he has been in this part of the world since the 'seventies—super-cargo, skipper, trader on islands seldom visited even to-day. Now he is retired and lives on a small plantation which represents the savings of a lifetime. After dinner, as we sat on his wide veranda with pipes going and glasses on the table between us, he told me a tale so curious that I cannot resist repeating it to you—the story of an island far away to the north and west—an island I shall call *Ariri*.

Atolls are by nature lonely places, but of all atolls in the Pacific, *Ariri* is perhaps the loneliest—never visited, far off from any group, out of the paths of navigation. Not very many years ago *Ariri* was a bit of no man's land; though marked on the chart, its existence was ignored by the Powers—it had never been inhabited, no flag had ever been raised above its beaches of dazzling coral sand. At that time, as for centuries before, the sea birds nested undisturbed on the islets within the reef, where all day long the water flashed blue in the sunlight and the trade wind hummed a song of loneliness among the palm tops.

Then a day came when two Frenchmen—shrewd traders and planters of coconuts in the Tuamotu—spoke of *Ariri*. Here was an island capable of an annual hundred tons of copra, and claimed by no man; they would plant it and reap the rewards of enterprise. The chief difficulty was to find a superintendent to

Faery Lands of the South Seas

take charge of the project; it needed a white man, but white men willing to undertake a task of such poignant loneliness were not to be found every day in Papeete. As it chanced, their man was at hand.

The natives called him Tino—perhaps his name had once been King. Years among the islands had obliterated whatever stamp of nationality he might have possessed; it was rumored that he was English by birth, and also that he had held a commission in the Confederate navy. Tall, strong, and of fine presence, with a full blond beard and eyes of reckless blue, a great singer and dancer—always the merriest at a feast and the idol of the women, a remarkable linguist and story-teller, drunken, brave, witty, and unprincipled—Tino was of a type which thrives in Polynesia.

When they offered him the position of superintendent at Ariri the two Frenchmen were not without misgivings. He was on the beach at the time, though the only sign of that condition was an unusual laxity in returning the favor when a friend invited him to drink. Tino had no money, but that was his sole limitation; each of a dozen native families vied for the honor of transferring his mat and camphorwood box to their house; when evening came he had his choice of a dozen invitations to dine, and a dozen girls competed for the joy of doing his laundry and making hats for him. But this easy-going philosophy and lack of worry over a situation scarcely respectable in the eyes of Papeete's business men were calculated to sow distrust. In the case of Ariri, however, it was difficult to see how he could go astray; there would be no liquor—they would see to that—and with no visitors and no means of

In the Cook Group

leaving the island there seemed little chance of trouble, Tino was a famous handler of native labor.

The agreement was made and in due time a schooner sailed into the Ariri lagoon to land Tino and a score of Raiatea boys with their wives. The Frenchmen took care to leave no boat capable of putting out to sea, but as there were houses and sheds to build they left a considerable variety of tools and gear, in addition to a year's supply of medicine, food, and clothing. A day or two later the schooner sailed away.

The superintendent called his men together and appointed a foreman. The main island was to be cleared, rows staked out, and the nuts brought for seed to be planted in such a manner. Before this work began, a house was to be built for each family. That was all, except that Tino needed five men at once for special work of his own—let them be those most skilled in woodworking. With that he seems to have dismissed the business of planting coconuts from his mind.

There was a certain amount of hibiscus on the island, as well as the trees called *tou* and *puka*. In seven months' time, with the help of his men, Tino cut down trees, sawed out timbers and planking, and built a forty-foot cutter—sturdy, fast, and seaworthy. Her mast was the smoothed-down trunk of an old coconut palm; her sails a patchwork of varied fabrics; her cordage of cinnet, twisted and braided coconut fiber—the work of women, incredibly skillful and patient. For anchor, she carried a grooved coral boulder, and her water tanks were five-gallon kerosene tins. At the end of the seventh month this improbable vessel was launched, rigged, and provisioned. Tino bade his men

Faery Lands of the South Seas

farewell and set sail—promising to return—to the westward, fearless and alone. His only instrument was a compass, and yet he made the passage to Fiji—twelve hundred miles—in fifteen days.

I forgot to say that before his departure he had ordered the top of a tall palm chopped off, and on this stout flagpole had hoisted a homemade edition of the Union Jack. In Fiji he wasted no time. At the office of the High Commissioner of the Pacific he announced that he had taken possession of Ariri in the name of the British Empire, and petitioned that a fifty years' lease of the island—at nominal rate—be given him. The request was granted; a few days later Tino was again at sea, still alone, and headed for his little kingdom.

The story is that he bought a sextant in Fiji, but at any rate, something went wrong and he was fifty days without a landfall. Think of this extraordinary man, drifting about alone in his absurd boat—careless, self-confident, and unworried! Even Captain Slocum, said to have navigated thousands of miles of ocean with no other chronometer than a Connecticut alarm clock, performed no madder feat. Tino fetched up at a big lagoon island, six or seven hundred miles out of his course. It is enough to say of his stop there that he spent a week and left, loaded down with provisions and drinking nuts, and accompanied by five of the younger and prettier girls of the village.

This time all went smoothly; the plural honeymoon party enjoyed a merry voyage to Ariri, where Tino established his large and amicable family, and proceeded to the less diverting business of planting coconuts. A year passed; a day came when the schooner from Tahiti rounded to in the lagoon and sent a boat

In the Cook Group

ashore. Accompanied by his twenty men, Tino met the supercargo on the beach. Copra from the old trees? There was not much, but what there was belonged to him. This was a British island, and he was the lessee; here were the papers to prove it. He regretted that as the proprietor he could not allow strangers ashore—demoralize the labor, you know. The Frenchmen fumed, but they were too shrewd not to recognize defeat.

The years passed in peaceful and idyllic fashion; a score of Tino's half-savage offspring fished and swam and raced along the beach. Then one day Tino fell ill.

While he lay in bed, despondent, and brooding over the unfamiliar experience, a schooner entered the lagoon and dropped anchor opposite the settlement. Her boat—trim and smartly manned as a yacht's gig—brought ashore the first missionary to set foot on Ariri. Tino was difficult in the beginning, but the moment was perhaps the weakest of his life; when the missionary left he had married the sick man to Manini—his favorite wife—and received permission to install a native teacher for the children of the island.

It amuses me to think of Tino's recovery and probable regret over his weakness—the thing is so natural, so human; bodily illness and spiritual reform have always gone hand in hand. But his word had been given in good faith; he finished the church and school-house he had promised, and in due time installed the teacher among his flock. The supreme irony of the affair comes at this point, for the native teacher, on the lookout for a flirtation, was indiscreet enough to select Manini as the object of his attentions, and ended by being caught with her under circumstances of the most

Faery Lands of the South Seas

delicate and compromising nature. As Tino said afterward:

“He had a score of women to choose from, beside four of mine who wouldn’t have mattered—and then he picked on Manini! Why, damn it all! man, I was a bit fond of the old girl!”

The teacher paid dearly for his indiscretion. Tino lashed him to a post in the sun, where he would probably have died if the missionary schooner had not appeared just at that time. Cowed and whimpering, the culprit was thrown into a canoe by the indignant husband, who pushed off and paddled angrily alongside the schooner.

“Here’s your bleeding missionary!” he roared out, as he hurled the struggling native into the lagoon. “I’m through with him—from now on this island will have to get along with me for teacher and missionary and king!”

That is all of the story, except that Tino died not long ago—happy, rich enough, and surrounded by a numerous tribe of grandchildren.

CHAPTER XIII

At the House of Tari



YOU will not find Ahu Ahu—under that name—on any chart, and it would be equally useless to search for Nukutere; yet both islands exist, and I like their ancient names better than the modern ones. Glance at your maps and you will see the eastern Pacific dotted with islands bearing names like Jarvis, Malden, and Starbuck—names which suggest no more than the thought of some wandering skipper, immortalizing himself by adding new dangers to the chart. Then think of Nukutere—the immemorial name of an island known wherever the old Polynesians gathered to tell their tales; Nukutere: The Object of the War Fleet's Voyage . . . it needs a dull imagination not to feel a stir.

It was on Nukutere that I found that curious fellow, Tari, at home. Friends often smile at my passion for wild fowl, yet I owe this peaceful adventure entirely to a duck. For several days I had been awaiting a chance to photograph the sky line of the island, and when, one afternoon, the clouds about the peaks dispersed, I put my camera into a small outrigger canoe and paddled down the lagoon, on the lookout for the viewpoint of greatest beauty. I had gone a number of

Faery Lands of the South Seas

miles and the sun was low when I found the view I wanted; though the silhouette of Nukutere was clear-cut, there were clouds in the west and the light was not strong enough for an instantaneous picture. The lagoon is narrow at this point; there was nothing to do but paddle out to the reef and set up my tripod in the shallow wash of the sea. In this manner I made ten exposures—pretty things they must have been, with the long evening shadows, the foreshore of dark bush beyond the water, the high profile of peaks and jagged ridges against the sky.

I folded the steel tripod and stowed the camera in its case; just as I pushed off to paddle back to the village I heard the whimper of a duck's wings in leisurely flight. I have a very fair acquaintance with the ducks of the northern hemisphere, which winter in considerable numbers in Hawaii and occasionally drift down as far as Penrhyn Island, nine degrees south of the equator; but though it must be well known in scientific quarters, the odd nonmigratory duck of the South Seas is a puzzle to me. It is an unsocial bird, this Polynesian cousin of the mallard; a lover of solitude, a haunter of thick woods and lonely valleys; though I have seen them many times in the distance, I have been unable to obtain a specimen so far. I used to wonder how they survived the swarms of bloodthirsty island rats until a friend wrote me from the Cook group: "On top of the razor-back ridge behind the plantation, the dogs put up a duck almost under our feet. I found the nest well hidden in the fern—a beautifully constructed affair, edged with a coaming of down, curled inward. There were eight eggs, standing on end and arranged to occupy the least

At the House of Tari

possible space. When the ducklings appear the old bird must carry them down one at a time—a thousand feet or more—to the swampy feeding grounds.”

I could tell by the sound of its wings that the duck approaching me over the lagoon was closer than any I had seen; in my eagerness for a glimpse I forgot all about cameras and canoes. I flung myself around to look, intent and open-mouthed. Next moment the outrigger heaved up with the speed of a rolling porpoise, described a flashing arc through the air, and smacked heavily into the water closing over my head. It was a fast bit of comedy. The coral anchor and my tripod went to the bottom; I caught the camera instinctively and rose, sputtering, to the surface, where I managed to balance it on the flat bottom of the canoe. Then, as the water was not deep, and I had on nothing but a singlet and a *pareu*, I swam down to get the tripod, and started for shore, pushing the canoe before me. Ahead on the beach two girls and a boy were dancing and rolling in the sand; as the water left my ears I could hear their screams of joy. For the moment I found myself unable to join in the mirth. My thoughts dwelt on cameras and on a story I had heard the night before—how a fisherman, not far from where I was, had felt a tug at his waist as he swam with face submerged, watching the bottom, and turned to see a shark of imposing size nip off the largest fish on his string.

The closer sight of me seemed to redouble the appreciation of my audience, but it was not until I was splashing in the shallows that I was able to smile. Then I saw that the elder of the girls was Apakura, the wife of Tari. She had been washing clothes at the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

mouth of a little stream and came forward, bare-armed and smiling maliciously, to greet me.

“Ah, you have come to bathe in the sea,” she said, as I took her hand, and at this enormous joke all three fell into such a convulsion of laughter that they were obliged to sink down on the sand once more. When she had caught her breath she turned to call her husband: “*E Tari! E Tari e! Aere mai ikonei!*” A moment later he stepped out of the bush, rubbing from his eyes the sleep of an afternoon nap, and I was shaking his hand.

I know Tari rather well, and have spent a good deal of time within a few miles of where he lives, yet I had been in his house only once before. This is characteristic of the islands. There is an agreeable indifference about the relations of white men down here, a careless friendliness I find pleasanter than the more strained and effusive sociality of civilized places. In every part of the world, of course, this tranquil simplicity—the essence of the finest manner—is to be found among the few who have studied the art of living, but the average one of us is neither sure enough of himself nor sufficiently indifferent to the opinion of others; handicapped by an abnormal sense of obligation, we permit ourselves both to bore and to be bored. In certain respects the native is a very well-bred man; perhaps the white intruder has caught something of his manner—or it may be that distance from home brings life into a truer focus; in any case, one deals with the white man of the islands without consciousness of an effort either to entertain or to impress. When you stop at the house of a strange planter he will offer you a whisky-and-soda—if you refuse, nothing more

At the House of Tari

will be said of the matter. At home, with a parching throat, it is quite conceivable that you might tell your chance host not to bother, looking forward with hopeful hypocrisy to his persuasion and your own inevitable acceptance. I think I liked Tari the better for not having asked me to his house; now that hazard had brought me to the door, he made me feel that I was really welcome.

The house was set on a little rise of land, with a view of the lagoon at the end of an avenue of tall coconut palms. The broad veranda, set with steamer chairs and scarlet-bordered Aitutaki mats, gave on a garden of small flowering trees—"Frangipani," "*Tiare Tahiti*," "Maid of Moorea," "Queen of the Night." Tari showed me to a corner room, and mixed a rum punch while his wife put buttons on a fresh suit of drill.

Dressed in his clothes, I strolled into the living room to wait while he was changing for dinner. The place was large, and one might have spent hours examining the things it contained—the fruit of twenty years in the South Seas. There were wreaths of bright-colored shell—the favorite parting gift of the islands—from the Paumotus, from Raiatea, from Aitutaki, and Mangaias. There were fans from Manihiki, woven in patterns of dyed pandanus, and Savage Island fans, decorated with human hair. Ranged on a series of shelves, I found a notable collection of *penus*—the taro-mashers of eastern Polynesia, implements in which the culture of each group expresses itself. I was able to recognize the pestle of Mangaia, eight-sided and carved with almost geometrical perfection from a stalactite of pink lime; the Marquesan *penu* of dark volcanic stone with its curious phallic handle;

Faery Lands of the South Seas

the implement of old Tahiti, gracefully designed and smoothly finished by a people far removed from savagery; the rare and beautiful *penu* of Maupiti—unobtainable to-day—perfect as though turned on a lathe, and adorned with a fantastic handle of ancient and forgotten significance. Mother-of-pearl bonito hooks from a dozen groups were there, and on a table I saw a rare *Toki Tiki* from Mangaia, an odd thing which, for want of a better name, might be called a Peace Adze. It is a slender little tower of carved wood, set with tiers of windows and surmounted by a stone adze head, lashed on with wrappings of sennit, above which extend a pair of pointed ears. The carving—in the close-grained yellow wood of the Pua—is exquisitely done; I recognized the standard patterns of the islands—the Shark's Teeth, the Dropping Water, and the intricate *Tiki Tangata*. The significance of the Peace Adze was religious and ceremonial; the story goes that when, at the end of a period of fighting, two Mangaian clans decided to make peace, the adze played a leading part in the attendant ceremony. A handful of earth was dug up with its head to show that the ground might now be cultivated, and the people were told that they might come and go unmolested, freely as the air through the windowlike openings on its sides. Tari had real adzes as well—the tools with which trees were chopped down and canoes hollowed out—stone implements of a perfection I have never seen elsewhere, carved out of basaltic rock, hard and close as steel, smoothed by processes at which one can only guess, sharp and symmetrical as the product of modern machines.

The Marquesan curiosities interested me most of all—

At the House of Tari

relics of those dark valleys which harbored the most strangely fascinating of all the island peoples. There were ornaments of old men's beards, arranged in little sennit-bound tufts, crinkled and yellowish white; beaked clubs of ironwood, elegantly carved and smooth with countless oilings; ear pendants cut in delicate filigree from the teeth of sperm whales; grotesque little wooden gods, monstrous and bizarre; ceremonial food bowls of *Tamanu*, adorned with the rich and graceful designs of a culture now forever gone. One felt that the spirits of forgotten artists hovered about the place, beckoning one back to days a century before Melville set foot in the valley of Taipi, to scenes of a strange beauty on which mankind will never look again. Some day—perhaps in a future less remote than we like to fancy—nature's careless hand may once more set the stage for a similar experiment, but the people sequestered in those gloomy islands will be of another blood, and the result can never be the same. The Marquesans themselves—if one is to believe the students of antique mankind—were the result of a racial retrogression; their continental forebears knew iron and pottery and the culture of rice—things lost in the eastward push which brought them to the Nine Islands of Iva.

One curious trinket—labeled "Fatu Hiva"—caught my eye; a squat little figure carved in a sawn-off length of yellow ivory. I examined it closely; it had the air of being at least a hundred years old, and the concentric rings of the section showed it to be the tooth or tusk of some large animal. Where could the Marquesan carver have obtained such a lump of ivory on which to exercise his skill? Could it be possible

Faery Lands of the South Seas

that this was the tusk of an elephant, carved not one hundred but many centuries ago, and preserved by the people of these distant islands—an immemorial relic of the days when their ancestors left Persia or the Indian hills? I looked again; it was large enough to be part of a small tusk, but the section was flatter than any elephant ivory I had seen. What could it be? Not the tooth of a hippopotamus—it was too large for that; not the sword of a narwhal, which shows a betraying spiral twist. Then I thought of a walrus tusk, and the story seemed clear. Seventy-five or a hundred years ago some whaling vessel, after a venture in the northern ice, must have sailed south and put in at Fatu Hiva for water or wood or fruit. They had killed walrus off Cape Lisburne or in the Kotzebue Sound and, as was the habit of whalers, some of the tusks had been kept for scrimshaw work. Knowing the Polynesian passion for ivory (in Tonga it was death for any but those of the highest rank to take the teeth of a stranded sperm whale) it is not difficult to imagine the rest—a lantern-jawed Yankee harpooner, perhaps, trading his walrus tusk for a canoeload of fruit or the favors of an exceptionally pretty girl.

I was examining a paddle from Manihiki—a graceful, narrow-bladed thing, carved out of porcupine wood and set with diamonds of mother-of-pearl—when Tari came in.

“A pretty paddle, isn’t it?” he remarked. “You won’t find a more curious one in the Pacific. Notice the way that reinforcing ridge runs down the blade from the haft? Everything has a meaning in primitive stuff of this sort; the original pattern from which this has descended probably came from a land of little trees,

At the House of Tari

where the paddles had to be made in two pieces—blade lashed to handle. Look at the shape of it—more like a Zulu *assegai* than anything else; it is a weapon, primarily; a thrust of it would kill a naked man. The Manihiki people spend a lot of their time in canoes on the open sea—after bonito by day and flying-fish by night—and those waters swarm with sharks. They have developed their paddle into a weapon of defence. The Samoans carried a special shark club for the same purpose.”

I asked his opinion on the disputed question of sharks—whether, in general, the shark is a real menace to the swimmer or the paddler of a small canoe.

“I’ve heard a lot of loose talk,” he said; “how learned societies have offered rewards for a genuine instance of a shark attacking a man, but I have seen enough to know that there is no room for argument. Some idiot goes swimming off a vessel in shark-infested waters, and talks all the rest of his life, perhaps, of the silly fears of others—never realizing that he owes his life to the fact that none of the sharks about him chanced to be more than usually hungry. The really hungry shark is a ravening murderer—dangerous as a wounded buffalo, reckless as a mad dog. . . . I have seen one tear the paddle from the hand of a man beside me and sink its teeth, over and over again in a frenzy, in the bottom of a heavy canoe. How long do you suppose a swimmer would have lived? And it’s not only the big sharks that are dangerous. I remember one day when a lot of us were bathing in Penrhyn lagoon. Suddenly one of the boys gave a shout and began to struggle with something in the waist-deep water—clouded with blood by the time I got there.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

A small tiger shark, scarcely a yard long, had gouged a piece of flesh out of his leg, and continued to attack until a big Kanaka seized it by the tail and waded to the beach, holding the devilish little brute, snapping its jaws and writhing frantically, at arm's length. As he reached the dry sand the native allowed his arm to relax for an instant; the shark set its teeth in his side and tore out a mouthful that nearly cost the man his life."

The voice of Apakura was summoning us to eat. "*Kaikai!*" she called: "*Aere mai korua!*" Tari's dining room was a section of the side veranda, screened off with lattices of bamboo, where we found a table set for two, fresh with flowers and damask. Apakura sat cross-legged on a mat near by; she was weaving a hat of native grass and looked up from her work now and then to speak to the girl who served us—admonishing, scolding, and joking in turn. Tari followed my glance, and smiled as he caught the eye of his wife.

"It probably strikes you as odd that she doesn't sit with us," he said to me. "I tried to get her into the way of it at first, but it's no good. For generations the women of her family have been forbidden to eat in the presence of men, and the old *tapu* dies hard. Then she hates chairs; when she sits with me she is wretchedly uncomfortable, and bolts her food in a scared kind of way that puts me off my feed. It is best to let them follow their own customs; she likes to sit on the floor there and order her cousin about; when we've finished they'll adjourn to the cook house for dinner and discuss you till your ears tingle. House-keeping down here is a funny, haphazard business—

At the House of Tari

hopeless if one demands what one had at home; easy and pleasant if one is willing to compromise a bit. To a man who understands the natives at all the servant question does not exist; they will jump at a chance to attach themselves to your household—the trouble is to keep them away. It isn't wages they are after; I pay these people nothing at all for cooking and washing and looking after the place. They like to be where tea and sugar and ship's biscuit are in plenty, and they like to be amused. An occasional stranger, coming and going like yourself, gives them no end of food for talk; I have a phonograph I let them play, and a seine I let them take out for a day's fishing now and then. Once a month, perhaps, I kill a pig and give a bit of a party, and once or twice in a year I get a bullock and let them invite all their relatives to a real *umukai*. In return for all this they look after my fifty acres of coconuts, make my copra, do my housework, cooking, and laundry, and provide me with all the native food I can use. It strikes me as a fair bargain, from my point of view, at least. It is understood that they are not to bother me; unless there is work to do or they want to see me they never set foot in the house.

“My greatest trouble has been to get some idea of regularity into their heads. These people cannot understand why we prefer to eat our dinner at the same hour every day. Where contact with the white man has not changed their habits, they eat whenever they are hungry—at midnight or at four in the morning, if they chance to be awake. Even here they can't understand my feelings when dinner is an hour or two late.”

Faery Lands of the South Seas

The cousin of Apakura took away the remnants of a dish of raw fish and brought us a platter heaped with roast breadfruit, taro, yams, and sweet potatoes, served with a pitcher of *tai akari*—the sea water and coconut sauce, worthy of a place on any table. It is only the uncivilized white who turns up his nose at native food; the island's vegetables are both wholesome and delicious, and cannot be cooked better than in a Maori oven. A certain amount of European food is necessary to health, but the sallow, provincial white man, who takes a sort of racial pride in living on the contents of tins, need not be surprised that the climate of the islands does not agree with him. It is the same type, usually with no other cause for pride than the fact that he chanced to be born white, whose voice is most frequently heard declaiming on the subject of color. Everywhere in the islands, of course, the color line exists—a subtle barrier between the races, not to be crossed with impunity; but the better sort of white man is ready to admit that God, who presumably made him, also made the native, and made of the Polynesian a rather fine piece of work. Tari had stepped across with eyes open, counting the cost, realizing all that he must relinquish. He is not a man to make such a decision lightly; in his case the step meant severing the last material tie with home, giving up forever the Englishman's dreams of white children and an old age in the pleasant English countryside. His children—if children came to him—would have skins tinted by a hundred generations of hot sunlight, and look at him with strange, dark eyes, liquid and shy—the eyes of an elder race, begotten when the world was young. His old age would be spent on this remote and forgotten

At the House of Tari

bit of land, immensely isolated from the ancestral background to which most men return at last. As the shadows gathered in the evening of his life there would be long days of reading and reflection—stretched in a steamer chair on this same veranda, while the trade hummed through the palm tops and the sea rumbled softly on the reef. At night, lying wakeful as old men do, in a hush broken only by the murmur of a lonely sea, his thoughts would wander back—a little sadly, as the thoughts of an old man must—along a hundred winding paths of memory, through scenes wild and lovely, savage, stern, and gay. Dimly out of the past would appear the faces of men and women—long since dead and already only vaguely remembered—the companions of his youth, once individually vibrant with the current of life, now moldering alike in forgotten graves. They would be a strangely assorted company, Tari's ghosts: men of all the races, scholars, soldiers, sportsmen, skippers of trading vessels, pearl divers of the atolls, nurses of the Red Cross, Englishwomen of his own station in life, dark-eyed daughters of the islands, with shining hair and the beauty of sleek, wild creatures—bewitching and soulless, half bold and half afraid. Whether for good or ill, wisely or unwisely, as the case might be, no man could say that Tari had not lived; I wondered what the verdict would be when, in the days to come, he cast up the balance of his life. . . .

Apakura ceased her plaiting and began to measure off the narrow braid, delicately woven in a pattern of black and white, which would eventually be sewn in spirals to make a hat—my hat, by the way, for it had been promised to me weeks before. One fathom, two

Faery Lands of the South Seas

fathoms, three fathoms—another two fathoms were needed, work for the odd moments of a month. Some day—in an uncertain future and on a distant island, perhaps—the cabin boy of a schooner would step ashore and present me with a box containing this same hat, superbly new, decorated with a gay puggree and lined with satin bearing my initials in silk. Meanwhile, though I would have given much for a new hat, there was nothing to do but wait. Like other things of native make, a hat cannot be bought with money; the process of manufacture is too laborious to be other than a matter of good will. Think of the work that goes into one of these hats. First of all—far off in the mountains—the stalks of *aeho* (*Erianthus floridulus*) must be gathered. These are split when thoroughly dry, and the two halves scraped thin as paper before being split again into tiny strips of fiber less than a sixteenth of an inch wide. A certain amount of the *aeho*, depending on the pattern to be woven, must now be dyed—usually black or in a shade of brown. From a dozen to twenty of these strands—dyed and undyed—are plaited into the flexible braid of which the hat is built up—a task requiring extraordinary patience and skill. Such hats are made only for relatives and close friends; if an unmarried girl gives one to a man the gift has the same significance as the pair of earrings he would give in return. When a native boy appears with a new and gorgeous hat, the origin of which is veiled in doubt, village gossip hums until the truth is known; even the classic sewing circle of New England can show no faster or more efficient work than these artless brown women, standing knee deep in the waters of some dashing stream, prattling, laugh-

At the House of Tari

ing, shattering the reputations of absent sisters, as they pound and wring the soapy clothes.

When dinner was over and Tari was filling his pipe in the living room I took up the lamp for a glance at the titles on his shelves of books. Side by side with the transactions of the Polynesian Society and the modern works of S. Percy Smith and McMillan Brown, I found Mariner's *Tonga*, Abraham Fornander's *Account of the Polynesian Race: Its Origin and Migration*, Lieut. William Bligh's *Voyage to the South Seas for the Purpose of Conveying the Bread-fruit Tree to the West Indies, in His Majesty's Ship the "Bounty,"* and the *Polynesian Researches* of William Ellis. I took down a volume of Ellis; Tari crossed the room to glance over my shoulder at the quaint title page—it was evident that he loved his books.

"Tahiti was the most interesting of all the islands," he said, as we sat down, "and the best accounts of old Tahiti are those of Bligh and Ellis. Bligh wrote from the standpoint of a worldly man and, though he was unable to speak the language fluently and stopped only a few months on the island, he has left an extraordinarily vivid and detailed picture of the native life before European religion and trade began their work of change. Ellis was a missionary of the finest sort—broad-minded as religious men go, inspired by the purest of motives, a close and sympathetic observer, and able to appreciate much of the beauty and interest of the old life. If you believe that one branch of mankind is justified in almost forcibly spreading its religion among the other races, and that trade should follow the Bible, you will enjoy every page of Ellis. His point of view concerning temporal matters is summed up in

Faery Lands of the South Seas

this volume, at the end of a chapter on Hawaii. Here it is: 'Their intercourse with foreigners has taught many of the chiefs to prefer a bedstead to the ground, and a mattress to a mat; to sit on a chair, eat at a table, use a knife and fork, etc. This we think advantageous, not only to those who visit them for purposes of commerce, but to the natives themselves, as it increases their wants, and consequently stimulates to industry.' There you hear the voice of the mechanical age, which began a hundred years ago and ended—I rather fancy—when we fired the last shots of the war. Increase their wants, advertise, speed up production—whatever the impalpable cost, make the way smooth for the swift wheels of progress—those are the germs of a disease from which the world may need another century to recover. But the change in these islands was only the insignificant corollary of a greater change throughout the world; Ellis and his kind were no more than the inevitable instruments of a harsh Providence.

“Ellis’s book was published in eighteen thirty-one. During the eighty-nine years that have passed since that date we have seized the islands and profited largely by them—as coaling stations, as naval bases, as sources of valuable raw material, as markets for our surplus manufactured goods. What have we done for the natives in return? Instead of the industrious, piously happy, and increasing communities foreseen by the missionaries as the result of their efforts, one finds a depressed and dying people, robbed of their old beliefs and secretly skeptical of the new. We who conduct our wars in so humane and chivalrous a spirit have taught them to abolish human sacrifice and to stop the savage fighting which horrified the first messengers of

At the House of Tari

Christianity, but, in the case of the islands of which Ellis wrote, the benefits of civilization end here. Infanticide is now a punishable crime and rarely practiced, but perhaps it is as well to have children and to kill a certain number of them, as to be rendered sterile by imported disease. After all, infanticide, repulsive though it may be, is only a primitive form of the birth control which is making its appearance in Europe and America, as the continents—the white man's islands—approach the limit of population.

“As for true religious faith of the kind which the missionaries sincerely hoped to instill, that plays in the life of the Kanaka a part of about the same importance as in the life of the average white man. Don't think I am cynical in saying this—I respect and envy men who possess real faith; they are the ones by whom every great task is accomplished. But the religion of the native is less than skin deep; his observance of the Sabbath day a survival of the old *tapu*; his churchgoing and singing of hymns—satisfying the social instinct, the love of gossip, the desire to be seen in fine clothes—replace the old-time dance, wrestling matches, and exhibitions of the *areoi*. You have seen something of the outer islands, where the people are half savage even to-day, still swayed by what we call heathen superstition. Now consider Tahiti, where the people for more than a hundred years have been subjected to exhortations of an intensity almost unparalleled. If it is possible to inject our religion into their blood, it must have been accomplished in Tahiti, but in my opinion the efforts of three generations of missionaries have produced a result surprisingly small on this island—the most civilized of the South

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Pacific—where heathen superstition is far from dead to-day.

“Before the schooners took to Penrhyn Lagoon we used to spend the hurricane season in Papeete; I never cared much for towns; I usually put in the time wandering about the more remote districts. Civilization has barely scratched the inner life of Tahiti. Men who wear trousers and go to church by day would fear to sleep at night unless a lamp burned in the house to repel the *varua ino* and ghastly *tupapau* of their ancestors. If a girl falls ill the native doctor—a lineal descendant of the heathen priest—is called in. ‘What have you done during the past week?’ he asks. . . . ‘You spoke harshly to that old woman? Ah, I knew there was a cause!’ He administers a remedy in the form of a certain bath or a sprinkling with the water of a young coconut, and takes his leave. If the girl recovers it is a remarkable instance of the doctor’s skill; if she dies it is proof that her offense was too grave to be remedied. Perhaps a ghost walks and the native doctor is again consulted. ‘It is your wife who comes to trouble you at night? How was she buried?’ Eventually the grave is opened and the body found to be lying face down; when turned on her back and again covered with earth the lady is content, and ceases her disreputable prowlings.

“I am not convinced that all of these things are absurdity. . . . I told you, when we were on the schooner, about some of my curious experiences in this group. There are happenings fully as strange on Tahiti and Moorea. You must have heard of what the natives call *varua ino*—a vague variety of devil, a sort of earth spirit, quite unhuman and intensely malignant. The

At the House of Tari

people are not fond of discussing this subject, and their beliefs have become so tangled that it is impossible to get a straightforward story, but as nearly as I can make out, numbers of these *varua ino* are thought to lie in wait wherever a man or woman is dying, struggling fiercely with one another in their effort to catch and devour the departing human soul. If the spirit makes its escape the first time the ravening watchers do not give up hope, but linger about the body, to which the soul is apt to return from time to time during the day or two following death. The human soul, at this stage, is considered nearly as malignant and dangerous as the *varua ino*—you can see what a garbled business it is. Sometimes an earth spirit enters the corrupted body and walks abroad at night. On one subject the natives all agree: the struggles of the preying spirits and the human soul are apt to be marked by splashes and pools of blood—whose blood I have never learned to my satisfaction.

“A friend of mine—an educated and skeptical Englishman, in whose word I have the utmost confidence—was the witness of one of these blood-splashing affairs. He lived on Moorea, just across from Tahiti; Haapiti was the village, I think. One afternoon he whistled to his fox terrier and strolled to a near-by house, where the body of a native (an old fellow he had liked) lay in state, surrounded by mourning relatives. As he stood on the veranda the dog began to growl furiously, and at the same moment the oldest man present—a sort of doctor and authority on spiritual matters—shouted out suddenly that everyone must leave the house. The native explained afterward that he had caught a glimpse of something like a small comet

Faery Lands of the South Seas

—a shapeless and luminous body, trailing a fiery tail—rushing horizontally toward the rear of the building. The people gathered outside in a bit of a panic; the fox terrier seemed to have gone mad on the porch—alternately cowing and leaping forward with frenzied growls toward some invisible thing. All at once there was a great racket of overturned furniture inside the house, and next moment the Englishman saw gouts of what looked like blood splashing over the outer wall and the floor of the veranda. The dog was covered—it was a week before his coat was clean. The net result of the affair was that the veranda needed a cleaning, a couple of tables were overturned, and the body of the old man considerably disturbed; but its most curious feature is the fact that my friend—suspecting native trickery and the desire to impress a white man—took a specimen of the blood across to Papeete, where he got the hospital people to examine it. It was human blood beyond a doubt. What do you make of that?

“The other evening, when I was having a yarn with Apakura, she told me about another kind of *varua ino*, who figures as the villain in the tale of a Polynesian Cinderella. It may interest you. A great many years ago, on Ahu Ahu, there was a man named Tautu—one of Apakura’s family—a renowned fighting man, who dabbled in sorcery when there were no wars to be fought. Tall, handsome, and famous, it was no wonder that Tautu was pursued by all the island girls—scheming sisters, in particular, who went so far as to build a hut near where he lived. Hoping to catch the eye of the hero, they took their finest ornaments and robes of *tapa* and went to live in the hut, accompanied

At the House of Tari

by their little sister, Titiara, who was to act as a drudge about the house. Young Titiara had no designs on Tautu, and she possessed no finery to make herself beautiful in his eyes, but one day, when she was gathering wood in the bush, he chanced to pass. Stopping to speak with her, he was struck with her goodness and beauty, and from that time the two met every day in the forest. The older sisters, meanwhile, were the victims of a mischievous earth spirit which haunted the vicinity and visited them in the guise of Tautu. They were triumphant—when it was known that they had won the warrior's favors all their friends would be wild with jealousy; they could not resist preening themselves before their little sister. 'Tautu loves us,' they told her; 'he comes every day when you are off gathering wood.' 'But that is impossible,' said Titiara, 'for Tautu is my lover; he meets me each day in the forest.' The older girls laughed scornfully at this, but Titiara said no more until she met her lover in the evening. When she told him what her sisters had said, he laughed. 'It is a *varua ino*,' he informed her, 'a mischievous spirit whose true appearance is that of a hideous old man. To-morrow I will prove to your sisters that it is not I who visit them.' That night Tautu sat up late, weaving a magic net of hibiscus bark—a net which had the property of causing a spirit to assume its true shape. Next afternoon Tautu and Titiara stole up to the house where the spirit, in the form of a splendid warrior, was talking and laughing with the two sisters. Tautu cast the net; next moment the spirit was howling and struggling in the magic meshes, unable to escape, moaning as it shriveled and changed to the appearance of an old man, gray-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

bearded, trembling, and hideous. The two sisters shrank back in loathing and mortification, while Tautu told them that he had chosen Titiara to be his wife."

As he finished his story Tari rose, crossed the room to a bookshelf, and returned to hand me a volume bound in worn yellow leather.

"I'm going to turn in now," he remarked; "we'll go fishing in the morning if you will plan to stop over. Take this to your room if you are not sleepy; it is worth running over—Bligh's account of the voyage of the *Bounty*, published at Dublin in seventeen ninety-two."

Propped up in bed, with a lamp burning on the table beside me, I opened Bligh's quaint and earnest account of his voyage. The mutiny, the commander's passage in an open boat from Tonga to Timor, and the settlement of the mutineers on Pitcairn Island have been made familiar by a voluminous and sentimental literature, but I had never before come across the story of Bligh's residence among the natives of Tahiti, one hundred and thirty-two years ago.

More than any other Eastern island, perhaps, Tahiti was the cradle of the oceanic race; called the Lap of God by Kamapiikai, the fabled Hawaiian voyager, who discovered, in the southern group, the fountain of eternal youth. Knowing something of the island as it is to-day, I had listened with interest when Tari remarked, "Civilization has barely scratched the inner life of Tahiti." Bligh was a close observer, blessed with insight and a pleasant sense of humor; at the time of his visit the people were untouched by European influence. It is interesting to check his observations against what any traveler may see nowadays—to judge for oneself how deeply the civilization

At the House of Tari

of Europe has been able to modify the peculiarities of Polynesian character.

The family of Pomare, of which the chief Tu (called Otoo by Cook, Tinah by Bligh) was the founder, owed its rise to power largely to the friendship of the English. Bligh often entertained Tinah and his wife, Iddeah, on board the *Bounty*—they must have been amusing parties. “Tinah was fed by one of his attendants, who sat by him for that purpose . . . and I must do him the justice to say he kept his attendant constantly employed: there was, indeed, little reason to complain of want of appetite in any of my guests. As the women are not allowed to eat in presence of the men, Iddeah dined with some of her companions about an hour afterward, in private, except that her husband, Tinah, favored them with his company and seemed to have entirely forgotten that he had already dined.” In his rambles about the island Bligh noticed precisely what strikes one to-day: “In any house that we wished to enter we always experienced a kind reception and without officiousness. The Otaheiteans have the most perfect easiness of manners, equally free from forwardness and formality. When they offer refreshments, if they are not accepted, they do not think of offering them the second time; for they have not the least idea of that ceremonious kind of refusal which expects a second invitation.” Bligh was not deceived, like the French philosophers who read Bougainville’s account of Tahiti, and rhapsodized about the beauty of a life free from all restraint; he remarked the deep-rooted system of class inherent in the island race, a system of which the outward marks are gone, but which is far from dead to-day. “Among people so free from osten-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

tation as the Otaheiteans, and whose manners are so simple and natural, the strictness with which the punctilios of rank are observed is surprising. I know not if any action, however meritorious, can elevate a man above the class in which he was born, unless he were to acquire sufficient power to confer dignity on himself. If any woman of the inferior classes has a child by an Earee it is not suffered to live."

Bligh's observations on the gay and humorous character of the people and their extraordinary levity might have been written yesterday. "Some of my constant visitors had observed that we always drank His Majesty's health as soon as the cloth was removed; but they were by this time become so fond of wine that they would frequently remind me of the health in the middle of dinner by calling out, 'King George Earee no Brittanee'; and would banter me if the glass was not filled to the brim. Nothing could exceed the mirth and jollity of these people when they met on board." One day Tinah told Bligh of an island "to the eastward of Otaheite four or five days' sail, and that there were large animals upon it with eight legs. The truth of this account he very strenuously insisted upon and wished me to go thither with him. I was at a loss to know whether or not Tinah himself gave credit to this whimsical and fabulous account; for though they have credulity sufficient to believe anything, however improbable, they are at the same time so much addicted to that species of wit which we call humbug that it is frequently difficult to distinguish whether they are in jest or in earnest." On another occasion, while walking near a place of burial, Bligh was "surprised by a sudden outcry of grief. As I expressed a desire to see

At the House of Tari

the distressed person, Tinah took me to the place, where I found a number of women, one of whom was the mother of a young female child that lay dead. On seeing us their mourning not only immediately ceased, but, to my astonishment, they all burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, and, while we remained, appeared much diverted at our visit. I told Tinah the woman had no sorrow for her child, otherwise her grief would not have so easily subsided, on which he jocosely told her to cry again: they did not, however, resume their mourning in our presence. This strange behavior would incline us to think them hard-hearted and unfeeling did we not know that they are fond parents and, in general, very affectionate: it is therefore to be ascribed to their extreme levity of disposition; and it is probable that death does not appear to them with so many terrors as it does to people of a more serious cast."

When the surgeon of the *Bounty* died and was buried ashore "some of the chiefs were very inquisitive about what was to be done with the surgeon's cabin, on account of apparitions. They said when a man died in Otaheite and was carried to the Tupapow that as soon as night came he was surrounded by spirits, and if any person went there by himself they would devour him: therefore they said that not less than two people together should go into the surgeon's cabin for some time." I thought of Tari and his tales of the *varua ino* . . . four generations of schools and churches have failed to work a metamorphosis.

I read on till drowsiness overcame me and the pages blurred before my eyes. It was late and the night was

Faery Lands of the South Seas

very calm; a vagrant night breeze, wandering down from the mountains, rustled gently among the fronds of the old palms around the house. When the rustling ceased—so faint as to be almost inaudible—I could hear the far-off whisper of the sea. The world about me was asleep; I roused myself with an effort, adjusted the mosquito net, and blew out the lamp.



CHAPTER XIV

In the Valley of Vaitia



IT is not easy to analyze the magic which cozens every traveler into believing that he is the first to see Tahiti with clear eyes—one feels that it is made up of nature in a mood of unearthly loveliness; of a sense of ancient and unalterable life; of a realization that strange beliefs persist under a semblance of Christianity; of the lure of a race whose confidence the white man can never fully gain. The mail steamers, the wireless, the traders, the scattering of French officials—these things are a mere play of shadows on the surface. Even the churches, I was tempted to say; but the church plays more than a shadowy part in the life of the native, whose religion, at the present day, is a singular blending of Christian doctrine and old heathen belief. The Tahitian reads his Bible (he has no other book) and sings loudly every Sunday in church; but the dead are still things of horror in his mind; sorcerers—masquerading as doctors—still carry on a brisk trade; and Tautau, the Great-headed, is still a living presence in the valley of Punaruu.

When the people of the Society Islands accepted Christianity a century ago they did so with reservations

Faery Lands of the South Seas

of which the missionaries, perhaps, were not aware. Here and there, as at Faatoai on Moorea, there was a burning of idols, but a great mass of material—old gods and heathen weapons—was stored in secure hiding places among the hills. To-day, after three generations of increasing European influence, hundreds of natives know of these caves and repair to them for purposes of their own, yet a white man might spend his life on Tahiti without a glimpse of a cinnet-bound *orooro* or a slender ironwood spear.

My friend Airima is typical. The widow of a Yankee skipper, the owner of a neat wooden villa in Papeete, where she appears regularly, on her way to church, in shoes, stockings, and a black-silk gown, she finds it necessary, from time to time, to cast off the unnatural manners of Europe and live as she was meant to live; to be herself, an elderly and delightful savage. When the mood comes she closes the villa in Papeete, gathers the willing members of her family, and repairs to her native house, far off on the peninsula of Tairapu.

The house of Airima stands on the river bank, shaded by a pair of mango trees, dark green and immemorially old. The roof is thatched with braided fronds of coconut; breezes play through the lofty single room, bare of furniture and floored with mats spread on white coral gravel, leveled and packed. Past the veranda, on which the family sleeps through the warm hours of the day, the river flows out gently to the sea; a broad, still water, deep and glassy clear, peopled with darting shoals of fish—mullet, young pampano, and *nato*, the trout of the South Seas. Opposite the river mouth the reef is broken by a pass, through which the steady lines of combers sweep in to crash and tumble on the

In the Valley of Vaitia

bar. Morning and afternoon the breakers are alive with naked children, shouting and glistening brown in the sunlight as they ride the waves.

Inland, the valley marking the river's course is lost in a maze of broken and fantastic peaks; seaward, bordering the green and blue of the lagoon, the snowy line of the reef stretches off endlessly; and beyond a three-league expanse of bright sea the headlands of Tahiti Nui rise in vast, swelling curves, up and up to the perpetual clouds which veil the heights. Under a bright sun at midday, when the palm tops toss to the trade which paints the lagoon—in the deep passes and over the patches of sandy bottom—with ruffled sapphire and emerald, and sets the whitecaps to dancing beyond the reef, or in the calm of night, with the moon hanging low over pinnacles of basalt—when the polished surface of the lagoon is broken by the plunge and swirl of heavy fish, and native songs, rising and falling in savage cadences, float out across the water—it is a place not easily forgotten.

It was still dark when we rose—Maruae and I; the brothers of Maruae had returned from the reef, and the ovens behind the cook house were smoking, for in these places the hour of the day's first meal is set by the return of the fishermen. I took one shuddering plunge into the river, dressed myself in a shirt, a waistcloth, and a pair of hobnailed boots, and squatted with the rest to consume a fresh-caught mackerel and a section of breadfruit, dipped in the common bowl of sauce.

Maruae sucked his fingers and stood up, calling to the dogs. Airima glanced at me over the back of a large fish she was gnawing, holding it with both hands.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

“Go, you two,” she said. “You stay,” replied Maruae, as he turned to take the path to the mountains. The oceanic tongue possesses no other words of parting.

We followed the river across the flatlands of the coast. Dawn was flushing in the east; the profile of lofty ridges, fern clad and incredibly serrated, grew sharp against the sky. The mynahs were awakening; from the thick foliage of orange and mango trees came their extraordinary morning chorus—a thousand voices, whistling, screaming, and chattering that it was time the assembly broke up for the foraging of another day. In one place, where a turn of the path brought us suddenly to the edge of a still reach of water, a pair of native ducks (*Anas superciliosa*) rose vertically on beating wings and sped off over the palm tops. A little farther on, where volcanic boulders began to appear through the alluvial soil and the river leaped and foamed over the first rapids, a family of Tahitian jungle fowl, led by a splendid burnished cock, sprang out of the grass and streamed away, in easy, rapid flight, toward the hills. The dogs bounded forward and stopped, whining as they watched the wild chickens dwindle to speeding dots.

The groves of coconut palms and open pasture land were behind us now; the valley was narrowing, hemmed in by thousand-foot cliffs to which a tangle of vegetation clung. The river had become a torrent, boiling and waist deep—plunging over cataracts, roaring down dark rapids under a roof of matted trees: giant hibiscus a yard through, too remote to tempt the ax of the canoe builder; candle nut, Barringtonia, and mapé, the island chestnut, with boles like fluted columns of a temple. The trail wound back and forth,

In the Valley of Vaitia

across the river, over the trunks of fallen trees, around masses of rock tumbled from the cliffs above, mounting higher and higher into the heart of the island. Once, as we stopped to rest, I looked back and caught a glimpse of the sea—a wedge of blue, far behind us and below. The dogs had begun to range ahead, for they knew that any moment we might start a sounder of wild pig. I was growing tired—it was not easy to follow Maruae at his own gait. He walked with the rapid, springy tread of a mountain man; when he stooped to clear a low-branching limb or lopped off a section of creeper with an easy swing of his machete I admired the play of muscles on his back, rippling powerfully under the smooth, brown skin. Silken and unblemished—unless it be by scars—the skin of these people is not like ours, but softer and closer in texture; seeming, like marble, to glimmer with reflected light.

The gorge grew narrower; we rounded a buttress of jointed basalt and came suddenly into the light and open of a lonely valley. A quarter of a mile wide and twice as long, set high above the sea, and hemmed in by untrodden ridges, it lay here uninhabited and forgotten, in a silence broken only by the roar of savage cataracts and the far-off bellowing of wild bulls. Yet man had been here. Along the base of the cliffs we found the terraced stone of his dwellings, the blocks of volcanic rock pried apart by the roots of huge old trees.

Maruae was squatting on his heels beside me, contemplating in silence these relics of an older time. Finally he turned his head. “Those stones are very old,” he remarked; “they have been here always, since the beginning. Men placed them there and men

Faery Lands of the South Seas

slept on them, but not the men of my people." My thoughts dwelt on the old idle tales I had heard—of the Lizard men, of the dark-skinned aborigines, the Manahune, said to have been in possession of the land when the eyes of Polynesian voyagers first rested on cloudy Orofena. There were other tales, too, of a later day; of a tribe of men dwelling in the valleys, neither tasting fish nor setting foot on the beach except when, at certain intervals, they were permitted to come down to worship by the sea. Even to-day it needs no effort of the imagination to see two distinct types among the island people: men and women of the kind one considers typically Polynesian—tall, clean limbed, and light brown, with clear, dark eyes, straight or waving hair, and heads not differing greatly from the heads of Europeans; and another kind, of a negroid or Melanesian cast—short, squat, and many shades darker in complexion, thick-lipped and apish, with muddy eyes, kinky hair, and flattened, undeveloped heads. And, strangely enough, after more than a century of missions and leveling foreign influence, the dark and awkward people seem still to fill the humbler walks of life—they are the servants and dependents, the feeders of pigs, the carriers of wood and water. Great stature, physical beauty, and light complexion are still the hall marks of aristocratic birth. Writing of the islands a hundred years ago, old Ellis, the often-quoted, closest observer of them all, remarked: "It is a singular fact in the physiology of the inhabitants of this part of the world that the chiefs, and persons of hereditary rank and influence of the islands, are, almost without exception, as much superior to the peasantry or common people in stateliness, dignified deportment, and physical

In the Valley of Vaitia

strength as they are in rank and circumstances, although they are not elected to their station on account of their personal endowments, but derive their rank and elevation from their ancestry. This is the case with most of the groups of the Pacific, but peculiarly so in Tahiti and the adjacent isles. The father of the late king was six feet four inches high; Pomare was six feet two. The present king of Raiatea is equally tall. . . . Their limbs are generally well formed, and the whole figure is proportioned to their height, which renders the difference between the rulers and their subjects so striking that Bougainville and some others have supposed they were a distinct race, the descendants of a superior people, who at a remote period had conquered the aborigines and perpetuated their supremacy." There is a curious inconsistency in the matter of complexion, for in the old days a dark skin was considered the sign of a strong, warlike, and masterly man. Ellis records an extract from an old song: "If dark be the complexion of the mother, the son will sound the conch shell"; and yet, on the same page, he observes that "the majority of the reigning family in Raiatea are not darker than the inhabitants of some parts of southern Europe."

While Maruae and I rested among the ruins of the ancient settlement the dogs had been more usefully engaged. My musings were disturbed by a sudden burst of squeals, punctuated by excited yelpings. Maruae sprang to his feet, long knife in hand. It was only a small pig, a sixty-pounder, but he was bursting fat, stuffed with Vi apples fallen from the great tree under which he had been feeding. The dogs had him by the ears when we arrived; a thrust of the machete

Faery Lands of the South Seas

put an end to his short and idyllic life. I hung him from a branch and skinned him while Maruae went off in search of *fei*. Presently he returned, carrying on his shoulder a stout pole of hibiscus, from either end of which swung a bunch of the mountain plantains, like huge, thick bananas, the size of quart bottles and bright yellowish red. There was a clump of palms near by, another sign, perhaps, of man's former occupation—the relics of unnumbered vegetable generations; we had coconuts to drink, pork and *fei* were at hand, and plenty of fresh-water crayfish to be had in the river. In the islands, the obtaining of food is always the signal for a meal. Maruae beckoned to me and led the way to the river, where he readjusted his waistcloth to leave a kind of apron hanging in front and plunged up to his armpits in the still water. With the apron spread as a trap for the darting crayfish, he moved slowly along the grassy and overhanging bank of the stream, stopping every moment or so to hand a struggling victim up to me. This little fresh-water lobster is one of the most delicious shellfish in the world—of the same dimensions as the French *ecrivisse*, and not unlike it in flavor. In fifteen minutes we had enough, and the work of preparing our meal began.

I gathered wood and started a fire against a face of rock. Maruae cut a section of giant bamboo, half filled it with water, threw in the crayfish, and stood it beside the fire to boil. Our meal was genuinely primitive; I had cigarettes, matches, and a paper of salt stowed in the tuck of my *pareu*—excepting our knives, we had nothing else that the rudest of savages might not have possessed. Turning up the earth with his

In the Valley of Vaitia

machete, my companion scraped out a shallow trench—a Maori oven. He set a ring of stones about the edge, lined the inside with pebbles, and filled the whole with coals from our camp-fire. While the coals glowed, heating the earth and stones, he cut off a loin and hind-quarter of pork, wrapped the meat carefully in plantain leaves, and selected half a dozen of the riper plantains for our meal. Finally, when the oven was thoroughly hot, he scraped away the coals from the middle, laid in the leaf-wrapped pork, surrounded by a ring of plantains, pushed the hot stones close to the food, and covered the whole with a thick layer of plantain leaves. We ate the crayfish—boiled to a bright scarlet—while the balance of our meal was cooking. I added salt to the boiled-down liquor in the bottom of the bamboo, and dipped in this natural sauce. The first course whetted our appetites for the tender meat and juicy plantains which soon came from the oven.

As we lay smoking after our meal I could see that Maruae had something in his mind and was debating whether or not to speak. Finally he began, cautiously and with an air of skeptical restraint at first, but with more and more assurance as he saw that I listened seriously to his story.

“The old people say,” he remarked, pointing to the head of the valley, where the cliffs narrowed to a deep crack through which the river rushed, “that far up in this same valley, beyond the upper gorge you see, a spirit dwells, one of the heathen spirits which are as old as the land. You and I may not believe in these things, but it is good, when the evenings are long, to listen to the stories of the old men. The name of this spirit is Tefatu; some call him *varua ino*, saying that he

Faery Lands of the South Seas

dogs the footsteps of the living and preys upon the souls of the newly dead, but that is not true, for many times in the memory of my fathers he has been known to aid those in perplexity or distress. The old men believe that if a traveler, lost in these mountains at nightfall, calls on Tefatu for succor, the spirit will appear before him in the likeness of a pale, moving fire, and lead him in safety down to the sea. Once in sight of the sea, the man must cry out in a loud voice, 'You have aided me, Tefatu, and I am content; stop here and I will go on my way.' It is not good to neglect these words of parting. Sometimes he is seen at night, flying from ridge to ridge of the mountain—a great glowing head, trailing a thin body of fire. Long ago, during the childhood of my grandmother, Tefatu left this land for a space of years; men said that he had flown to Hawaii, but now he is returned beyond a doubt. High up among the cliffs I found the cave in which he sleeps by day. . . . These eyes of mine have seen the Old Lord lying there among the whitened heads of men—I looked and turned away quickly, for my stomach was cold with fear.

"I cannot tell you clearly," Maruae went on, in answer to my obvious question, "for I was greatly afraid. It seemed to me that he was a figure of wood, longer and thinner than a man, black with age, covered with carved patterns, and bound, in places, with close wrappings of *napé*—the fine sennit my people have forgotten how to make. The place was full of bones; scores of men had been slain and their bodies offered there, as was the custom of our old kings. Once, not many years ago, a wise man came here from the islands of Hawaii—an old man, bearded and wearing spec-

In the Valley of Vaitia

tacles. It was his work to write down the names of our ancestors, and he spoke our tongue, though haltingly and with a strange twist. He lived with us for a time and we grew fond of him, for he was a simple man, who made us laugh with his jokes and was kind to the children. One evening I told him how I had found the place of Tefatu. As I spoke his eyes grew bright behind their windows of glass, and when I had done he begged me, in great excitement, to lead him to the cave—offering a hundred of your dollars if I could prove that I had spoken true words. I was younger then, and in need of money, for I was courting a girl. We went together into the mountains, but as we drew near the place something within me made me hesitate and I grew afraid. In the end I deceived that man who was my friend, telling him that I could not find the way. He was indeed a wise man; another would have mocked me for a liar and a teller of idle tales, but he only smiled, looking at me kindly—he knew that my words were true and that I feared to betray the sleeping place of the Old Lord.”

Maruae rose to his feet with the sigh of a man who has eaten well and is deprived of his rightful siesta. He shouldered his ponderous load of *fei*—which I could scarcely raise from the ground—and led the way toward the sea, while I followed, bearing the remnants of the pig. It was noon when we reached the flatlands of the coast.

A quarter of a mile above the house of Airima we stopped to watch a large canoe, loaded with a mound of seine, gliding up the river, followed by a fleet of smaller craft. An old woman stood in the bow, directing the proceedings with shrill volubility; she

Faery Lands of the South Seas

was the proprietor of the net, a village character at once kindly and tyrannical—widow of one chief and mother of another. As her canoe drew abreast of us she gave the command to halt and spread the net. The river at this point is almost without current, very still and clear; Maruae and I sat on the high bank, too tired to do more than play the part of spectators.

They grounded the big canoe just below where we sat, putting one end of the seine ashore and paddling slowly across the river while the net was laid out in a deep, sagging curve downstream. One after another the smaller canoes were beached, and the people, half naked and carrying spears, ran along the bank to take to the water a few hundred yards above. The river was alive with them, splashing and shouting as they drove the fish toward the trap. Next moment the bright shoals began to appear beneath us, the sunlight glinting on burnished sides as they darted this way and that by hundreds, seeking a way of escape. A run of mullet flashed downstream, saw the net, turned, and were headed back toward the sea. A series of cries went up—“*Aué! Aué!*”—as fifty or sixty of the beautiful silvery fish leaped the line of floats and dashed away to safety. The old headwoman, dressed in a Mother Hubbard of respectable black and a rather handsome hat, was swimming easily in three fathoms of water; nothing escaped her watchful eye.

“*E ara!*” she shouted, angrily; “the best fish are getting away! Hurry, you lazy ones—splash the water below the net, or we shall not have a mullet left! Remember that when the haul is over he who has not worked shall have no fish.”

As the line of beaters drew near, the men in the big

In the Valley of Vaitia

canoe paddled upstream and across behind them, throwing out net as they went, until the frightened fish and a score of swimmers were encircled. The two ends of the seine were now close together on the bank, and half a dozen men began to haul in with a will, their efforts causing the circle to narrow slowly and steadily. Looking down from the high bank, one could see children of ten or twelve, stark naked, and carrying tiny spears in their hands, swimming like frogs a fathom deep in the clear water, pursuing the darting fish. Now and then a youngster came to the surface with a shrill cry of triumph, holding aloft the toy spear on which was transfixed a six-inch fish. The people of the islands, as a rule, are neither fast nor showy swimmers; one can see prettier swimming any summer afternoon on the Long Island shore, but the Polynesian is at home in the water in a way the white man can never match. I watched an old woman, all of seventy and wearing a black blouse girded tightly to her waist with a *pareu*, treading water at the lower end of the net, where the fish were beginning to concentrate. She was as much at her ease as though she had been lying on her veranda exchanging gossip with a neighbor. Each time she thought the headwoman's eyes were turned away she reached over the net, seized a fish, and stuffed it into her blouse, until a flapping bulge hung down over her *pareu*. But old Tinomana's eyes were sharp. "Enough," she cried, half laughing and half in anger, "*aué, tera vahine e!* Perhaps she thought to get a string of fish, too, for that worthless son-in-law of hers!"

At length the seine lay in two great piles on the beach, and only a bulging pocket, filled with a pulsating mass of silver, remained in the river. Under the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

direction of Tinomana the fish were divided into little piles, strung on bits of hibiscus bark, and apportioned among the people, according to the size of their families and the amount of help they had given in the haul. For herself she reserved a considerable share, for her household was large, and as the owner of the net she was entitled to a full half—more than she loaded into the big canoe.

It was early afternoon when we laid down our burdens in the cook house and stripped for a swim. The others were awakening from their siesta; a flock of brown children, all vaguely related to the family of Airima, followed us to the river, carrying miniature surf boards. Next moment they were in the water, splashing and shouting as they paddled downstream toward where the surf broke on the bar. Tehinatu, the pretty sister of Maruae, passed us with a rush and leaped feet first from the high bank. She rose to the surface thirty yards away, shouting a challenge to catch her before she could reach the opposite shore. Her brother and I dove together, raced across the river, and had nearly overtaken the girl when she went under like a grebe. I was no match for her at this game; under water she could swim as fast as I, and was a hundred times more at home. I gave up the pursuit and landed for a sunning among the warm rocks of the point.

Out where the seas reared for the landward rush the black heads of children appeared and disappeared; I could hear the joyous screams of others, flattened on their boards and racing toward me, buried in flying spray. The old woman I had seen helping herself to fish was coming down the river, paddling an incredibly

In the Valley of Vaitia

small canoe, laden with an enormous bunch of bananas and four kerosene tins of water. She lived a mile down the coast and, like many of her neighbors, braved the surf daily to supply her house with fresh water from the river. The gunwale of her canoe seemed to clear the water by no more than a couple of inches; I watched with some anxiety, thinking of the feelings of an American grandmother in the same situation.

She ceased to paddle at the river mouth and watched her chance, while the frail dugout rose and fell in the wash of half a dozen big seas. Then in a momentary lull she dug her paddle into the water. I sat up to watch; a boy standing in the shallows near by shouted encouragement. At first I thought that she had chosen her moment well. The canoe passed the white water, topped a little wave without swamping, and was seemingly out of danger; but suddenly a treacherous sea sprang up from nowhere, rearing a tossing crest. It was too late to retreat—certain disaster lay ahead. Stoically, without a sign of dismay, the paddler held her craft bow on; the canoe rose wildly against the foaming wall, seemed to hang for an instant almost vertically, and then canoe, cargo, and old woman disappeared in the froth. The boy screamed in ecstasy as he galloped through the shallows to lend a hand. The other children ceased their play and soon the canoe and its recovered cargo were brought ashore. They emptied the dugout and filled the tins with fresh water; I heard the old woman laugh shrilly as she wrung her clothes on the beach. Presently, coached by a dozen amused spectators, she made a second attempt, and passed the surf without a wetting; when I saw her last she was paddling off steadily to the west.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

I was dozing among the rocks when a ringing whistle startled me and I looked up to see a bird like a large sandpiper alight on the beach and begin to feed, running briskly after the receding waves or springing into the air for a short flight when threatened by a rush of water. It was a wandering tattler, and no bird was ever better named. Solitary in its habits, except in the breeding season, when it resorts to northern lands so remote that its nest and eggs are still (I believe) unknown, it travels south at the approach of winter, making lonely passages across some of the widest stretches of ocean in the world . . . to Hawaii, to the Galapagos, to the Marquesas, and probably to the remote southern islands of Polynesia. What obscure sense enables the migrating bird to follow its course far out of sight of land? In France, I have flown side by side with wild geese, heading steadily southward above a sea of clouds. It seemed to me that—like the pilot of an airplane—they might guide themselves, in a general way, by the sun, the stars, or the look of the land below—an idea borne out by the fact that geese become lost and confused in a fog. But in considering a bird like the carrier pigeon or the tattler, all such theorizing comes to an end. No general sense of north and south could guide the tattler to the lonely landfalls of the South Pacific; his wanderings—like the migration of the golden plover, or the instinct of the shearwater, which sends him unerringly, on the darkest night of storm, to his individual burrow in the cliffs—must be classed among the inexplicable mysteries of nature.

On the road which passes close to the house of Airima I found Tehinatu in conversation with the driver of a

In the Valley of Vaitia

Chinese cart. She was bargaining for a watermelon; the Chinaman stood out for three francs—she offered two.

“Enough of talking,” she said, firmly; “the melon is the best you have, but it is green. I will give two francs.”

“*A toru toata*,” muttered the proprietor of the melon, indifferently. (“*Toata*” means a franc, but is obviously a corruption of quarter, for the dollar passed current here long before the money of France.)

“Look at my clothes,” pleaded the deceitful girl, changing her tactics suddenly. “I am a poor woman who cannot afford to pay the prices you expect from the chief. Come, dear *Tinito*, give me the melon for two francs.”

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders and glanced at me. The glint in his narrow eye might have meant, “Ah, these women—what’s the use!” He sighed; for a moment, while *Tehinatu* looked at him pleadingly, he was silent.

“Take the melon,” he said, “and give me two francs; I must be on my way. But do not think you have deceived me, cunning woman; I know that you are not poor, for only yesterday your brother sold the copra from your land.”

Without a sign of embarrassment the girl opened her hand and held up a hundred-franc note. “Ah, you are rich,” remarked the Chinaman, as he undid an oil-cloth wallet and stripped the change from a substantial roll of bills. “I knew it. Are you not ashamed to practice such deceit?” But *Tehinatu* only tucked the melon under her arm with a triumphant smile.

It is a curious study to watch the contact of Chinese and Polynesian, races separated by the most profound

Faery Lands of the South Seas

of gulfs, yet possessing the meeting ground of a common love of bargaining. All through the French islands you will find Chinamen, scattered singly or in little groups—through the windward and leeward Societies; the Marquesas; among the distant atolls of the Paumotu; in the remote Gambiers; in Tupuai, Rurutu, and lonely Rimatara. They are keepers of small stores, for the most part, where you may see them interrupted at their eternal task of copra making to exchange a box of matches for a single coconut or to haggle for a quarter of an hour over a matter of five sous. Patient, painstaking, and unobtrusive—existing in inconceivable squalor, without the common pleasures which enable most of us to tolerate our lives—they seem to be impelled by motives far more profound than the longing for material gain, by a species of idealism equally incomprehensible to the native and to the visitor of European race. It is not beyond possibility that in the course of a few more generations it will be the native islander who lingers here and there, isolated in communities principally Chinese; for the islanders, superb physically, are the least prolific of men, while the weedy little *Tinito*, who brings his own women with him, or succeeds, with his own peculiar knack, in obtaining women from a population which regards him with amused contempt, surrounds himself with children in as short a time as nature allows. I have sometimes thought that the secret of the Chinaman's dogged and self-denying labors might lie here—traceable to his cult of ancestor worship: to become a revered ancestor one must have children, and in order to bring up properly a large family of children one must spend one's life in unceasing toil.

In the Valley of Vaitia

I doubt that Europeans in large numbers will ever be tempted to make the islands their home; the life is too alien, the change too great. As things are, the relation of Polynesian and Chinese amounts to a subtle contest for the land—a struggle of which both parties are aware. The native, incapable of abstract thought, feels and resents it vaguely; to the Chinaman, whose days are spent in meditation undisturbed by the automatic labors of his body, the issue is no doubt clear cut. The native is by far the more attractive of the two—clean, kindly, selfish, jolly, childish, well bred, and pleasing to the eye; but the Chinaman possesses the less attractive qualities which make for the survival of a race—the industry, the unselfishness, the capacity to live for an idea—and in the end, if only by force of numbers, he will win. Looking into the future, one can see the Eastern islands populated by Chinese, as our own islands of Hawaii have been peopled with immigrants from Japan. “They are dying, anyway, and they won’t work,” the commercial gentleman will tell you; “here is rich cane land, needing only labor to produce bountifully—and the world needs sugar.” Perhaps this view is correct—for myself, I feel that the question is debatable. There are certain parts of the world—like our American mountains, deserts, and lonely stretches of coast—which seem planned for the spiritual refreshment of mankind; places from which one carries away a new serenity and the sense of a yearning for beauty satisfied. Ever since the days of Cook the islands of the South Sea have charmed the white man—explorers, naturalists, traders, and the rough crews of whaling vessels; the strange beauty of these little lands, insignificant so far

Faery Lands of the South Seas

as commercial exploitation is concerned, seems worthy of preservation. And the native, paddling his outlandish canoe or lounging in picturesque attitudes before his house, is indispensable to the scene. If the day comes when his canoe lies rotting on the beach and his house is tenanted by industrious Chinese—though the same jagged peaks rise against the sky and the same sea thunders lazily along the reef—when the anchor drops and the call comes to go ashore, I, for one, shall hesitate.

In the Cook group, six hundred miles west of Tahiti, the prospect is less depressing, for the British have adopted a policy of exclusion and made it impossible for the native to sell his land. The Cook-Islander, reinforced here and there with a dash of white blood, and undiscouraged by a competition he is not fitted to meet, seems to be holding his own. The reason is clear—the native has been little tampered with, left in possession of his land, and protected rigidly against epidemics like the influenza of 1918, which ravaged the island populations wherever infected vessels were permitted to touch. Imported disease, exploitation of the land, and coolie immigration—these are the destroying forces from which the native must be preserved if a shadow of the old charm is to linger for the enjoyment of future generations of travelers.

Following Tehinatu toward the house, I thought to myself how wonderfully the island charm had been preserved here on the peninsula of Tairapu. We were within fifty miles of Papeete, where business is carried on, and steamers call, and perspiring tourists walk briskly about the streets; yet here, in this lonely settlement by the lagoon, civilization seemed half a

In the Valley of Vaitia

world away. When I walked abroad the sight of a white man brought the people to their doors, and bands of children followed me, staring and bright eyed, with interest.

On the veranda children surrounded us while the girl cut and distributed thin slices of her melon. There is a fascination in watching these youngsters, brought up without clothes and without restraint, in an environment nearly as friendly as that of the original human pair. Once they are weaned from their mothers' breasts—which often does not occur until they have reached an age of two and a half or three—the children of the islands are left practically to shift for themselves; there is food in the house, a place to sleep, and a scrap of clothing if the weather be cool—that is the extent of parental responsibility. The child eats when it pleases, sleeps when and where it will, amuses itself with no other resources than its own. As it grows older certain light duties are expected of it—gathering fruit, lending a hand with fishing, cleaning the ground about the house—but the command to work is casually given and as casually obeyed. Punishment is scarcely known; yet under a system which would ruin forever an American or English child the brown youngster flourishes with astonishingly little friction—sweet tempered, cheerful, never bored, and seldom quarrelsome. The small boy tugs at the net or gathers bait for the fishermen, seemingly without a thought of drudgery; the small girl tends her smaller sister in the spirit of playing with a doll. Perhaps the restless and aggressive spirit which makes discipline necessary in bringing up our own children is the very quality that has made the white race master of the world;

Faery Lands of the South Seas

perhaps the more hostile surroundings of civilization have made necessary the enforcement of prohibitory laws.

I filled my pipe and lay smoking on a mat, with an eye on the youngsters at their play. For the time being, a little girl, at the most attractive period of childhood, was the center of interest. One of her front teeth was loose; she had tied a bit of bark to it and was summoning up courage for a determined pull. A boy stole up behind her, reached over her shoulder, and gave the merciful jerk; next moment he was dancing around her, waving the strip of bark to which the tooth was still attached. The owner of the tooth began to sob, holding a hand over her mouth, but her lamentations ceased when a larger boy shouted, seriously, "Give her the tooth and let her speak to the rat!" The small girl trotted to the edge of the bush, where I heard her repeat a brief invocation before she flung the tooth into a thicket of hibiscus. I knew what she was saying, for I had made inquiries concerning this children's custom—probably as old as it is quaint. It is a sort of exchange; the baby tooth is thrown among the bushes and the rat is invoked to replace it with one as white and durable as his own. The child says:

"Thy tooth, thy tooth, O rat, give to the man;
The tooth, the tooth of the man, I give to the rat."

No doubt the games of children everywhere are very much the same; in the islands, at any rate, an American child would soon find itself at home. The boys walk on stilts, play tag, blindman's buff, prisoner's base,

In the Valley of Vaitia

and a game called *Pere Pana*, like what we called Pewee when I was a youngster in California—almost exactly as these things are done at home. The girls play cat's cradle, hopscotch, jackstones, and jackstraws—often joining in the rougher games of their brothers. One curious game, evidently modern, and perhaps originated by the children of missionaries, is called *Pere Puaa Taehae* (the Game of the Wild Beast). The boys and girls, who pretend to be sheep, stand in line one behind the other, clinging together under the protection of the mother ewe at the head of the line. Presently the wild beast appears, demanding a victim to eat. "You are the wild beast?" the sheep ask. "Yes," he replies, "and I want a male sheep." He then waits while the sheep—in whispers inaudible to him—decide on which boy (for the beast has his choice of sexes) shall be sacrificed. When the decision is made the mother at the head of the line says, "You want a male sheep?" At that, all the others chant in unison, "Then take off your hat, and take off your clothes, and strike the hot iron." The last word is the signal for the victim to make a dash for safety; if he can get behind the mother before the wild beast catches him the performance is repeated until the beast succeeds in catching another boy or girl, who then becomes the *Puaa Taehae*.

The twelve-year-old daughter of Maruae—for Airima was a great-grandmother, not an uncommon thing in this land of rapid generations—had been talking for several days of piercing her ears in order to install a pair of earrings to which she had fallen heir. This evening she had finally mustered courage for the ordeal; I watched her hesitating approach and saw

Faery Lands of the South Seas

her hand Tehinatu the necessary instruments—a cork, a pair of scissors, and a brace of sharp orange thorns from which the green bark had been carefully stripped. Whatever her color, woman's endurance in the name of vanity is proverbial; the child made no outcry as the thorn passed through the lobe of her ear, sank into the cork, and was snipped off, inside and out, close to the skin—the remaining section to be removed a fortnight later, when the small wound had healed. As Tehinatu smiled at me and flourished the scissors, to which clung a drop of blood, I heard a shrill call from the cook house, "*Haere mai tamaa!*" It was supper time.

Some of the children, in answer to the call, straggled toward where Airima squatted beside her oven; others, already stuffed with odds and ends of fruit, went on with their play. Maruae beckoned to me as he passed. The meal was a casual affair; one helped oneself without ceremony, squatting to exchange conversation between bites, or walked away, food in hand. There were pork, cold fish, baked taro, and sections of cream-colored breadfruit, ripe and delicately cooked.

The sun had set when we finished, and as the sky gave promise of a clear night I spread a mat on the river bank. Bedtime in these places comes when drowsiness sets in; as I fell asleep the clouds veiling the highlands of Tahiti Nui were still luminous in the afterglow.

It was midnight when I awoke. In the house, faintly illuminated by the light of a turned-down lamp, the family of Airima slept. The air was warm and scented with the perfume of exotic flowers. The river was like a dark mirror reflecting the stars; even

In the Valley of Vaitia

the Pacific seemed to sleep, breathing gently in the sigh of little waves, dallying with the bar. Presently I became aware of subdued voices—Airima and Tinomana, the chief's mother, were seated on the rocks below me, fishing with long rods of bamboo for the *faia* which runs in with the night tide. They were recalling the past, as old ladies will.

“The women of Tahiti,” remarked Tinomana, “are not what they were when I was young; nowadays you may travel from morning till night without seeing a really beautiful girl.”

“Those are true words,” said Airima; “*Aué*, if you had seen my eldest daughter, who died when she was fifteen! She was lovely as the *itatae*, the white tern which hovers above the tree tops. Her eyes were brown and laughing, her hair fell in ringlets to her knees, her teeth were small white pearls, and her laughter like the sound of cool water running in a shady place. Alas, my Vahinetua! She was our first-born; my husband loved her as he loved none of the others. A strange, dreamy child. . . . I used to watch her when she thought herself alone. Sometimes, I know not why, the tears came to my eyes as I saw her gazing into the sky while she chanted under her breath the little old song the children sing to the tern:

“O Itatae, sailing above the still forest, where shall you fly to-night?

Downwind across the sea to Tetiaroa, the low island . . .

“As she grew older a wasting illness fell on her; the doctors could do nothing to stop her coughing; my husband even took her to the white doctor in Papeete—it was on his recommendation that we took her to sea.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

We were in Mangareva, far off in the Gambier Islands, when I saw that the end was near. My husband was not blind—he headed back for Tahiti at once, giving up the rest of his trip. Vahinetua was never more beautiful than on the last morning of her life—cheeks flushed and eyes shining soft and clear as the first star of evening. We were nearly home—off Maitea, the little island which lies between Tahiti and Anaa; she died in my arms and I covered her with the bright patchwork *tifaefae* her own hands had sewn. ‘Our child is dead,’ I told the captain, her father, as I came on deck. He said nothing, but put a hand on my shoulder and pointed toward the masthead, where I saw a small white tern hovering above us. I cannot tell you how, but I knew at once the soul of my daughter was in that pretty bird. It flew with us all day, and at evening, as we entered the harbor of Papeete, it turned back and disappeared in the night. For many years thereafter, each time my husband passed Maitea homeward bound, the white bird was waiting for him at the place where my daughter had died. . . .”

The voices of the old women murmured on, recalling the joys and sorrows of other days. Suddenly, in a mango tree behind the house, a rooster crowed, answered far and near by others of his kind. As the last drawn-out cry died in the silence of the night I yielded to an overpowering drowsiness and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV

Tahitian Tales



THE evening was very warm and still. The sea rumbled faintly on the reef, half a mile offshore, and behind us—above the vague heights of the interior—a full moon was rising. The palms were asleep after their daily tussle with the trade—fronds drooping and motionless in silhouette against the sky. We had spread mats on the grass close to the beach; Tehinatu lay beside me, chin propped in her hands—she had been bathing, and her dark hair, still damp, hung in a cloud about her face. Her grandmother, Airima—the woman of Maupiti—sat facing us, cross-legged in the position of her people. Now and then a fish leaped in the lagoon; once, far down the beach, a ripe nut thudded to the earth.

“If you two like,” said old Airima, “I will tell you the story of my ancestor, the Lizard Woman.”

The girl smiled and raised her head in the little gesture which corresponds to our nod. “That is a good tale,” she declared, “and true, for I am named after that Lizard Woman who died so many years ago.”

The woman of Maupiti lit a match to dry a leaf of black tobacco over the flame; when she had twisted it in a strip of pandanus and inhaled deeply of the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

smoke, she spoke once more. Her voice was flexible and soft with a sweet huskiness—an instrument to render the music of the old island tongue—its cadences measured or rapid, falling or rising with the ebb and flow of the tale.

“In the old days,” Airima began, “so long ago that his name is now forgotten, there was a king of Papenoo, a just man, successful in war and beloved by his people. His wife was a daughter of Bora Bora—the most beautiful woman of that island; she was the delight of his heart, and they had many children. When she fell ill and died, a great sadness came over the king; he could do nothing but brood over his loneliness. In his dreams he saw the face of his wife; life was hateful to him; even his children, shouting and playing about the house, grew hateful in his eyes. A day came at last when he could endure the sight of them no longer, and a plan to be rid of them took form in his mind.

“There had been a storm and he knew that the waves would be running high at a place where there was a break in the reef. ‘Come,’ he said to the women of his household, ‘bring my children to swim—it will hearten me to see them sporting in the surf.’ But when they came to that beach and the women saw the great waves thundering in through the pass, they were afraid, for even a strong swimmer could not live in such a sea. Then the king, whose hope was that his children might drown, bade them forget their fears. One after another the young boys and girls went into the sea and were swept out by the undertow—fearless and shouting. The waves broke over them and at times they disappeared; the women began to cover

Tahitian Tales

their faces, for they thought, 'Those pretty children, so dear to us, are as good as dead.'

"Then the watchers saw a strange thing—a true thing, told me by my grandfather, who had learned it from the lips of his ancestors. Beyond the breaking of the surf, the children began to sport in the water, diving and leaping higher and higher into the air. Their skins grew black and glistened in the sunlight; their arms turned to fins and their feet became like the tails of fish; the gods of those days had taken pity on their innocence and made of them the first dolphins—the playful children of the sea. And the king was glad, for he saw that his children would not die, and he knew that they could no longer come to his house to bring back bitter memories.

"As the years went on, the daughters of many chiefs were brought to the king, but no woman found favor in his eyes; his heart was always heavy and no man saw him laugh. Sometimes he walked alone in the mountains where men do not go even to-day, for he feared nothing—neither the ravening spirits of the dead, nor the Lizard People, who in those days lived in the interior of the island. Fifty generations of men have lived and died since our ancestors came to this island; they found the Lizard People already in possession of the land. Ta 'a ta Mōo, they called them—half human, half lizard; able to climb among the cliffs where no man could follow. The human warriors were more powerful in battle, and as time went on the Lizard Folk were driven into the fastnesses of the mountains. Now the last of them is dead, but if you doubt that they once lived, go into the hills and you will see the remains of their plantain gardens high

Faery Lands of the South Seas

above cliffs no human creature could scale. My own people are traveling the same path—soon the last of us will also be dead, and the white man will glance at the scattered stones of our *maraes* to make sure that once upon a time we lived.

“But I was telling you of the king. One day, as he wandered alone in the mountains, a Lizard Woman was lying in the fern beside the trail—a head woman of her people, skilled in magic and able to read the future. This king was a tall man, very strong and handsome; as he passed without looking down, she seized his foot gently. At that he looked down and his heart swelled with love of her. He dwelt with her in the mountains, and when at last he came down to the sea his people had given him up for dead.

“In due time a son was born to that Lizard Woman—a strong and beautiful boy, the image of the king his father; she reared him alone in the mountains and grew to love him better than her life. But when she looked into the future her tears fell. When the child was twelve years old she led him to the mouth of her valley and talked long with him, telling him what he was to do, before she turned away and went back to her own place, weeping. Taking thought of her words, the boy went alone to the village of the king. His dress was the skin of lizards.

“When he came to that place he said to those about, ‘Take me to the king, my father.’ But when they repeated his words, the king said, ‘It is false; I have no wife and no child.’ Then the child sent back word asking the king if he had forgotten walking one day in the mountains many years before. With that the king remembered his love for the Lizard Woman and

Tahitian Tales

bade his men bring the boy to him. And when he saw the strong, fearless child and heard his people exclaim at the beauty of the boy and the wondrous likeness to himself his heart softened and he said, 'This is indeed my son!'

"The years passed, and the heart of the Lizard Woman—sad and alone in the mountains—grew ever more hungry for her son, until at length her life became intolerable without sight of him. She stole down from the hills by night and went softly about the village, weeping and lamenting because her son was not to be seen; the people trembled at sight of her in the moonlight and at the sound of her weeping, and the king feared her, for he knew that she was powerful in magic, and thought that she had come to take her son away. In his fear he took canoe with the young man, and they went down the wind to Tetuaroa, the Low Island, where he thought to be safe from her. But the Lizard Woman, by her magic, knew where they had gone; she looked into the future and saw only sadness and death for herself. What must be cannot be avoided. She leaped into the sea and swam first to Raiatea, where she had lands and where the bones of her ancestors lay in the *marae*. When she came to that shore she knew that her death was near and that she would die by the hand of her own son. Close by the beach she stopped to weep, and the place of her weeping is still called Tai Nuu Iti (the Little Falling of Tears). Farther on her path, she stopped again to weep still more bitterly, and to this day the name of that place is Tai Nuu Rahi (the Great Falling of Tears). When she had been to her *marae*, she plunged again into the ocean and swam to Tetuaroa—in all the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

islands there was no swimmer like her; because of his mother, her son was named Au Moana (Swimmer in the Sea).

“The king and the king’s son saw Tehinatu coming far off—for Tehinatu was the name of that Lizard Woman—and they felt such fear that they climbed to the top of a tall palm. Then, knowing the manner of her death, she came out of the water—weeping all the while—and began to climb the palm tree. The two men trembled with fear of her; they threw down coconuts, hoping to strike her so that she would fall to the earth. But though she was bruised and her eyes blinded with tears, she climbed on until she was just beneath them, clinging to the trunk where the first fronds begin to branch. She stopped to rest for a moment, and as she clung to the palm, allowing her body to relax, her son hurled a heavy nut which struck her on the breast. She made no outcry, but her hands let go their hold and she fell far down to the earth. But the men still trembled and were afraid to come down out of the tree, for she struck in a swampy place and was long in dying; all afternoon she lay there, weeping and lamenting, until at sunset the spirit left her body. When she was dead, they took her to Raiatea and buried her in her *marae*. After that the two men returned to Papenoo, and when the king died the son of the Lizard Woman reigned long in his stead. These are true words, for the blood of Swimmer in the Sea, born of the Lizard Woman, flows in my veins.”

Old Airima ceased to speak. From the coconut shell at her side she took a lump of black native tobacco and began to tear off a leaf for a fresh cigarette. Her

Tahitian Tales

granddaughter turned on one side—head resting on a folded forearm—and looked at me.

“Aye, those are true words,” she said; “for is my name not the same as that of the Lizard Woman? During a thousand years, perhaps more—*mai tahito mai*: since the beginning—the women of our family have been called Tehinatu. You yourself, though we call you Tehari, have a real name among us—Au Moana, after her son. These names belong to us; no other family does well to use them.”

The flare of a match illuminated for an instant the wrinkled and aquiline face of Airima. As she tossed the glowing stick aside, the moonlight smoothed away the lines; I was aware only of her black eyes, wonderfully alive and young.

“Tell him of Poia,” she suggested, “and the dead ones in robes of flame.”

“*Aué*,” said the girl; “that is a strange tale, and it came about because of a name.” She sat up, shaking the hair back over her shoulders.

“The woman who saw these things,” she went on, “was another of our ancestors. She was called Poia, a name her grandfather had given. She lived at Tai Nuu Iti in Baiatea, where Tehinatu first stopped to weep.

“One day, in midafternoon, Poia was sitting in the house beside her mother, busy with the weaving of a mat. All at once a darkness closed in before her eyes and she felt the spirit struggling to leap from her body. It was like the pangs of death, but at last her spirit was free and with its eyes she saw her body lying as if in sleep, and perceived that there were strangers in the house—two women and a man. The women were very lovely, with flowers in their hair and robes of scarlet

Faery Lands of the South Seas

which seemed to flicker like fire. They were Vahinetua and Vivitautua, ancestors dead many years before, who loved Poia dearly. The man was likewise dressed in flaming scarlet, and he wore a tall headdress of red feathers. He was Tanetua, another of Poia's ancestors. The three had come from the *marae* to seek Poia, and they spoke to her kindly, saying, 'Come with us, daughter.' And though she felt shame when she looked down at her dull dress and disordered hair, she followed where they led.

"They took her to the *marae* of Tai Nuu Rahi, and there Poia saw a huge woman waiting for them. The right side of that woman was white, and the left side black; when she saw them coming she fell on her knees and began to weep for joy. 'Is it you, Poia?' she cried. 'Then welcome!' As Poia stood there, marveling, the stone of the *marae* opened before her like the door of a great house, and Vahinetua and Vivitautua said to her, 'Go in.' The door gave on a chamber of stone—the floor was of stone, and the ceiling and the walls. They passed through another door into a second empty room of stone, and thence into a third, and there Poia chanced to look down at herself. She had become lovely as the others; her hair was dressed with flowers and her robe was scarlet, seeming to flicker like fire. While she was looking at herself, no longer ashamed, the two women said to her: 'You must stay here, for you belong to us. We are angry with your grandfather because he called you Poia. That is not all of your name—your true name is Tetuanui Poia Terai Mateatea. That name belongs to us, and you must have it, for you are our descendant and we love you.'

Tahitian Tales

“She did not know that this was her name; she thought it was only Poia. In spite of their kindness she was frightened and told them that she wished to go home. They took her to the door of her house and left her there; and she found herself lying with the half-woven mat in her fingers. Her mother, who was sitting beside her, only said, ‘You have slept well.’ But Poia, in fear and wonder at what she had seen, said nothing to her mother, not even when the two went to bathe.

“The next day, in midafternoon, Poia again felt the darkness close in before her eyes, the pangs of death as her spirit struggled and at last escaped from the body. But this time she found herself gloriously clothed and beautiful at once. All went as before until they came to the third chamber of the *marae*; there were leaves spread on the floor of that place as if for a feast, but the only food was purple flowers. The others sat down and began to eat, and Poia attempted to do likewise, but the taste of the flowers was bitter in her mouth. Again the two women said, ‘You belong to us; you must not be called Poia, but Tetuanui Poia Terai Mateatea.’ And they coaxed her to stay with them, but she wept and said that she could not bear to be separated from her husband, whom she loved. As before, they were kind to her and took her to her house, where she awoke as if from sleep, and said nothing.

“It was the same the next day, but this time, when they had come to the third chamber of the *marae*, Vehinetua and Vivitautua said: ‘Now you must no longer think of returning. You are ours and we wish you to stay here with us.’ Poia wept at their words,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

for she began to think of the man she loved. 'I must go,' she said; 'if I had no husband I would gladly remain with you here.' At last, when her tears had fallen for a long time, the three dwellers in the *marae* took her home; they bade her farewell reluctantly, saying that next day she must come to them for good.

"This time Poia awoke in great fear, and she told the story to her mother when they went to bathe together. Her mother went straight to the grandfather, to tell him what she had seen and ask him if her true name was Poia, as he had said years before. Then the old man said that he had done wrong, for the name was not only Poia, but Tetuanui Poia Terai Mateatea, a name which belonged to Vahinetua and Tanetua and Vivitautua. And these three came no more to get Poia; they were content, for they loved her and wanted her to have their name."

As she finished her story, Tehinatu lay down once more, resting her head on her grandmother's knee. My thoughts were wandering far away—across a great ocean and a continent—to the quiet streets of New Bedford, set with old houses in which the descendants of the whalers live out their ordered lives. In all probability the girl beside me, Polynesian to the core and glorying in a long line of ancestors whose outlandish names fell musically from her lips—had cousins who lived on those quiet streets; for she was the granddaughter of a New Bedford whaling captain, the husband of Airima—a Puritan who ate once too often of the *fei*, and lingered in the islands to turn trader and rear a family of half-caste children, and finally to die. The story is an old one, repeated over and over again in every group: the white cross; the half-

Tahitian Tales

white children at the parting of the ways; their turning aside from the stony path of the father's race to the pleasant ways of the mother. And so in the end the strain of white, further diluted with each succeeding generation, shows itself in nothing more than a name . . . seldom used and oftentimes forgotten. It is Nature at work, and she is not always cruel.

"Is it the same with names in your land?" Airima was asking. "Are certain names kept in a family throughout the years?"

"It is somewhat the same," I told her, "though we do not prize names so highly. My father and grandfather and his father were all named Charles, which you call Tehari."

"Among my people," she said, "the possession of a name means much. As far back as our stories go, there has been a man named Maruae in each generation of my father's family. Some of these Maruaes were strange men. There was Maruae Taura Varua Ino, who fished with a bait of coconut for the spirits of men drowned in the sea; and another was Maruae Mata Tofa, who stole a famous shark—the adopted child of a man of Fariipiti. That was a good shark; it lived in the lagoon, harming no one, and every day the man and his wife called it to them with certain secret words. But Maruae coveted the shark, and he prepared an underwater cave in the coral before his house. Then, when the cave was ready, he hid in the bushes on the shore of the lagoon while the man was calling his shark, and in this way Maruae learned the secret words of summons. When the man and his wife had gone, Maruae called out the words; the shark appeared close inshore and followed him to the cave,

Faery Lands of the South Seas

where it stayed, well content. And that night he taught it new words. Next day the man and his wife called to their shark; and when it did not come they suspected that Maruae had enticed it away. After that they went to the house of Maruae and accused him of the theft; but he said: 'Give the call, if you think I have stolen your shark. I have a shark, but it is not yours.' They called, but the shark did not come, for he had taught it new words. Then Maruae called and the shark came at once, so he said, 'See, it must be my shark, for it obeys me and not you.' As he turned away to return to Fariipiti, the other man said, 'I think it is my shark, but if it will obey you and no other, you may have it.'

"Some days later, a party of fishermen came to Maruae's cave, where the shark lived. They baited a great hook and threw it into the water, and as it sank into the cave they chanted a magic chant. Then the shark seized the bait, and as they hauled him out they laughed with joy and chanted, '*E matau maitai puru maumau e anave maitai maea i te rai.*' This chant is something about a good hook and a good line, but the other words are dead—what they mean no man knows to-day. That night there was feasting in the houses of the fishermen, but next morning, when Maruae went down to the sea and called his shark, nothing came, though he stayed by the lagoon, calling, from morning till the sun had set. After that he learned that his shark had been killed and eaten, and from that day none of Maruae's undertakings prospered; finally he pined away and died."

Tehinatu stirred and sat up, eyes shining in the moonlight. The subject of sharks has for these people

Tahitian Tales

a fascination we do not understand, a significance tinged with the supernatural.

“They did evil to kill that shark,” she said, “for all sharks are not bad. I remember the tale my mother told me of Viritoa, the long-haired Paumotuan woman—wife of Maruae Ouma Ati. Her god was a shark. It was many years ago, when the vessels of the white men were few in these islands; Maruae shipped on a schooner going to New Zealand, taking his wife with him, as was permitted in those days. That woman was not like us; she understood ships and had no fear of the sea; as for swimming, there were few like her. When she came here the women marveled at her hair; it reached to her ankles, and she wore it coiled about her head in two great braids, thick as a man’s arm.

“The captain of that schooner was always drinking; most of the time he lay stupefied in his bed. As they sailed to the south the sea grew worse and worse, but the captain was too drunk to take notice. The men of the crew were in great fear; they had no confidence in the mate, and the seas were like mountain ridges all about them. The morning came when Viritoa said to Maruae: ‘Before nightfall this schooner will be at the bottom of the sea; let us make ready. Rub yourself well with coconut oil, and I will braid my hair and fasten it tightly about my head.’ Toward midday they were standing together by the shrouds when Viritoa said, ‘Quick, leap into the rigging!’ That woman knew the ways of the sea; next moment a great wave broke over the schooner. The decks gave way, and most of the people—who were below—died the death of rats at once, but Viritoa and her husband leaped into the sea before the vessel went down.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

“A day and a night they were swimming; there were times when Maruae would have lost courage if Viritoa had not cheered him. ‘Put your hands on my shoulders,’ she said, ‘and rest; remember that I am a woman of the Low Islands—we are as much at home in the sea as on land.’ All the while she was praying to the shark who was her god. The storm had abated soon after the schooner went down; next day the sea was blue and very calm. Presently, when the sun was high, Viritoa said to her husband, ‘I think my god will soon come to us; put your head beneath the water and tell me what you see.’ With a hand on her shoulder, he did as she had told him, gazing long into the depths below. Finally he raised his head, dripping, and when he had taken breath he spoke. ‘I see nothing,’ he said; ‘naught but the *miti hauriuri*—the blue salt water.’ She prayed a little to her god and told him to look again, and the third time he raised his head, with fear and wonder on his face. ‘Something is rising in the sea beneath us,’ he said as his breath came fast—‘a great shark large as a ship and bright red like the mountain plantain. My stomach is sick with fear.’ ‘Now I am content,’ said the Paumotuan woman, ‘for that great red shark is my god. Have no fear—either he will eat us and so end our misery, or he will carry us safely to shore. Next moment the shark rose beside them, like the hull of a ship floating bottom up; the fin on his back stood tall as a man. Then Viritoa and her husband swam to where he awaited them, and with the last of their strength they clambered up his rough side and seated themselves one on each side of the fin, to which they clung.

Tahitian Tales

“For three days and three nights they sat on the back of the shark while he swam steadily to the north-east. They might have died of thirst, but when there were squalls of rain Viritoa unbound her hair and sucked the water from one long braid, while Maruae drank from the other. At last, in the first gray of dawn, they saw land—Mangaia, I think you call it. The shark took them close to the reef; they sprang into the sea and the little waves carried them ashore without a scratch. As they lay resting on the reef the shark swam to and fro, close in, as though awaiting some word from them. When she saw this, Viritoa stood up and cried out in a loud voice: ‘We are content—we owe our lives to thee. Now go, and we shall stay here!’ At those words the shark-god turned away and sank into the sea; to the day of her death Viritoa never saw him again. After that she and her husband walked to the village, where the people of Manitia made them welcome; and after a few years they got passage on a schooner back to Maruae’s own land.”

The soft voice of the girl died away—I heard only the murmur of the reef. Masses of cloud were gathering about the peaks; above our heads, the moon was sailing a clear sky, radiant and serene. The world was all silver and gray and black—the quiet lagoon, the shadowy land, the palms like inky lace against the moonlight. Tehinatu stifled a little yawn and stretched out on the mat with the abrupt and careless manner of a child. Her grandmother tossed away a burnt-down cigarette.

“It is late,” said the woman of Maupiti, “and we we must rise at daybreak. Now let us sleep.”

Becalmed at Pinaki



CHAPTER XVI

Anchored off the Reef



ON the third day of the homeward voyage the wind died away, and in the middle of the afternoon it fell dead calm when we were less than a mile distant from the atoll of Pinaki. With the exception of a small group of Papeete traders, I don't suppose there are a dozen white men who have ever heard of the place; and those who have seen it or set foot upon it must be fewer still. It lies toward the eastern extremity of the Low Archipelago, and is one of four small atolls, all within a radius of thirty miles of one another. On charts of that segment of the eastern Pacific these four islands are barely discernible, and Pinaki, the least of them, appears but little larger than the dot of the "i" in Whitsunday, its English name.

The current carried us slowly along the north-westerly side of the island. It was intensely hot. Teriaa, nephew of Miti, the skipper, was sluicing the blistered deck, but the water steamed out of the scuppers, and in a moment the planking was as dry and as hot to the touch as before. He soon left off and took refuge in the whaleboat, which he covered with a piece of canvas. I crawled in with him, but the suffocating shade was less endurable than the full glare of the sun.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

Tane, the other sailor, a man of fifty, was below. He had remained there most of the time since our departure from Rutiaro, sleeping on a greasy mat, indifferent to the cockroaches—the place was alive with them by night—or the copra bugs, which were a nuisance at all hours. The stench from the little cabin, filled almost to the ceiling with unsacked copra, was terrible; and it was not much better on deck. I took shelter beside Miti, who was sitting in the meager shade of the mainsail. Presently, pointing casually toward the shore, he said: “You see him? What he do there?”

I saw the man plainly enough, now that he was pointed out to me, standing with his arms folded, leaning lightly against a tree. I was limited to a hasty glance through my binoculars, for he was looking toward us; but I saw that he was unmistakably white, although his skin seemed as dark as that of a native. He was barefoot, naked to the waist, and for a nether garment wore a pair of trousers chopped off at the knee.

I, too, wondered what a white man could be doing on an uninhabited island. Miti knew no more of the atoll than that it was or had formerly been uninhabited. It belonged, he said, to the natives of Nukatavake, which lay nine miles to the northwest. We could see this other atoll as we rode to the light swell, a splotch of blue haze a nail's breadth wide, vanishing and reappearing against the clear line of the horizon. In two hours' time the current had carried us to the lee side of the island. It ran swiftly there, but in a more northerly direction, so that we were forced out of the main stream of it, and drifted gradually into quiet water near the shore. An anchor was carried to the

Anchored off the Reef

reef and we brought up to within thirty yards of it. With another anchor out forward, the schooner was safely berthed for the night.

I went ashore with the two sailors for a fresh supply of drinking coconuts, but I gave no help in collecting them. A fire was going on the lagoon beach, and there I found the solitary resident frying some fish before a small hut built in the native fashion. He might have been of any age between thirty-five and forty-five; was powerfully built, with a body as finely proportioned as a Polynesian's. His voice was pleasant and his manner cordial as he gave me welcome, but a pair of the coldest blue eyes I have ever seen made me doubt the sincerity of it. I felt the need of making apologies for the intrusion, adding, lamely, "I haven't seen a white man in three months, and our skipper speaks very little English."

"I was about to look you up," he said. "I can't say that I'm lonely here. I manage to get along without much companionship. But to be frank, I'm hungry for tobacco. There's none left at Nukatavake, and I've been sucking an empty pipe since last November. You haven't a fill in your pouch by any chance?"

I would have given something for his relish of the first pipeful, or the fifth, for that matter. Finally he said: "I imagine you are in for several days of Pinaki. You have noticed the sky? Not a sign of wind. I can't offer you much in the way of food; but the fishing is good, and if you care to you are welcome to stop ashore."

I accepted the invitation gladly; but as I walked back to the schooner for a few belongings and some more tobacco I questioned the propriety of my decision.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

My prospective host was an Englishman by his accent, although, like my friend Crichton at Tanso, he was evidently long away from home. He struck me as being a good deal of the Crichton type, although he differed greatly from him outwardly. I remembered that Crichton, too, had been pleasant and friendly, once the ice was broken between us; but the prospect of an early parting and the certitude of our never meeting again had been the basis for the friendship in so far as he was concerned. This other Englishman was not living on an uninhabited atoll because of a liking for companionship. I was debating the matter of a return to shore when Tane crawled out of the cabin to make preparations for supper, and as he was a sufferer from elephantiasis, the sight of his immense swollen limbs and his greasy, sweating body decided me. Papeete was far distant, and I would have enough of Tane before we reached the end of the journey.

Supper was ready by the time I reached the hut. It consisted of fish deliciously broiled, coconuts, and hard biscuit. Over it I gave my host an account of my stay at Rutiario and of the unsuccessful experiment in solitude.

"Yes," he said, "they are rather too sociable, these natives. The people of Nukatavake used to bother me a good deal when I first came here. I thought nine miles of open sea would keep them away; but they often came over in sailing canoes—a dozen or two at a time when the wind favored; and they would stay until it shifted back into the southeast. I didn't encourage them. In fact, I made it quite plain that I preferred to be alone. The island is theirs, of course,

Anchored off the Reef

and I can't prevent them from coming during the copra-making season; but they no longer come at other times. Nine months out of the year I have the place to myself. But they are damnably inquisitive. I don't like Kanakas in the aggregate, although I have one or two good friends among them."

The dying fire lit us to bed about midnight. I lay awake for a long time after my host was sleeping. We had talked for three hours, chiefly about the islands. In fact, all that he told me of himself was that he was fond of fishing.

There was not a hint of a breeze the next day, nor the next, nor the day after that. The sea was almost as calm as the lagoon, and the *Potii Ravarava* lay motionless at anchor as though frozen in a sheet of clear ice. Miti and the two sailors remained on board most of the time, sleeping during the heat of the day under a piece of canvas rigged over the main beam, and at night fishing over the side in dreamy contentment. If they came ashore at all it was only for a few moments, and they never crossed to the lagoon beach. During these three days I remained the Englishman's guest, and although I was out of patience with myself for my curiosity, it grew in spite of me. What under the sun was the man doing here? Evidently he had not come to an atoll, as my friend Crichton had, to do his writing and thinking undisturbed. Crichton had books, a practical interest in planting, and a cultural interest in Polynesian dialects. He would muse for hours over a word in one dialect which might or might not bear a remote resemblance to some other word in usage a thousand miles away. The study fascinated him. As he once told me, it gave his imagination

Faery Lands of the South Seas

room to work in. I have no doubt that he made up for himself stories of the early Polynesian migrations vastly better than any romances he might have read. This other Englishman had no books; not so much as a scrap of writing paper. At least I saw none in his house, which was as bare as it was clean. There was a sleeping mat in one corner; a chest and some fishing gear against the wall; picks and shovels in a corner; a few old clothes hanging from nails driven into the supports, and absolutely nothing else. How did he put in his time? Fishing was a healthy interest, but it was not enough to keep a man sane for a period of seven years. He let that bit of information slip in one conversation I had with him.

He was not a taciturn chap. After our first evening he talked quite freely about his earlier adventures. He had spent three years in northern Australia, prospecting for gold, and he gave me an intensely interesting account of the aborigines there—of their marvelous skill at following a trail, no matter over what sort of country. I had heard that these people were biologically different from the rest of humankind and that their blood would not cross with white blood. This was not the case, he said. He had known white men animal enough to take the Australian blacks for wives, and had seen the children which they had by them. From Australia he had gone to New Guinea, still prospecting for gold, although at times he sought relief from the disappointment of it by making expeditions with the natives in search of bird-of-paradise feathers. But “gold” was the word that rang through all his talk. Several times it was on the tip of my tongue to say, “But there’s no gold at Pinaki.” I was able

Anchored off the Reef

to resist the temptation, remembering his remark about the damnable inquisitiveness of the people of Nukata-vake. Then, on the morning of my third day on the island, an incident occurred which made the situation clear.



CHAPTER XVII

The Englishman's Story



ROSE at dawn, but my host was out before me. He had left two fish cleaned and ready for cooking on a plate outside the door. Having breakfasted, I started on a walk around the atoll, which I estimated I could accomplish in about an hour. I expected to meet the Englishman somewhere on the way, and I did find him on the opposite side of the lagoon. The shore was steep to there. He had a steel-tipped rod in his hand and was diving off a ledge of rock, remaining below for as long as a full minute. He waved when he saw me, but kept on with his work. In about a quarter of an hour he came over to where I was standing.

"Tiresome work," he said. "I need a blow." Then, "You see, I've been doing a bit of digging here."

I had walked along the lagoon beach and had not noticed before the series of trenches higher up the land. I should think he had been digging! I inspected the ditches under his guidance. There were three at least a quarter of a mile in length each and from three to four feet deep. These ran in parallel lines and were about four paces apart. Fifteen to twenty shorter trenches cut through them at right angles.

The Englishman's Story

The sun was well above the horizon. We lit our pipes and sat down in the shade. After a few moments of silence he said: "I suppose you know what I'm doing here? If you have been in Papeete you must have heard. There is no secret about it—at least not any longer."

I said that I had left Papeete shortly after my arrival. I had spent several idle afternoons on the veranda of the Bougainville Club, but in the talk which went around there I didn't remember having heard of Pinaki.

"So much the better," he said. "Yes, seven years is a long time, and I'm not keen about feeding gossip; but when I first came down here there was a clacking of tongues from one end of the group to the other. I believe I have since earned the reputation of being rather queer. I thought you must know. The fact is I'm looking for treasure. Would you care to hear the story?"

"Very much," I said, "if it won't bore you to tell it."

"On the contrary, it will be something of a relief. Seven years of digging, with nothing to show for it, must strike an outsider as a mad business. Sometimes I'm half persuaded that I am a complete fool to go on with the search. But you can't possibly know the fascination of it. It seems only yesterday that I came here. As you see for yourself, it's not much of an island. And to know that there is a treasure of more than three million pounds buried somewhere in this tiny circle of scrub and palm—"

"But do you know it?" I asked.

"I'm as sure of it as that I am smoking your tobacco. That is, I am sure it was buried here. Whether it has

Faery Lands of the South Seas

been removed since, I can't say, of course. The natives at Nukatavake remember a white man whom they called Luta, who came here about twenty years ago and remained for something over a month. One of the four men who stole the gold and brought it to Pinaki was a man named Luke Barrett, and it may have been he who came back, although he was supposed to have been killed in Australia forty years ago. It is the uncertainty which makes this such killing work at times. But when I think of giving it up—you would have to live with the thought of treasure for seven years, and to dream at night of finding it, before you could understand." He rose suddenly. "If you don't mind a short walk, I will show you something rather interesting."

We went along the lagoon beach for several hundred yards, then crossed toward the ocean side. Near the center of the island we came upon an immense block of coral broken from the reef and carried there by some great storm of the past. Cut deeply into the face of the rock I saw a curious design: 

I asked what it meant.

"Man, if I knew that! I believe it's the key, and I can't master it! But we may as well sit down and be comfortable. If you would really care to hear the story from the beginning it will take the better part of an hour. I'll not give you all the details; but when I have finished you will be in a position to judge for yourself whether or not I was mad in coming here.

"Have you ever read Walker's book, *Undiscovered Treasure*? It doesn't matter, except that you have missed a very entertaining volume. It is a pity that

The Englishman's Story

old work is out of print. Nothing in it but bare facts about all sorts of treasure supposed to have been buried here and there about the world. You might think it would be dry, but I found it better company than any romance I've ever read. However, that has nothing to do with this story, except in an indirect way. I first read the book as a boy and it started me on my travels.

“To me the facts about this Pinaki treasure are as interesting as any of Walker's. He, of course, knew nothing about it, for it had not been stolen when his book was published. Four men had a hand in the business: a Spaniard named Alvarez; an Irishman named Killorain; and two others of uncertain nationality, Luke Barrett, whom I spoke of a moment ago, and Archer Brown. They were a thieving, murdering lot by all accounts—adventurers of the worst sort; and in hope of plunder, I suppose, had joined the Peruvian army during the war with Chile in eighteen fifty-nine to sixty. Their hopes were realized beyond all expectations. They got wind of some gold buried under the floor of a church, and the strange thing was that the gold was there and they found it. It was in thirty-kilo ingots, contained in seven chests, the whole lot worth in the neighborhood of three and a half million pounds. How they managed to get away with it I don't know; but I have investigated the business pretty thoroughly and I have every reason to believe that they did. They buried it again in the vicinity of Pisco, and then set out in search of a vessel. Alvarez was the only one of the four who had any education. They had all followed the sea at one time or another, but he alone knew how to navigate. The

Faery Lands of the South Seas

others could hardly write their own names. At Panama they signed on as members of the crew of a small schooner, and as soon as they had put to sea knocked the captain and the two other sailors in the head and chucked them overboard. They returned to Pisco, loaded the gold, and started for Paumotus.

“This was in the autumn of eighteen fifty-nine. In the December following they landed at Pinaki, where they buried the treasure. The island was uninhabited then as now, and they crossed to Nukatavake to learn the name of it. The natives were shy, but they persuaded one man to approach, and when they had the information they wanted, shot him and rowed out to their boat. If you should go to Nukatavake you will find two old men there who still remember the incident.

“Then they went to Australia, scuttled their vessel not far from Cooktown, and went ashore with a story of shipwreck. They had some of the gold with them—not much in proportion to the amount of the treasure, but enough to keep four ordinary men in comfort for the rest of their lives. It soon went, and the four were next heard of at the Palmer gold fields. Alvarez and Barrett were both supposed to have been killed there in a fight with some blacks. Brown and Killorain had not mended their ways to any extent, and both were finally jerked up for manslaughter and sentenced to twenty years’ penal servitude. Brown died in prison, but Killorain served out his term, and finally died in Sydney hospital in nineteen twelve.

“Most of these facts—if they are facts—I had from Killorain himself the night before he died. I met him in a curious way; or, better, the meeting came as the

The Englishman's Story

result of a curious combination of circumstances. You may have noticed the scar on my side?"

I had noticed it, a broad gash puckered at the edges where the flesh had healed, tapering to a point in the middle of his back.

"It was not much of a wound," he went on, "but it gave me a deal of trouble at the time. I got it in New Guinea in nineteen eleven, when I was prospecting for gold in the back country. I was a long way from a settlement, and one day a nigger took it into his head to stick me with a spear. I suppose he wanted my gun and ammunition, for I had little else excepting my placer outfit. I let him have one bullet from my Colt just as he was about to dive into the bush, and for all I know he may be lying there to this day. I have that little frizzly headed native to thank for my knowledge of the Pinaki treasure. Sometimes I am sorry that I killed him; but at other times I feel that shooting was altogether too easy a death for the man really responsible for bringing me here. I was in a bad way from the wound. Infection set in, and I had to nurse myself somehow and get down to a place where I could have medical attention. I managed it, but the ten days' journey was a nightmare. I was nothing but skin and bone when I left the hospital, and New Guinea not being a likely place for a convalescent, the doctor recommended me to go to Australia.

"I had a small bag of dust, the result of a year and a half of heart-breaking work in the mountains. Most of it went for the hospital bill, and when I reached Sydney I had very little left. I was compelled to put up at the cheapest kind of a boarding house, although the woman who kept it was quite a decent sort. Her

Faery Lands of the South Seas

house was in a poor quarter of the town and her patrons mostly longshoremen and teamsters. It was a wretched life for her, but she had two children to support and was making the best of a bad job. I admired her pluck and did what I could in a small way to help her out.

“One evening I was waiting for supper in the kitchen when some one rapped. Before I could go to the door, it opened, and an old man came stumbling in, asking for something to eat. I thought he was drunk and was about to hustle him back the way he came when I noticed that he was wet through—it was a cold, rainy night—and really suffering from exposure and lack of food. I made him remove his coat—he had nothing on under it—but not without a great deal of trouble, and he insisted on drying it across his knees. He was a little wizened ape of an Irishman, about five feet three or four in height, with deep-set blue eyes, bushy eyebrows, a heavy, discolored mustache, and a thick shock of white hair—altogether the most frightful-looking little dwarf that ever escaped out of a picture book. He was tatoored all over the arms and chest—Hands Across the Sea, the Union Jack, a naked woman—several other designs common in waterfront tatooring parlors.

“His body was as shriveled as a withered apple, but his little bloodshot eyes blazed like bits of live coal. Except for the fire in them, he might have been a hundred years old and, as a matter of fact, he wasn't a great way from it. Eighty-seven, he told me, and that is about all he did tell me. He gorged some food and was all for getting away at once. But it had set in to rain very hard and I persuaded him to wait until

The Englishman's Story

the worst of it was over. He was very suspicious at first. I believe he expected me to call a policeman. Later he thawed a little, and became even talkative in a surly way when I told him, with the landlady's consent, that he might stay the night if he had no place else to go. Wouldn't hear of it, though. He said he had a job as night watchman at Rush-cutters' Bay. That might or might not have been true. At any rate, I went with him to the car line—the boarding house was a good mile from Rush-cutters' Bay—and gave him a couple of shillings, as a loan, I said. He could return it sometime. Just before I left him he asked for my name and address, mumbling something about doing me a bit of good one of these days. He was insistent, so I gave it to him, but not at all willingly. He had frightened Mrs. Sharpe, the landlady, just by the way he looked at her, and I didn't want him coming back.

“He didn't come back. That was in May, nineteen twelve, and I heard nothing more of him until September. I was still at the boarding house, getting slowly better, but not yet good for anything. I kept out of doors as much as possible, took long walks in the country and along the waterfront looking at ships. When I came in one evening Mrs. Sharpe told me that an attendant from the Sydney hospital had called twice during the day. An old man named Killorain, a patient at the hospital, wanted to see me. The name meant nothing to me and I couldn't imagine who the man could be. The attendant called again later in the evening. Killorain was about to die, he said, and wouldn't give them any peace until I was brought to see him.

Faery Lands of the South Seas

“It was getting on toward midnight when we reached the hospital. The old man was in one of the public wards. I recognized him at once, although he had shriveled away to nothing at all. It was impossible to forget his eyes, once you had seen them. He was dying—no doubt of it, but I could see that he wasn’t going to die until he was ready.

“‘Sit down close here,’ he said. ‘I’m glad you came. You did me a good turn once and I haven’t forgot it. Few good turns I’ve had in my life. Not so many but what I can remember the lot.’ The night nurse had approached quietly and was standing on the other side of the bed. All at once he saw her. ‘Hey, you!’ he said. ‘Grease off out of this! Stand over there on the other side of the room where I can watch you!’ When she had gone he rose from his pillow and looked cautiously around the room. The beds on either side of him were empty. There was a patient in the one across the aisle, but he was sleeping. Killo-rain watched him for a moment to make sure of this. Then he motioned me with his finger to come still closer. ‘Listen!’ he said. ‘I’ve cut more throats in my time than you might think.’ Sounds a bit stagey, doesn’t it? But these were his exact words. Nothing remarkable about them, of course. Throat-cutting is still a fairly thriving business. I waited for him to go on. He again looked up and down the room, and then asked me to hand him the coat which was lying across the foot of the bed. It was the same coat he had been wearing in May, when he came to the boarding house.

“‘When they brought me here,’ he said, ‘they took my clothes, and I’ve had some trouble getting this back.’ The attendant had told me as much. The old man

The Englishman's Story

had raised the very devil of a row until it was found. He asked me to rip open the lining of the right sleeve and to give him the paper I would find there. It was a soiled, greasy sheet of foolscap, pasted on a piece of cloth. 'Once,' he went on, 'you gave me two shillings for car fare to Rush-cutters' Bay. It probably wasn't any hardship on you, but never mind about that. You said I could pay it back if I'd a mind to. Well, I'm going to pay it back with a bit of interest. I'm going to give you this paper, and it's as good as three million pound notes of the Bank of England.'

"I thought, of course, that he was completely off his chump, and the fear that I would think so was uppermost in his mind. He kept repeating that he was old and worn out, but that his mind was clear. 'Don't you think I'm balmy,' he said. 'I know what I'm talking about as well as I know I'm going to die before morning.' He gave me a circumstantial account of the whole affair. I have outlined it briefly. There were many other interesting facts, but it is not worth while to speak of them here. As he talked, the conviction grew upon me that he was perfectly sane and was telling the truth. He went over the chart with me. It had been made by Alvarez, the scholar of the party, he said. There had been a good deal of quarreling and fighting later for the possession of it.

"Before I left him he made me promise that I would go to Pinaki. He wouldn't rest easy in his grave, he said, unless he knew that I was looking for the treasure. 'It's there, and it will always be there if you're bloody fool enough to think I'm queer. It ain't likely I'd lie to you on my deathbed.' Rest easy in his grave! There was an odd glimpse into his mind. He wasn't

Faery Lands of the South Seas

worrying about his crimes, and there were enough of them, according to his own confession. It was the thought of the gold lying forever forgotten which worried him. He could rest quietly if he knew before he died that some one else was fighting and throat-cutting over it. I asked him why he hadn't gone back for it himself. He told me that of the fifty-three years since it had been buried he had spent forty in prison and the rest of the time he was trying to earn or steal the money to buy a schooner. I told him that I would come back to see him the following day. 'You needn't bother,' he said. 'I'm finished.' And it was true. He died three hours later.

"I tried to forget the incident, but it was one of those things which refuse to be forgotten. It was always in the back of my head. I decided to check up Killo-rain's story where I could. I made inquiries in Peru, and found that the gold had actually been stolen. The dates and circumstances coincided with his account. A friend in the customs at Cooktown confirmed for me the story of four shipwrecked sailors who landed in February, eighteen sixty, from a ship called the *Bosun Bird*. I had a small piece of property on the outskirts of Cooktown which I had bought years ago. With the money realized from the sale of it I took passage for Tahiti on my way to Pinaki.

"That voyage was the longest one I have ever made. By that time the thought of those seven chests of gold, all in thirty-kilo ingots, was with me twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four. Yes, even at night. I slept very little, and when I did it was to dream of hunting for the treasure; of finding it. I became suspicious of a villainous-looking old man who was traveling third

The Englishman's Story

class. I thought he might be Brown or Luke Barrett. Perhaps they were not dead, after all. At Papeete I told no one of my purpose there, with the exception of one governmental official. If the treasure should be found the French government would have a claim to certain percentage on uncoined gold, and I meant to be aboveboard in my dealings with it. This official was sworn to secrecy, but the business leaked out eventually and created a great deal of excitement. I was immensely annoyed, of course, for I had guarded the secret as well as old Killorain ever had. However, I had in my pocket all the necessary papers, drawn up accurately, witnessed, signed, and sealed. I went on with my preparations, and finally, in February, nineteen thirteen, I was put ashore from a small cutter, not four hundred yards from where we are sitting.

"I started the search before the cutter was two miles on the return voyage. For two months I slept in the open—had no time to build a house—and ate tinned food which I had brought with me. Killorain's chart was of but little use. It made reference to trees which had long since rotted away or had been cut down by the natives of Nukatavake. The marks which I found corresponded precisely with those on the chart, but several of the most important ones were missing."

The treasure hunter rose. "Well," he said, "there's the end of the story. You know the rest of it."

"But I don't know the rest at all!" I said. "You have left out the most interesting part. Tell me something of your life here."

"You have seen three days of it. It has gone on for seven years in the same way."

"You were diving just now in the lagoon. Do you

Faery Lands of the South Seas

think the gold may have been buried there or that the land has fallen away?"

"My dear fellow, I'll not weary you with an account of what I think. It's rather warm here. Shall we go back to the house?"

I was hoping for a week of calm, and when we went to bed that evening there was reason to believe we might have it. A few hours later, however, I was awakened by the Englishman. "There's going to be a bit of a blow presently," he said. "Your skipper has just sent for you. He wants to get away at once."

The stars had been blotted out. The wind was souging in the palms, and the waves slapping briskly on the lagoon beach. Our farewell was a brief one.

"When shall you come to Tahiti?" I asked.

"Not until I have found what I'm looking for."

"Well," I said, "I hope that will be soon."

But if he holds fast to his resolve my belief is that it will be never.

Conclusion



CHAPTER XVIII

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*



WAS awaiting Hall's arrival in Tahiti, confident that sooner or later he would keep a vague rendezvous set months before. I knew that by this time he must have penetrated far into the sea of atolls, traveling in the leisurely manner of these latitudes, transferring from one schooner to the next and stopping over—for weeks at a time, perhaps—in the tranquil and lonely communities he had grown to love. Once or twice—when a dingy Paumotu schooner, deep laden with copra and crowded with pearl divers eager for a whirl of gayety in the island capital, crept into the pass—I had word of him, but there was no hint of return.

It was a month of calms: long days when the lagoon, unruffled by the faintest cat's-paw, shimmered in the blinding sunlight, while the sea outside seemed to slumber, stirring gently and drowsily along the reef. Once, at midday, a three-masted schooner with all sails furled and Diesel engines going, came in to waken the town with the hoarse clamor of her exhaust. An hour later I met her skipper on the street.

"Your friend Hall is homeward bound," he told me. "I spoke the *Potii Ravarava*, a bit of a thirty-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

ton native schooner, off Nukatavake, and he was aboard of her—she ought to be in some time this week.”

The days passed in the rapid and dreamy fashion peculiar to the South Seas. From time to time I thought of Hall and his diminutive schooner drifting about becalmed among the coral islands, or perhaps only a score of miles off Tahiti, helpless to reach the sighted land. The *Potii Ravarava* was a full week overdue when the calm weather came to an end. The heat was intense that afternoon, and toward sunset towering masses of cloud began to pile up along the horizon to the north. The sky grew black; there was a tense hush in the air, vibrant with the far-off rumble of thunder. When I strolled out along the waterfront the people were gathering in anxious groups before their houses; I heard snatches of talk: “Have you noticed the glass? Things have an ugly look. . . . Hope it doesn’t mean another cyclone. . . . The town will catch it if the sea begins to rise.”

I had heard of the hurricane of 1906, when the sea rose and reached clean into the harbor, driving the population of Papeete to the hills. On Motu Uta, an islet in the bay, a white man was living with his Pautuan wife. When the angry seas began to race in over the reef without a pause, sweeping the islet from end to end, the watchers ashore gave the pair up for lost. But the woman was a Low-Islander, and just before dawn, when the coconut palm in which she had taken refuge was swept away, she swam six hundred yards to shore and landed through a surf a sea otter would have hesitated to attempt. Next day they found the drowned and battered body of her husband drifting

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*

with dead pigs and horses and a litter of wreckage from the lower portions of the town.

Possibly Tahiti was in for another hurricane. When I glanced at my barometer after dinner, it was falling with ominous rapidity, and at bedtime the glass stood lower than I had seen it in the South Seas. In the small hours of the morning a servant came to waken me. There was a new sound in the air—the uproar of surf breaking on the inner shore of the lagoon.

“The sea is rising,” said Tara; “the waves are breaking under the *purau* trees, and if you do not come quickly to help me our canoe will be washed away.”

The stars were hidden by black clouds, and though scarcely a breath of air stirred, the level of the lagoon was four feet above its normal limit, and the sheltered water, usually so calm, was agitated by a heavy swell. Then the rain came—drumming a thunderous monotone on my tin roof—and after the rain the wind. At dawn, though a seventy-mile gale was blowing out of the northeast, it was obvious that all danger of a hurricane was past. At midday the glass began to rise and before dark the wind was falling away perceptibly.

More than once during the night I had thought of Hall out somewhere on the wild and lonely sea to the east. The *Potii Ravarava* was reputed an able little boat—with proper offing she would probably come through worse than this. But she had no engine, and if she had been caught in the Paumotu—the Dangerous Archipelago, where unknown currents and a maze of reefs make navigation ticklish in the best of weather—there was cause for anxiety.

The storm blew itself out in two days' time, and on the evening of the third day I was standing on the

Faery Lands of the South Seas

water front with a group of traders and schooner captains. They were speaking of the *Potii Ravarava*, by this time the object of mild misgivings, when one of the skippers gave a sudden shout.

“There she is now!” he announced and, looking up, I saw a deeply laden little schooner, with patched grayish sails, rounding the point of Fareute. Presently she turned into the wind, dropped anchor, and sent a boat ashore—a few moments later I was welcoming Hall—very thin, raggedly dressed, and brown as a Paumotuan. His eyes were smiling, but they had in them a look unmistakable when once seen—the expression of a hunger greater than most of us have known.

“Hello!” he said. “Come along to the hotel—it must be dinner time. By Jove! I feel as though I could eat a raw shark!”

When he had eaten two dinners complete—from soup to black coffee, and beginning with soup again—he lit a cigarette and told me the story of his return from the Low Islands.

“It was all right,” he began, “until we left Hao. The palm tops were still in sight on the horizon when the breeze died away, and we drifted for seven whole days in a broiling, glassy calm. It was a curious experience, but one I would not care to repeat.

“You’ve seen the schooner—she’s not much bigger than a sea-going canoe. There were four of us aboard—Miti the skipper, a Paumotuan and a seaman by instinct, though he knows nothing of latitude or longitude; two sailors, one of whom has a horrible case of elephantiasis; and myself. We had a tremendous load of copra for so small a boat; the hold was crammed with it and the cabin stuffed to the ceiling. Opposite

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*

the companionway they had left out a few bags at the top, giving a space two feet high and just wide enough for two men to sleep side by side in case of rain or bad weather. Our stove was merely a box of sand in which a fire could be lighted, set in a little box of a galley tacked to the forward deck. If we had had anything to cook, the galley might have been useful; but Miti had given away nearly all of the ship's provisions to his relatives on Hao. They gave him a feast while some copra was being loaded, and when the job was finished he gave a feast in return. The two sailors looked sour while they watched the people opening their biscuit and salmon and bully-beef, but, after all, the prevailing winds are fair, and normally the passage to Tahiti wouldn't take more than ten days. Miti overdid the giving-away business, however. When we took stock of our *kaikai* on the first day of the calm I found he had saved only half a tin of biscuit and a few cans of salmon. In addition to this, we had a parting gift of a sack of drinking nuts and a couple of dozen ripe nuts some one was sending to Tahiti for seed. I had grown fed up on the sort of water these schooners carry—stale, and full of wriggling young mosquitoes—and by great good fortune I had a three-gallon demijohn, sent by Tino, of the *Winship*, which I filled with fresh rain water at Hao.

“My demijohn lasted precisely a day and a half. All hands drank out of it, but I did not complain of their lavishness—there was supposed to be a barrel of water somewhere below. Those were thirsty days. We rigged up an awning with part of an old mainsail; I spent most of my time lying in the hot shade, reading the one book I had with me—*Froissart's Chronicles of*

Faery Lands of the South Seas

England, France, and Spain. The days seemed interminable. . . . The starlight paled; the sun rose to glare down hour after hour on the face of a motionless and empty sea, and set at last on a horizon void of clouds. Sometimes I dozed; sometimes I watched the reflections of the bowsprit. It was painted gray, with a bright-red tip—and, seen in the faintly heaving water, it looked like a long, gray snake spitting fire as it writhed in graceful undulations. The sufferer from elephantiasis turned out to be an extraordinary man; it was not worth while to keep watches during the calm, and, as there was no work of any importance, he retired to the stifling cubby-hole among the copra sacks and slept—slept from dawn to darkness and from dark to dawn again. Now and then, at long intervals, he appeared on deck; once I went aft for a look at him, lying naked except for a *pareu*—mouth open and swollen limbs sprawled on the uneven surface of the copra. Miti and Teriaa showed a different side of native character. The schooner belonged to the captain, and keeping her trim gave him the same delight a man feels in buying pretty clothes for his mistress. The young sailor was Miti's nephew, and the pair of them worked tirelessly in the sun, scraping her rail and topsides in preparation for a fresh coat of paint. It was strange, when I was deep in Froissart's sieges and battles and stories of court life, to glance up from my book and see the vacant rim of the horizon, the silhouette of the foremast against a hot blue sky, and the two Kanakas endlessly at work—scrape, scrape, scrape; an exchange of low-toned remarks; a chuckle as they heard the gentle snores of the sleeping man below.

“Nearly every day our hopes were raised by deceitful

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*

cat's-paws, heralded by far-off streaks of blue. Some died before they reached us; others, after a preliminary rustle and flutter, filled our sails and set the schooner to moving gently on her course . . . only to die away and leave the sea glassy as before.

“On the second day the sharks began to gather in their uncanny fashion, as they always do about a vessel becalmed or in distress. I spent hours watching them—ugly blots in the clear blue water, waiting with a grim and hopeful patience for some happening which would provide them with a meal. They circled about the schooner in deliberate zigzags, or lay motionless in the shadow of her side, attended always by their odd little striped pilot fish. I learned to recognize one ponderous old gray shark; he had a brace of pilot fish, one swimming on each side of his head—and he wasn't afraid of us in the least. Sometimes he lay for an hour within a yard of the vessel's side; I could see the texture of his rough skin and the almost imperceptible motion of fins and tail. I can understand now the hatred sharks inspire in men who follow the sea—it wasn't long before I decided to try to kill the big, insolent brute. We hadn't as much as a hook and line on board, but finally, with a file and the point of a rusty boat hook, I improvised a makeshift sort of spear. Armed with this, I waited by the rail until my victim came in range, and then lunged down with all my strength. The spear glanced off his tough hide; he swam away in a leisurely manner, turned, and a moment later was again beneath me. This time I struck him fair on the back, but it was like trying to kill an elephant with a penknife. I think the point of my boat hook punctured him, but he only circled off again and re-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

turned to give me another chance. In the end I gave up and left him in possession of the field.

“The nights, when the air had cooled and the stars were blazing overhead, were so beautiful that one hated to fall asleep. Reflection made sky and sea alike—dark backgrounds for the myriad lights of the constellations. Lying on deck while the others slept, I used to regret that I had not learned something of astronomy—the average native sailor knows more about the stars than I. Orion I knew; the Pleiades, which the natives, with a rather pretty fancy, call *Matariki*, the Little Eyes; and the Scorpion, believed in heathen times to be the great fish hook of Maui, flung into the sky by the god, when he had finished pulling up islands from the bottom of the Pacific. Each night I watched the rising of the Southern Cross, and low down in the south I saw the Magellanic clouds, streamers of star dust, like vapor impalpable and remote. In spite of my companions, sleeping quietly on deck, those nights gave me a sense of overwhelming loneliness: the languid air; the solitary ship, immobile on the face of a lifeless sea; the immense expanse of the universe, ablaze with the light of distant suns. . . .

“When our water gave out I began to prefer the nights to the days. My demijohn, as I told you, lasted only a day and a half. After that we used the drinking nuts, and not until the last of them was gone did anyone think of investigating the water cask. There was consternation when we discovered that it contained only three or four inches of rusty water—either it leaked or the skipper was remarkably careless. Hoping all the time for a breeze or a squall of rain, we began on the half sack of ripe nuts—thin, sharp

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*

stuff for drinking, but the lot of them went in a day. Then we went on rations, dealt out from the barrel with a soup spoon. Finally the barrel was dry, and we went two days with nothing of any kind to drink. It was no joke—if you've ever had a real thirst, you'll know what I mean. The natives stood it wonderfully well; Miti did not once complain, though he remarked to me that when he got ashore he was planning to "drink too much coconut"! The victim of *feefee* continued his slumberous routine—I wondered if he were dreaming of rustling palms and shaded, gurgling rivulets. It was my first experience of thirst; odd what an utter animal one becomes at such a time. Waking and sleeping, my head was filled with dreams of water, brooks, rivers, lakes of cool, fresh water, in which to bury one's face and drink. I dreamed of lochs and highland burns in Scotland; of the gorge of Fautaua on Tahiti, where only a few months before I had stood in the mist, listening to the roar of the cataract.

"Well, it wasn't much fun—another day or two might have been unendurable. We had one comfort, at any rate—if you're thirsty enough, you don't worry about eating. By the time we had finished the salmon and biscuit we had ceased to bother about food. On the last night of the calm none of us slept, unless it was the sailor in his den among the copra sacks. At dawn Miti touched my shoulder and pointed to the south, where the paling stars were obscured by banks of cloud. An hour later the rain water was streaming out of the scuppers and spouting off one end of our awning into the barrel, hastily recoopered in case of leaks. When the squall passed and the sun shone down on a dark-

Faery Lands of the South Seas

blue leaping sea we were running before a fine breeze from the southeast.

“Now that our thirst was satisfied and we had plenty of water in reserve we discovered suddenly that we were starving. Miti prowled about below and came on deck with a package of rice, stowed away during some previous voyage. It was a valuable find, for we had nothing else to eat. There was copra, of course, which the natives will eat in a pinch, but the rancid smell of the stuff was too much for me. The wind held, and finally a day came when the skipper announced that we ought to raise Tahiti soon. About midday his nephew, who was perched in the shrouds, sang out that he had sighted land. I had a look and saw on the horizon a flat blur, like the palm tops of a distant atoll. As we drew near the land rose higher and higher out of the sea—it was Makatea, and we were more than a hundred miles north of our course. No meal I have ever eaten tasted so good as the dinner Miti’s relatives gave us that night!

“We got away next morning, with a liberal stock of provisions and an additional passenger for Tahiti—a philosophic pig, who traveled lashed under one of the seats of the ship’s boat. For three hours we ran before a fresh northwesterly breeze, but about nine o’clock the wind dropped and soon the sails were hanging limp in a dead calm. I began to suspect that the man with the swollen legs was a Jonah of the first order. This time, however, the calm was soon over; heavy greenish-black clouds were drifting down on us from the north; the sunlight gave place to an evil violet gloom. Miti and his two men sprang into a sudden activity; they battened down the forward hatch, put

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*

extra lashings on the boat, double-reefed the foresail, and got in everything else. Then, in the breathless calm, a downpour of rain began to lash the sea with a strange, murmuring sound. I thought of an ominous old verse:

“If the wind before the rain,
Sheet your topsails home again;
If the rain before the wind,
Then your topsail halyards mind.

“It was a disagreeable moment. Even the pig felt it, for when the sailors moved him to a place in the bow of the dory he refrained from the usual shrill protest. One detail sticks in my memory—when the skipper had taken his place at the wheel he gave a sudden order; the man with the swollen legs shuffled hastily to where the boat was lashed down and pulled out the plug from its bottom. Then came the wind.

“It swept down on us from the north-northeast, from the quarter in which hurricanes begin—and the first furious gust was a mild sample of what was to come. When Miti got her laid to, heading at a slight angle into the seas, I realized the splendid qualities of the little *Potii Ravarava*. No small vessel could have kept her decks dry in the sea that made up within an hour. The captain never left the wheel, and I doubt if there’s a finer helmsman in the South Seas, but before noon the galley—with our entire supply of food—was swept clean overboard, and time after time the lashed-down boat was filled. The pig had worked himself free except for one hind leg, tied to a bottom board with a rough strip of hibiscus bark, and as the water drained out slowly through the unplugged hole astern the agitated surface would be broken by his

Faery Lands of the South Seas

snout, emitting sputtering screams. He lived through it, by the way.

“All of us, I believe, thought that we were in for a hurricane. Every hour the violence of the wind increased; it was a gale from the north-northeast—the wind called by the ancient Polynesians the Terrible Maoake. It seemed to rush at us in paroxysms of fury, tearing off the entire crests of waves and hurling solid water about as though it were spray. The forward hatch leaked badly; when I think of that storm my memory is filled with a nightmare of endless pumping.

“A day and a night passed, and dawn found us riding a mountainous sea, but the wind was abating and our decks were dry. The victim of elephantiasis had been taking spells with me at the pump. He is a man, that fellow, in spite of his loathsome infirmity. The pump began to suck up bubbles and froth. Miti’s eyes are sharp.

“‘Enough pumping,’ he shouted. ‘Go and sleep, you two!’

“We obeyed the order with alacrity. Sleeping on deck was out of the question; without an instant of hesitation I crawled in among the copra sacks beside my repulsive companion. When I awoke it was evening and we were running, with a heavy following wind. Miti was still at the helm; red eyed from want of sleep, but whirling the spokes dexterously as each big sea passed beneath us and gazing ahead for the first glimpse of Tahiti. The clouds broke just before dark, and we had a glimpse of the high ridges of Tairapu, dead ahead. We got sail on her at that, and stood off to the northwest, past the Bay of Taravao

Aboard the *Potii Ravarava*

and the sunken reefs of Hiitaa. Toward morning we raised Point Venus Light, but the wind failed in the lee of the island, and it took us all day to reach Papeete harbor."

Hall finished his story in the dark. The last of the diners had gone long since, and, save for ourselves, the broad veranda was empty.

"What are your plans?" I asked. "Our year in the South Seas is up. Where are you going now?"

"I have no plans," he said, "except that I doubt if I shall ever go north again. I may be wrong, but I believe I've had enough of civilization to last me the rest of my life. We are happy here. Why should we leave the islands?"

I fancy the South Seas have claimed the pair of us.

THE END

DU510F21 BOSTON UNIVERSITY BOSS

Faery lands of the South seas.



1 1719 00143 4564

