

ISLES OF ADVENTURE



BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

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THE ART OF THE PAPUAN HEAD-HUNTERS

ISLES OF ADVENTURE

*From Java to New Caledonia
but Principally Papua*

BY
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

With Illustrations



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ISLES OF ADVENTURE

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CHAPTER I A DREAM COME TRUE

IT was the dining-room of a set of rooms in Number 6, Fitzgibbon Street, Dublin. It was in the nineties, and a summer day.

From the back window you could see (perhaps you still can) a bit of high white wall, outlined against a sky that occasionally was blue. On that summer day a dream, from the white wall and the blue sky, took birth; a dream of things longed for, never seen. One could almost see those things. One could almost fancy, behind that un-European-looking scrap of shining wall, against the blue that might have been Mediterranean, or Pacific, the trembling of tall palms. . . .

That was the beginning.

There are white walls about me. White cool pillars, grey cool floor. On all four sides of the forty-foot room, palms, pawpaws, sea look in, for the shutters and windows are only closed in storm. There is a sky of dry pale blue beyond the palms. This is my home at the end of the world, and the end of the dream, thirty years after.

Has it been good? It has been very good.

In the nineties, one had a Career. Careers have died; they need explaining. One began, as a rule, by leaving a perfectly good home, where the manners and the food were better than one found anywhere else, but where life was infested by givers and takers of loathsome parties, and nobody was really Serious.

Some careerists learned typing and shorthand, and wrote letters in men's offices; a daring thing to do, but when the daring began to pall, not very profitable. Some became lecturers in ladies' colleges; upon these, about the thirties, a strange blight seemed to fall, so that they became desiccated, nervous, and inclined to giggle miserably in the presence of pupils' fathers.

Afterwards they got religion, or became cultured atheists.

Some took up journalism, and told the listening world, with variations, that a pretty BUT quiet wedding had taken place, and that Mrs. Willibald received her guests in a chaudron velvet double skirt. . . . One pictured her doing it—fielding, as it were. . . .

As for me, being very young and rather brazen and full of the ‘beans’ that go with a good muscular system, I started to teach other and older people their jobs. Life being so short (one argued), why waste it in learning? One had had enough of that at the ‘London.’ One would carefully refrain from ever learning again. But as for teaching—teaching that had nothing to do with colleges and universities—that was fun.

I don’t know how one got away with it; but somehow one did. A sporting paper kindly endured me as sub-editor; there were reporters whom, with awful impudence, I instructed in their duties. There was afterwards a society journal, which I edited mostly by main force, once locking the door against rivals. Over the way they were dynamiting each other on daily-paper staffs, so locking the door seemed an absolute gesture of courtesy, by comparison. The staff of the society paper did not tear me in pieces, but that was not for want of good will towards the task. The proprietors sat back, saw their bank account fatten, and laughed.

Sometimes I edited both papers, taking both editorial rooms, and feeling quite seven feet high. The absent editor of the sporting journal, a fine athlete and fighter (he needed to be), had once left the paper to me just after the appearance of a stinging article about football amateur-professionals, written by himself. I was sitting at his desk, full of glory, with my Sunday frock on (we had Sunday frocks then), and my hair painstakingly done in the latest fashion, when a noise as of some one, strangely, throwing sacks of coal upstairs instead of down, finally resolved itself into a scuffle in the outer office, and the violent entrance of a huge young man armed with a blackthorn club. The back of the desk was high, and he did not see me.

‘I want,’ he shouted, ‘to see the villain who edits this paper! I want to talk to him!’ He gave the blackthorn a whirl. ‘Where is the hound?’ he added.

I came out, spreading my six yards of skirt. ‘I am the editor,’ I told him proudly. ‘What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?’

‘I—I——’ he answered helplessly. ‘You—you—please—I——’

He backed himself out. Female editors! Was the sky going to fall? Who had ever heard——

I thought the outer office would never stop laughing.

Journalism in Dublin, in those days, was a gay scramble, with little of the

seriousness that informed the papers across the Irish Sea. One knew plenty of celebrities, and found them, as a rule, less interesting than the irresponsible folk who were not celebrated, and never would be. One dipped into society and, lest it should stick to one's skirts and hold one fast, fled quickly. The bicycle had not long been discovered; every careerist had one, and some few even ventured to ride in bloomers, more or less camouflaged as skirts.

'No wonder the decent poor is wanting for bread,' said a beggarwoman, strangely, as she saw me pass thus daringly dressed. I have wondered ever since just what she meant. It may have been merely a way of saying with more or less politeness that I was enough, in my audacity and wickedness, to call down a curse on the whole country.

The careerist of that day, in Dublin, was daring—but within iron limits. Much was made and much said of latchkeys. But one lived with respectable widows, and the chaperon was never absent, even from the bicycle clubs famous for hard riding. Sometimes a racing husband mounted his wife on a tandem bicycle, to run down offenders more certainly. 'Fast' was a word at which every one trembled, unless it applied to the speed of your wheels.

'You should not belong to that dreadful club,' fumed one of the old ladies who took a single paying guest. 'I hear they have a clubhouse miles out in the country, and come home from it in the middle of the night.'

'That's quite true,' I told her eagerly, 'but you haven't heard it all——'

'No?' she said, licking her lips.

'Certainly not. You don't understand. It's true about the club, and the fourteen miles out, but we never come home alone—never!'

'So I——'

'When the evening's over, and we've all danced enough, it's often quite late, perhaps nearly eleven. The captain of the club calls us all out onto the avenue, and starts us, and he sees that EVERY girl has a man to see her ALL the way home, no matter how out of the way it may be. And the men are dears, they NEVER leave you till they see you right to your door, and they just love to do it. They couldn't leave you because we all go different ways, and the roads are very lonely at that time of night, and very, very dark. So each stays with his girl all the time, and so we are perfectly safe.'

The old lady looked at me. I thought she stared oddly; once or twice she opened and shut her mouth like a frog. She seemed to be about to say something. But all that came out was, 'Well, well, my dear! Well, well!'—which was at least not unsatisfactory. And she never remonstrated again.

Dear Irish boys, so elderly now, so young and hot-blooded then—how few of us, your girl companions, realized your true fineness and chivalry! Could it

all have happened in any other land in the world, one wonders? Could it ever happen anywhere now? Thirty or forty youths and girls, many of them more or less in love with one another—black-dark and deserted roads, and fourteen miles to cover late at night, in widely separated twos and twos—and ‘they never left us, so we were quite safe. . .’

The wanderer’s ‘Salue’ to you—those of you who live. Some elderly doctor, some tired Indian Civilian, some parson growing old, some engineer getting a little past his bridge-making at the back of beyond, may read, and remember. I will wager that your sons are different, in this different day.

There never was a scandal in that club. There certainly were some miracles, not labelled as such.

Propriety took strange forms. Being more than ever ‘full of beans,’ and wanting to enjoy what the present day would call a real thrill, I went out after a world’s cycling record, the women’s twenty-four hours road, and got it, by five miles. But before that came about, a difficulty arose. The previous holder had been a married woman; her husband, naturally, ‘paced’ and accompanied her throughout, which gave her a considerable advantage. But I was single. It was seven times impossible for me to ride through the proper twelve hours and the improper twelve hours alike, of a twenty-four, accompanied by any man. Every one knew that, of course. I had to try, unpaced.

I left my rooms at eleven o’clock at night; rode through the dark alone, with provisions packed on the bicycle, and an ankle-length skirt encumbering my limbs. Checks were necessary for world records. I got my first on leaving; my next, far out on the central plains of Ireland, at 5 A.M., from a police barracks. From eight o’clock on through the ‘proper’ hours I was paced from time to time by various enthusiastic friends. The newspapers of the day ‘featured’ the performance, and maintained discreet silence as to pacers, except where they ventured to say that I had been paced ‘through the latter part.’

The old ladies, who suffered much in those days, were pained by the idea of the solitary ride from eleven till five, but not shocked. It was considered that a difficult question had been ingeniously solved. . . .

‘Instead of which, they go about,’ to-day, from England to America, Australia and India, in flying-machines, with what would once have been called ‘male escort.’ . . . The old ladies would have died, in congealed heaps!

In the midst of wild journalism, varied by wanderings through most parts of Ireland, and punctuated, for the good of one’s manners and soul, by excursions back into the ordered world one had left, the dream persisted. I wanted to go to the South Sea Islands.

Many people have, and have had, the same desire. Not many, one thinks, have been able to realize it so fully, and enjoy the realization so completely, as I have.

This is why I am telling the tale, including details that (for some reason hard to understand) seem always to be omitted from other accounts.

To be a traveller, an ‘explorer,’ either in the old or the modern sense, is the vague ambition of quite a number of youths and girls. It is not until one is confronted with the towering cost of long-distance steamer fares, the big incidental expenses, that the question arises—how is it to be paid for?

I was in the plight of a good many others, whose people were just discovering in that nineteenth-century-end, that the ‘top drawers’ would not, and did not, hold them any longer, and that it mattered not the least bit in the world during how many or how few centuries they had inhabited those top drawers, now that harder conditions and a changing world had shaken them out. It was no question of wish and have any longer. What you wanted, beyond the ordinary necessities of life, you must get for yourself.

I was in London by this time, having rather a good time on the whole among the newspapers, though I do not know, and I am sure they did not know, any particular reason why I should, except natural greed allied to North of Ireland persistence. But no newspaper offered, or consented, to pay my passage round the world. When I inquired about prices on my own account, the companies’ answers were staggering.

I thought for a while, and then had some neat cards engraved—not printed—with my name, and the intriguing (at that time) addition ‘Advertising Expert.’ (Incidentally, I have never respected the word ‘expert’ since.) With these and my very best frock, quite unsuitable to business, but very suitable for bluff, I penetrated the shipping offices, and suggested that my way round the world should be paid, provided I guaranteed plenty of newspaper advertisement. I did not adopt shock tactics, but tried to remember that the heads of big businesses were gentlemen, and should be approached as such.

It seems impossible, but it is true that the very biggest and proudest shipping companies agreeably consented to frank a totally unknown young woman all over the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, with the Mediterranean and the Channel thrown in, if I could assure them of certain newspaper commissions.

I procured the latter by the simple expedient of showing work, not very different from any one else’s work, and offering to pay my own way round the world if they could come to terms. They did, and, provided with their letters, I collected my free passes, took as many introductions as I could get, and

started, the newspaper payments furnishing expense money.



A CORNER OF THE LOUNGE IN THE AUTHOR'S HOUSE AT PORT MORESBY

I do not think for a minute that this sort of thing could be done in 1929; the world, before the War—long before—was simpler. But I hope that none of the newspapers had reason to regret their kindness.

It would, of course, have been possible to travel, somehow or other, third-class, working one's way as stewardess, or taking the most thankless and tiresome job in the world, that of companion. That, however, would not have been fun, and what is a trip round the world if it cannot be fun all through?—especially when you are young, and hungry for all the delights of all the earth.

As things were, I travelled like what I certainly was not, a millionaire, in the best cabins of the best liners, with kindness and consideration everywhere. And I enjoyed every minute of it from beginning to end. And that six months round the world expanded, like the magic tent in the Arabian Nights, until in the end it covered all my life.

So the dream came true. Incidentally, I wrote eighteen books about it.

I wonder now sometimes who inhabits the ground floor at 6, Fitzgibbon Street, and if he, or she, ever looks out at the bit of white wall against the bit of blue sky that changed a life for some one else—thirty years ago.

There are people—an increasing number in these days—whom the tropics call; to whom life within sight of palm trees, among blue seas, is the only life worth living. It used to be supposed, quite as a matter of course, that these were born wastrels. The natural place for all industrious, sensible, and consequently successful, people was at home. Certain exceptions were allowed. You might, without loss of character, go ‘ranching’ in various colonies. You might follow the mode of the year that prescribed from time to time such adventures as orange-growing in Florida, lemon-growing in California, gentleman-farming in Calgary or thereabouts. There is always a fashion in these things, and it has seldom much relation to solid facts. The orange-growers of Rhodesia, in recent years, could dot those *i*'s and cross those *t*'s.

You might, of course, enter the Indian Civil, with glory and approval. But you were not expected to like it too much. It was correct to rule the ‘natives’ from a height, treat them justly but firmly, do the right things socially, and go Home as much and as often as you could. To say that you liked India because it was India, and would prefer to spend your entire life there instead of a grudged few years, was to start instant speculation as to how many ‘annas in the rupee’ you had, and set your neighbours at a dinner party furtively scrutinizing your nails...

As for the Pacific Islands, they were, and still are, to most people, a section of the world inhabited by beachcombers, blackbirders, bad lots, missionaries who are equally sanctimonious and depraved, and native beauties invariably and delightfully immoral.

That there is, in the South Seas, a big world of perfectly respectable residents—officials, planters, business folk, much like their counterparts elsewhere, missionaries who are no more hypocritical and depraved than your own homely parson—seems incredible to stay-at-home people. It is, however, true, and it is also true that a great many of these live in the Islands, even the groups subject to fever and not innocent of cannibals—because they like the life.

It is not—a hundred times not—only the waster who appreciates the South Seas. He does not appreciate them as a rule. He is there because his people have thrown him out, and he drinks too much ever to have a chance of making his way home again or keeping a decent job. He has little eye for the beauty and wonder of earth's loveliest region—he is, in himself, the worst blot upon it; and, if it please you, we will now forget all about him, since he has already had much more than his share of literary notice.

What is the fascination of the South Seas, which all men know and most long to taste?

It is a heady brew compounded of different ingredients. One is the vivid and striking scenery, coloured like the gems on the gates of the Heavenly City, never touched by winter or by cold, seldom dimmed by storm. Forever it is warm, green, flowery in the Islands; almost forever seas and skies are blue. There is an illusion of eternity about this age-long summer; in a world of death and change it seems to offer one thing at least that does not change and does not die.

Another ingredient is the exquisite remoteness of it all, even in these days of swift steamers and swiftest flying-machines. Without doubt, the aeroplane, one day, will rob it of this charm. But that day has not yet come; the plane means little to the Island world, which is still far removed from ‘the fever and the fret,’ from the places where ‘men sit and hear each other moan.’ There is leisure in the Islands; time, between hours of work, to think and dream. There, as almost nowhere else in the world, the lost art of conversation survives. Friends, as their ancestors did, can spend long evenings or afternoons happily talking, and satisfied with the entertainment of their own tongues. . . .

I know an island where the trading community, when it feels the need of rest, agrees to shut up shop and holiday together for days at a time. Nobody loses and every one is the gainer by a little bit more enjoyment, another slice of happiness, filched from the grudging hands of Time.

From Tahiti to the Dampiers, and from the Kermadecs to Diamond Head, the natives of the Pacific interest and charm all those who know them. Enough has been written, over and over, about the men and women of Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga, and other Eastern and Mid-Pacific groups. But the Solomons, New Hebrides, above all New Guinea, have their own fierce attractions, and not the least of these are the natives—stronger, ruder, more primitive than the Eastern folk; far more mysterious, deeply more intriguing. I shall have more to say of that later on.

Above and beyond all, there is a certain holiday feeling in the world of the Islands; a spirit of light-heartedness, that has died out from the harsher and more crowded lands. This is not to say that we are a world of idlers. As much sheer hard work is done in the Pacific as anywhere else. But hours are more elastic, pressure of time less unyielding. Our world moves to the slow beat of the monthly, weekly, or six-weekly steamer, rather than to the unbroken rush of a speeded-up, motorized day. There are curious discrepancies. The cook in my own home comes from a district so recently cannibal that one may be quite sure he has, at all events, roasted human flesh in his time; the ‘parlour-maid,’ a huge Western warrior, firmly believes that ‘God bites him’ when he sleeps (i.e., he is attacked by unfriendly spirits). Both handle electric house-fittings with the utmost nonchalance, and another, of much the same type, drives and

can repair a motor car.

Even though the Stone Age and the Aeroplane Age jostle each other after this fashion, leisure and peace, those precious things, remain. And there is always the open door into 'outback,' that wonderland of which I have written much, and have yet more to write.

Last, and perhaps most important, is the chance that the Island world gives to individuality, and to the man or woman who enjoys handling the primitive things of life. There is room to spare in the vast Pacific world for those who find the civilized places too narrow, who like to blaze their own trails, make their own roads, find their own way, both literally and metaphorically. The outdoor life is the typical life; to use an Irishism, it extends to indoor life as well, since houses are built with the view of admitting as much air as possible, rather than excluding it.

This statement must not go without its due word of warning. The Islands are not for the weakling, for the lazy, the intemperate, the sensual. They are not for the man who dislikes civilization because it asks too much of him. The Islands will ask more; they will demand that he stand on his own feet, keep himself up without leaning on the shoulders of his neighbours, make his own code and stick to it without being forced to do so by any one else. A man who cannot get on well in cities or settled countries will not get on in the Pacific world, unless his failure was due to his being too big, not too small for his surroundings.

There are plenty of weaklings in the Island world. They go where they belong, and that is to the devil, rather quicker than they would anywhere else.

Of the influence exerted by the Island women, black, brown, or merely coloured, this is perhaps the best place to speak, briefly and plainly.

All that can be said has been said already about the woman of the Eastern Pacific, the more or less beautiful, more or less mixed blood, Tahitian, Samoan, Tongan, or Fijian. In the Western Pacific, things are somewhat different. Melanesian and Papuan girls are sometimes pretty in early youth; more often they are plain, according to white ideas. They have their own attraction, however, and it would be absurd to say that white men in the Solomons, New Hebrides, New Guinea, do not live with, occasionally marry, native women. But the general feeling towards native women is different from that which obtains farther east. The wandering sensualist, on the lookout for new amusements, who influences public ideas in other islands, is absent from the wilder and more dangerous Western groups. While human nature is human nature, and men dependent on the society of women, the single man (whether married or not) will turn, more or less, to coloured women, in the absence of

white.

But—it is a large but, and should obtain full emphasis—in Papua, at all events, the coloured housekeeper is by no means the rule; she is an exception; as time goes on, more and more of an exception. Single men in Papua, as ‘in barracks,’ ‘don’t grow into plaster saints.’ Nevertheless, the white inhabitant here would rather be decently married than not; does his best to find and keep a wife as soon as possible, treats her well when found.

One of the troubles of life in the Pacific—a trouble that is diminishing but not dead—is the semi-detached marriage. All over the Island world are men whose part in marriage is chiefly confined to paying for it; who live, anyhow, on the disgusting meals provided by unsupervised native cooks, who enjoy no home comforts, and suffer constantly from the dreariness of life that besets the married bachelor. Withal, they have none of the luxuries they enjoyed as real bachelors; drinks, smokes, and cards are cut down, newspapers have to be borrowed, trips ‘South’ are not to be heard of.

In the mean time, the wives, fortified by the advice of complaisant doctors, or by their own simple opinion that ‘the Islands are no place for a lady,’ make themselves into happy colonies in Sydney or Melbourne, enjoy life, have good food, live in cool houses and in the midst of pleasant weather. They go to theatres and picture shows. They have the society of their friends. Once in a year or two, for the sake of appearances, they come up to spend a Southeast season at home. The sword of criticism is readily turned aside by one of two well-tried parries—health and the children. Children must be educated, and they ought to have the care of their mothers. No boarding-school can—etc., etc. As for health——

Well, there are hard cases, and sad cases. But, apart from these, one cannot but realize, after more than twenty years of Island life, that there is only one thing that keeps husband and wife together in the far-off places; only one lack that separates them—love, and the want of it.

After a year or two it becomes plain as day, in an Island community, which marriages were made for the best of reasons and which for the poorest. One sees the woman who ‘sticks it out,’ through fever and bad food, loneliness, heat, mosquitoes, and all the other drawbacks of tropical life, contrasted glaringly with the other who is a living complaint, who cannot bear a crumpled roseleaf. One knows, with certainty, which of them married because her man was more to her, and remains more to her, than all the world; which, to use an expressive piece of slang, merely wanted, and got, a ‘meal-ticket for life.’

This without disparagement of the many splendid women who, in Papua and elsewhere, make of themselves civilization’s very foundation stones. All

the more credit is theirs, in that the relative positions of men and women are, to some extent, reversed. In the Islands it is the man who is tied, and the woman who is free. The bread-winner must stick to his task; the house-mistress may leave hers. There are far more of the plucky, stick-to-it kind than of the complainers who revert to city life, but, in the nature of things, the latter are more conspicuous.

There are two other aspects of social life in the Western Pacific that must be touched on—the ‘Black Peril,’ and the ‘Eternal Triangle.’

It may be said at once that the Black Peril, in Papua, is not serious. Twenty years ago it scarcely existed. Civilization, however, generally brings some trouble of this kind in its train. Brown men, violent and unrestrained of feeling, like all savages, are separated, sometimes for years, from their homes and families, and go to work in the houses of white people, where the women are constantly left alone for the greater part of the day, sometimes for weeks, in the absence of husbands and fathers. Tropical houses lack privacy; the heat makes people who would otherwise be careful somewhat careless in dress and demeanour. There is gunpowder here, and at times it has been known to explode.

Carelessness and contempt on the part of white women are answerable for a good deal. In very rare cases, there may have been direct encouragement. But it may be said on the whole that the white woman in the Western Pacific is about as likely to be attracted by a native man as to commit murder. There are women who murder, and there are women who insult their race in the deepest possible manner. Neither need be reckoned with in considering ordinary, decent folk who make up the world.

All allowance made, however, it would be idle to deny that the Papuan has been known, though rarely, to assault white women. The remedy is simple. If white women made a habit of learning how to use firearms and kept them in the house, nothing more would be heard of these troubles. Everything is known among the native servants, and the fact that a certain ‘sinabada’ (lady) keeps a revolver in her bedroom is sufficient to secure her from annoyance at any and all times.

A quarter of a century of Island life teaches one many things about the native that hysterical scaremongers do not seem to suspect. One is that he is extremely susceptible to the claims of etiquette, good manners, conventions of all sorts. A wild head-hunter from the main range will learn in a very few days what is and is not ‘done,’ in the way of entering people’s rooms at odd hours, knocking or not knocking on doors, keeping out of the way when he is supposed to be out of it—all matters that must be considered in houses open to every breath of air. His own village has imposed upon him elaborate social

codes of all kinds, to which he has unquestioningly submitted, no matter what inconvenience or even suffering may result. Our conventions, if utterly different, are conventions still, and, as such, he is ready enough to learn them.

To dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s, the brown man is decent and modest enough, given a fair chance.

That is not to say that he is to be regarded as a firework that cannot possibly go off. The old motto of trusting God and keeping your powder dry may very fairly be applied in respect to him.

If one judged by the work of certain brilliant and able writers, as well as that of a good many who have no claim to brilliance or ability, one would naturally suppose that the Eternal Triangle of fiction and films is a constant part of Island life. It is, on the contrary, a rarer feature than in the life of cities. Divorce figures are extraordinarily low, which fact is as good a proof as any. Apart from divorce, however, there are in most communities a number of more or less doubtful cases, about which scandal clings like slime; regarding which interested neighbours are continually and excitedly 'kept guessing.'

Of these there are no doubt a few in Papua, which is to say that the inhabitants, like the inhabitants of Clapham, Paris, and Timbuctoo, are not made of stained glass. Life would certainly be duller than it is, between steamers, if this substitute for the theatre were not provided by a handful of public benefactors. But the Triangle, as such, shows up poorly among the many unbroken circles; which is to say that, semi-detached couples and triangular troubles fully allowed for, Western Pacific folk, with Papua fairly in the lead, are conventionally and generally happy. It is the strange habit of Port Moresby married couples to go out walking frequently in each other's company, to sit pleasantly and lazily talking with one another, through many unoccupied hours, to be absurdly proud of one another, and inclined to one another, and to think each other's faces, somewhat yellowed and fever-worn, just as handsome as they were on the day when the confetti was thrown.

This is horribly uninteresting. If one could have said that the people of the Western groups, especially Papua, live in a sort of amazing community of husbands and wives; that they murder each other now and then, keep brown partners 'on the side,' and generally, like the monkey people in Ann Veronica's dream, 'go on quite dreadfully,' there would be something to interest the most casual reader, something for the most bored and inattentive reviewer to quote. I have to apologize, and to hope that any appetite for sensations and horrors will be more fully appeased later on, when I come to the 'bluggy' parts of Papuan life.

To us who live in the Territory of Papua (constantly and hopelessly confounded with that part which was once German New Guinea, and is now the Mandated Territory of New Guinea) things are exciting and interesting which would bore the outsider to tears; things are dull and ten-times-told that set the visitor screaming.

Our electric service, light and power, our telephones, motor cars (we have only a twenty-four-mile stretch of road to run them on, but who would not be in the mode?); our steamship service, four-weekly, poor in quality and high in price, our tea-parties and bridge-parties and dances and launch picnics, interest us passionately, in the little capital of some four hundred white souls. Outside, a step or two away, the Stone Age walls us round. Most of us forget it. When somebody comes in from outback with a tale of hairbreadth adventures, not imagined—like the tales of the passing journalist, who is usually the prince or princess of liars—but true, we, like Queen Victoria, ‘are not amused.’ We have heard it all before. . . . Who cares if the men of a village at the back of back of beyond asked the men of another to a dinner-party, and made the guests the chief dishes? What if a couple of explorers, scarcely more than boys, sent out by the Government to map new districts and discover things unheard of, have come back with all their carriers safe and all their work done? Tell us something about the price of rubber. . . .

That is how it looks to some of us. Others—quite a good many on the whole—love the outback better than the towns, are far more interested in it; visit it as often as we can. It is not easy to visit. The nature of the country is such that roads are almost impossible to make, except at prohibitive expense, which the numbers of the white population, scarce twelve hundred, do not justify. It follows that, unless you want to fit out and conduct a serious exploring expedition (and that will take months of time, and thousands of money), the rivers are your only road. Here again, difficulty is met with. Distances are big; the Territory of Papua has over two thousand miles of coastline, and some hundreds of miles may lie between you and the river you wish to visit. There may be a little local boat going that way, and there may not. If there is such a boat, it will almost certainly not run beyond the river-mouth; no Papuan river is settled, and, in consequence, the only people who ascend the rivers are Government officials and, once in a long while, a recruiter or so.

You can charter if a boat is available, and you can wait and hope for luck if it is not. I have been lucky several times. The Sepik and the Fly, both unvisited by any white woman before myself, and by few white men at any time, are among the most interesting rivers in New Guinea. The first I saw in the beginning of 1923, the latter three years later. A somewhat rough and hurried

account of these visits, written for the most part right upon the spot, makes the next chapter. There is little to be gained by touching up one's first impressions, so I have altered nothing and added little.

I have written as a traveller, a wanderer, to whom new and strange things are the chief happiness of life; a dreamer who has had near twenty-five years of realized dream, and is not yet satisfied. As I said elsewhere, at the beginning of that quarter-century, I say again to-day—my writings, such as they are, are dedicated to the Man-who-could-not-go. I know that he (and she) finds pleasure in them.

It is needless to apologize for the absence of any scientific observations. No country in the world has been more constantly written about and discussed, from an anthropological point of view, than New Guinea, and that, too, by thoroughly qualified people. As for statistics, those who want them, can easily find them in their appropriate place, which is not, one thinks, the pages of a gipsy tale. But there are other grave deficiencies in the tale which must not pass unnoticed.

I have never been captured by cannibals. I have never been present at a cannibal orgy. Feasts in my honour have been unaccountably neglected by the chiefs of the country; perhaps because there are practically no chiefs. Worst of all, nobody has ever attempted to make me queen of any place whatever, or worshipped me as a goddess, or tried to sacrifice me to idols.

This certainly suggests stupidity on my part, and negligence on that of the Papuan in general, because such things seem to happen to every one else. A film-acting party cannot land upon a coral beach without experiencing most, or all, of the adventures above set down, within forty-eight hours. A press photographer on holiday, or a traveller tired of sheiks on their native sands, and looking for new thrills, will be captured, rescued, made sovereign of wild tribes, carried about in triumph, tied up for slaughter—all in a week, and all between the Sogeri plantations and Tim Ryan's corner pub. An explorer will discover some spot 'on which the white man's foot has never trod' within a mile of the automatic selenium beacons of Port Moresby Harbour, photograph it in triumph, and become a hero on the strength of it. The queen of a cannibal tribe will be found smoking a pipe among the palms at the back of Government House, and interviewed for publication, with sensational results. . . .

These things do not happen to the people who live in the country. If they go outback, they do have adventures, but the adventures run on different lines. Only to the round-trip tourist, and to the newspaper man qualifying for the title of explorer by a run in a coastal boat, do these strangely standardized adventures happen. . . .

Something in the monotony of the tales, the vague megalomania that produces them, reminds one irresistibly of what is said about a certain temple wall in Egypt. It seems that this piece of masonry is in danger of serious damage at the hands of an unceasing stream of women tourists, who have all come to see the authentic portrait of Cleopatra carved upon it, and are all determined to secure a souvenir, because every last one of them knows that she WAS Cleopatra—in a ‘former life.’ . . .

Remembering the magnificent exploring work done recently by those amazing youths, Champion, Healy, and Karius, and somewhat earlier, by Humphreys (all young Government officers, travelling in the course of their ordinary duties), one is almost ashamed to mention ordinary travels. Still, the business of these young men is to map new districts and pacify wild, strange peoples, while mine is to observe, enjoy, and describe for those who are less fortunate. Seeing and doing much less, one may, therefore, have more to say.

The sum of recent serious explorations in Papua and the Mandated Territory will be found in the last chapter. The tale of a few of my own pleasure journeys follows this.

CHAPTER II

THE HEAD-HUNTERS OF THE SEPIK

THERE is not a more wonderful river in the world than the Sepik, the largest river of the island-continent of New Guinea.

It is wider, longer, deeper than most of the great European rivers. Large ocean liners can—or could, since they have never done so—travel up the first sixty miles; and steamers drawing ten to fifteen feet would find plenty of water for three hundred. Above that there are rapids; but the Sepik still remains a big river for another three hundred miles, back towards the mountains of Dutch New Guinea. Above this point, nearing its source, it dwindles to a tiny stream.

There is oil somewhere along its course—not yet located; there is gold; there is a seventy-mile stretch of sago, and hundreds of miles of wild sugar-cane. Tobacco is grown by the head-hunters of the middle river in such quantities that stray traders buy it by the ton, the quality of the leaf being good enough for white men to make into cigars. There is much swamp country, but there is also flat land suitable for cotton, tobacco, or sugar; and even the swamp lands are naturally rich, for they grow sago and nipa, the latter now known to be one of the best sources of commercial alcohol.

This mighty river runs through a great part of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea (formerly known as Kaiser Wilhelm's Land) and back through Dutch New Guinea, but the best stretches of the stream are all in our own new colony. Not until 1914 was any serious exploration done, and then a German traveller, just before the War, ascended the river and traced out its course as far as its source. Until 1927-28, little more exploring was done. Even now the tributaries are not much known, and the resources of the Sepik country are scarcely guessed at. No steamers run along the coast to the river-mouth; no regular communication of any kind is kept up. Recruiting schooners have gone up the river a few times; a German man-of-war once visited the lower reaches; the tiny steam pinnace of the Catholic mission travels the middle reaches from the mission station forty miles up. As for Government officials, they visit the river, at the time of writing, in native canoes. Unless one is prepared to charter a ship and bring it hundreds of miles up the coast, or unless some extraordinary chance favours you, the Sepik cannot be visited.

Extraordinary chance *did* favour myself. The Catholic mission launch, a ninety-ton boat, happened to be making a trip up the river (her only trip in six years) and I was fortunate in being able to accompany her. We went two

hundred miles from the mouth, stayed a week in the head-hunting country, had some adventures, and saw many sights that hardly any white person—certainly no white woman—had ever seen before. The heat, with every mile, grew worse and worse—it was already bad at the very mouth of the river—and the mosquitoes increased in a sort of geometrical progression, till one began to wonder how human life continued to exist any farther up. All the same, the journey was worth any and every discomfort; from the estuary to the two-hundred-mile point and back again, every mile had a new interest.

It was nipa and nipa at first—thirty-foot green ostrich plumes standing up in the dishwater-coloured stream; then sago, sago, sago for scores of miles; endless forests massed upon the banks; trees flowering and ready to cut, trees young and spreading, all beautiful beyond words. A sago palm cut down at eight years old (when it would naturally die) contains enough starchy food to keep a man and his wife and family for half a year. In the place of the cut-down palm, another springs up, so there is no risk of exhausting the supply. The pith is chopped out and washed in bark troughs; the resulting starch is collected and made into cakes. On the Sepik, sago is boiled into a pale jelly, and sometimes cooked into thin flexible cakes, rather like oatcakes in appearance. This fine nourishing starch is entirely different from the grained stuff—mostly made from potatoes—which is sold in shops under the name of sago.

All over New Guinea the biggest and most vigorous people are those who live upon the produce of the sago forests, supplemented by coconut and fish. On the Sepik they have yams as well, the best I have seen; the women catch prawns by basketfuls; and there are bananas of every kind. The flesh of pigs, dogs, and human beings is kept for feast days only.

Towards the end of the first day's run we came upon marvellous creepers, dripping, flowing from top to bottom of tall trees in waterfalls and curtains of close leaf. They draped themselves over half a mile of forest in solemn folds like giant funeral palls; they dropped in unbroken walls; they opened into arches, windows, and green, mysterious corridors. The river was half a mile wide, but one could see on the far side the same wonderful and beautiful display, concealing altogether the forest that supported it. In June, the D'Alberti creeper, with geranium-scarlet flowers, would have added its own special loveliness, but this was not the time, and no flower less robust than the splendid D'Alberti can live in such a torrent of leaf.

It was here, or a little after, that the sago began to lessen; to appear only in clumps, while beyond the regions of the smothering creeper, wild sugar-cane began.



WILD SUGAR-CANE, SEPIK RIVER

This wild sugar-cane is worthy of note. There are hundreds of miles of it bordering the Sepik and the Sepik's tributaries; it runs as high as fifteen and twenty feet, and its young shoots are quite as good as cultivated cane, though the older stems are too hard for natives to chew. There has been talk of using it commercially, but the Sepik is very far from anywhere, and nothing, so far, has come of any plans.

At forty miles the launch stopped for the night at a little mission station managed by one father and one brother—both Germans. And here is the place to say that the German 'Mission of the Divine Word,' left in possession of its different stations on sufferance, and under many conditions, has been behaving, since the end of the War, with a loyalty, an honourable acceptance of conditions and promises, that could not be surpassed. Many of the new residents in our Territory, and not a few of the Government officials, would fare badly without the help and kindness freely given by these missionaries. They even go so far as to report native murders to the proper authorities for the good of the country, though they know, as any resident knows, that such a course puts their own lives in serious danger.

The people who inhabit the many villages about this part of the Sepik are cannibals. Some of them have been Christianized, but a great number remain completely savage. Although cannibal, they are not particularly aggressive compared with the head-hunting tribes of the middle river. Nevertheless, a few years ago some of them plotted to wipe out the mission, and they would have



WILD NATIVES LOOKING OUT OF BUSH AS THE BOAT PASSES

done so had not others who were friendly come by night and warned the missionaries.

The touch of humour that is never absent in New Guinea appeared when the friendly natives explained that they would protect the missionaries even if there was a fight; but should there be a dead body or two as a result, they hoped the Fathers would permit them to eat it!

A couple of days later, the launch had made her way up nearly two hundred miles of the great river, which was still half a mile wide and deep enough for large ships, and we were in the country of that most interesting of tribes, the Sepik head-hunters.

These people are not supposed to belong to the same race as the common, unenterprising cannibals of the upper and lower river, who merely enjoy an occasional fight, and devour an enemy once in a way. It is thought that they came across country to the Sepik from the sea countless generations ago, armed with a little more knowledge, a trifle more of civilization than the other tribes, and immediately proceeded to make themselves unquestioned masters. 'Romans of the Sepik' they might well be called. They are better, bigger, stronger than any one else on the river; they hold the others in subjection, make them grow tobacco for the conquerors' needs, and exact tribute of yams and sago as they please. They are much cleaner than the other natives; they have not a bad idea of art; their houses are well built, and their towns—some of which number nearly two thousand people—are kept in good order. What

they know of white people is not much. One or two explorers; a few recruiting schooners; the tiny mission pinnace creeping up and down the river; a Government canoe once in a long while—that is all the head-hunters see of the white people who own the land. A white woman they had never seen until I came among them.

The immense distance of the Sepik from all settlements and the neglect that it has experienced until recent years have encouraged lawlessness. Head-hunting, at the time of my visit, flourished openly in the middle-river districts. If it did not reach the point attained during the War years—when one tribe is said to have taken about seven hundred heads in two years—it was still a menace to safety and a defiance to authority.

Heads, heads, heads—there was no getting away from them on the middle Sepik, that March and April of 1923. Every village had a display of heads in its men's communal house; every canoe that came about the launch offered a head or so for sale; every native who could speak pidgin English—and there were a good many, since Sepik folk have often been taken away to work on the plantations—had a tale of gossip about the head-hunting raids of yesterday and last week. On the deck of the launch, natives, given a lift up the stream, with their canoes towing happily behind, talked to each other in pidgin English with the most perfect candour about the inescapable subject. The 'cooky' of the boat—an alleged-to-be-civilized native—when he ought to be getting dinner was hanging entranced on the lips of a local chief, who was telling him all about the last raid.

'I go along that fellow village night-time, altogether I make finish that man, woman, monkey (child)—I take altogether head belong him,' he boasted.

'How many fellow head you taken?' asked the cook eagerly, tin-opener in hand and kettles boiling over unheeded.

The chief counted on his fingers and toes. 'Nine fellow head I gettem,' he answered.

'You strong man!' declared the cooky admiringly, and returned reluctantly back to his galley-pots.

We went on and on up the river; and now the local colour began to show itself thickly. Some of the returned labourers whom we were carrying as passengers seemed very reluctant, as their village drew near, to disembark. It was three years since they left; they could not be sure, they said, that their tribesmen would receive them well. Why not? . . . Over the dark faces dropped the darker veil that white men in these mysterious lands know well. The returned labourers could not—would not—say. But they were uneasy; one could see it.

Their village was reached next day. Like most Sepik towns, it was partly on the river-bank and partly far back in the bush. The houses—brown sago thatch, brown sago walls, set on high piles under the shade of palms—seemed few, but that was delusive; there were scores more behind.

The village folk assembled on the bank. We landed the boys, who were not now unwilling, only anxious, and we stood by for a while to see that they were well received. There was much talking, weight seemed to be lifted from their minds, and off they went into the gloom of the forests with their friends, chattering eagerly about matters that seemed of the first importance.

Later, we stopped at a village renowned for its friendliness. Here, it was said, the white man was in no danger at all of losing his head; here every one had always been civil and well-behaved. Crowds met the launch; men clad in a handful of fur and an armful of shell beads—their hair trained into long wiry curls, their eyes painted horribly with black, their noses and cheeks reddened. They jumped about, wild with excitement, as the two missionaries and myself came ashore. They had never seen a white woman; they expressed their astonishment, somewhat unflatteringly, by yelping like dogs. No doubt they were friendly, but they had not brought their women out, and every one who knows New Guinea knows that that suggests distrust. One of them, who spoke pidgin English, proposed a sort of confidence trick; they had their women away back in the bush, he said, and if I would leave the white men on the bank and go with the natives, they would take me to their women—and then, apparently, every one would trust every one else. . . . The offer was accepted.

It was not very far, only a few hundred yards, till we came to the bush part of the village, pretty and pleasant and cool, deeply shaded by thick trees and boasting a number of houses built with considerable skill. We were not yet in the region of the biggest villages, built by the ‘strong men’ of the Sepik, but this was a pleasant dwelling-place enough. There was a fine assembly hall, open on all sides to the cool river breezes, and roofed with heavy thatch; it had long tables (more used, one must confess, for sitting on than for meals), and it had a number of very cleverly made high stools, each carved from a large tree-trunk, with four outward-curving legs.

And now, out of the high-up door of the women’s house, small brown faces began peeping. The men roared to their wives to come down; and very timidly they came, pattering down the high ladder, staring and laughing nervously. Most of them would not even approach till the men, shouting with laughter, dragged them up to me. They were rather superior to the usual type of savage women, not nearly so hideous, nor so crushed-looking. One inferred that the wives of the head-hunters were not ill-treated, and enjoyed some position in the community.

Whether they, or the men, were responsible for the creepers prettily trained over some of the houses, the neat, tidy walks, and the occasional bunches of flowering orchids, I cannot say. There was no interpreter, and if there had been, every one was far too excited to keep up a conversation. Then and thereafter, every visit which I made to the villages resembled nothing so much as a combination of a dog-show and a bazaar; yelping and howling, crowding and pushing, offering of weapons, feathers, carvings, heads for sale. Knives were in keen demand as 'trade'; a good way after came fish-hooks, beads, and salt. But whatever the transaction was, the shouting and chattering that accompanied it, the excited dancing about, the laughing and pointing and general bedevilment were the same.

I went back to the river by and by, escorted by all the men of the place, but none of the women; the latter retired at once to their houses. The Fathers had concluded their own business, which, as mission work, seemed rather hopeless, and we went on board the launch.

It was a typical Sepik River afternoon; over huge open lagoons, steely and livid, under a sky that was black with terrible heat, the launch panted on her way; through narrower reaches, less than half a mile in width, where the silent dark green trees on either bank stirred not a leaf, but stood like gloomy soldiers, stiff at attention. The boat was full of mosquitoes now; whenever we approached the bank, they came on board in thousands, and if one walked about in the villages, one had to fight them off ceaselessly with branches of trees. All the natives carried long brooms made of cassowary feather or coconut fibre, and used them continually. And with every mile of our advance up the river, the mosquitoes and the heat increased.

Every one was streaming from every pore; clothes remained saturated night and day. Sleep within airless, close mosquito-nets became almost impossible; rest at any time of the day was hopeless. Two thoughts dominated the mind above all others—mosquitoes and heat, heat and mosquitoes.

And yet—how lovely the waterways that we passed; the tributaries running far back into lagoons set with silvery sugar-cane and gemmed with secret, exquisite islands! Sometimes the tops of coconuts, rising above apparently untouched brakes of cane, told of the existence of hidden towns in the centre of natural island fortresses. The Sepik has many villages that are thus half-hidden, and many more entirely concealed, kept jealously guarded from any white who may stray into the wild interior of the Forgotten Land.

The tale of one of these places is tantalizing to the last degree. All middle-river villages are well supplied with pottery—large ornamented clay pots (used for cooking food and also for boiling heads taken in a raid) and tall, bottle-shaped vessels in which the invaluable sago is stored. No village makes its

own—they all come from one source, a hidden town, some miles back from the river-bank, into which no white of the few who know the Sepik has ever been able to make his way. Even Father Kirschbaum, who knows more about the river and its people than any living man, and who is in the confidence of the head-hunting tribes if any one is, acknowledges that he has been defeated in all his attempts to find the mysterious village. He has hunted for it in and out of the huge marshes, the tangles of little artificial canals made for canoes, the tributaries of the river, the unknown islets. He knows within a few miles where it is—but at the time of writing he has not found it. Instead, he came across cleverly devised trap roads, well-trodden, and ending suddenly in a swampy lagoon; trick pathways through forests leading to spear-pits—but no village.

The people of this secret village, whoever and whatever they may be, will hold no commerce with whites; and every head-hunter on the Sepik swears—in the teeth of the fact that his house is full of pottery from the Unknown Town—that he doesn't know where it is, and that no one else does. Head-hunters, like thieves, hang together. By the time these lines are in print, the secret may be a secret no longer. And yet the New Guinea native is a past-master in the art of hiding his dwelling-place. I think he will keep his secret on the Sepik a little longer.

Some of the cooking-pots are enormous, as large as hip-baths; others are graduated down to the size of saucepans. All are cleverly decorated in various patterns of raised waving lines and chains; most have odd, fanciful representations of human faces. The sago jars are also fancifully decorated and excellently shaped—one and all the work of no mean craftsman.

Going on up the river, I had reason to be glad that in the old days of Papua it had been my chance, far to the south, to see much of the uncivilized and hostile tribes; for no one who knew New Guinea could travel the Sepik in March of this year and not see that care was necessary when visiting towns or going inland. Old New Guinea travellers will know what it was that one saw, or rather felt—a something, a nothing; a fierce look in native faces, an uneasiness in native manners. They are always fierce, always uneasy, these wild tribes, but sometimes it is with a difference—and now the difference was there. Even the missionary Fathers, who are, in their quiet way, the most complete dare-devils in the Territory, took some precautions. The little pinnace used for travelling up and down side streams carried loaded guns, hung in a handy place, and cautious questions were asked as to the state of the towns ahead, though I do not know that the answers made any difference to any one's plans. At night we did not tie up to the bank, but anchored some way out in the stream. And always, as we went on, it grew hotter and hotter, and the mosquitoes, incredible to relate, grew worse. . . .

Then we came to a town with an absurd name that sounded like ‘Come-on-a-bit’—and this town, represented on the bank by one house and one ruin (though there were many more buildings behind), we passed without visiting. Come-on-a-bit is a place that knows its own mind and always greets strangers with showers of spears. That would not (I am sure) have prevented the Fathers from making a call, but it happened that they had no errand there, so we passed. One could just see in the distance the warriors of the village collecting outside the big house, ready to start spear-throwing as soon as we got within range. They must have felt disappointed when we went on.

By and by—on a Tuesday forenoon it was—we came to a town where the men’s big house stood on the very bank of the river—an unusual circumstance. The warriors of the place were sitting and loafing about, chewing the eternal betelnut, eating cakes of sago—and staring. We had seen many fierce and wicked faces in other villages, but here one knew instantly that something different had been touched. There was a black horror that one felt like an evil mist; one saw something in the faces of the men for which civilized language has no words.

A young man, a comely fellow, came forward. He was oiled and painted; there were jet-black circles round his eyes; his nose was scarlet; he had black and scarlet patches on his cheeks. He had huge muscles, accentuated by the oily clay that had been streaked about his naked body. Sidelong he watched the party, and once or twice he smiled. Hell might have sickened at that smile, at the hideous knowledge, the horrible lusts late-satisfied that looked out of it. An old man strutted about, uneasy, nervy, on wires. He had a venerable grey beard and a wrinkled body. His face was full of strange furies. Unlike the youth, he knew it, and looked down at the ground when the white folk came too near. One was blood-intoxicated, full-fed; the other was still thirsty. And whether the happiness of the one or the uneasy restlessness of the other was the more appalling, it was impossible to say.

Quietly enough, however, they stood about and watched the white people examining the treasures of the men’s houses, which, in this village, held rather less than usual. Heads were plenty—a woman’s head among them, with short black curls on the dried scalp; a child’s head or two; men’s heads cleverly worked up, with modelled and painted clay faces and eyes of shell or mother-of-pearl. I asked if any were to be bought. No, none of the dried and completed heads could be parted with, but a knife would buy a skull, and one of the young men would put a face on it in no time. The young man—a harmless, amiable creature to all appearances—sat down at once and began his work. Then the warrior, who had been staring at me and walking round me in



SKULLS WITH CLAY PORTRAIT MASKS ATTACHED, SEPIK RIVER

somewhat unusual silence, made the inevitable request. Would I come into the bush with them and let the women see me?

Through heat that seemed to burn the very ground beneath one's feet, I followed the men for a quarter-mile or so. The way led past good vegetable gardens of yam, banana, and cultivated sugar-cane; under great clumps of betelnut and coconut palm that stood dark and motionless against the iron sky. Houses appeared soon, stringing out at long intervals into the forest behind. Still there were no women. The awful heat, the black sky, the stillness, and the silence of the evil-faced folk who accompanied me were almost hypnotizing in their effect. I wondered why I was here; I reflected, so far as reflection was possible, that curiosity led one into strange places and predicaments; wondered whether I should ever get away again, and told myself that the mosquitoes were impossible—there *could* not be so many mosquitoes anywhere.

Then at last a woman came in sight, peering round the corner of a banana tree. The men dragged her forth and talked to her loudly, and she consented to come up and stare. She tried to run away, but they called her back sharply. Two old and frightfully ugly women looked down from a house—the women's house. I went in. There was nothing out of the ordinary to see, and the heat was growing worse and worse, so I climbed down and said I was going back. At this they became talkative. One of the men who had accompanied me along the road told me that the women had not all come back, and invited me to follow him into the depths of the forest where they remained concealed.



CARVINGS, SEPIK RIVER

The inward monitor known to travellers in New Guinea shook its head. I refused. Then the men begged me to return to the women's house. I had not been five minutes away, but in that brief time a temporary door had been put into the previously open doorway, and a number of men, armed with spears and knives, had joined the two women inside. This time I declined their invitation to come in, but sat on the top step of the ladder looking through the door. There were two women outside. While the men were persuading me to come into the house again, these two slipped off into the bush so quietly that I should not have noticed had not old experience jogged my elbow. Then I saw the other women taking a place near the back door of the house, inside. This might have been for coolness, but it might also have meant that they were getting ready to run away.

I remembered that savage races in New Guinea almost invariably send their women away before making any attack, and I began to think seriously.

On the whole it seemed best to be 'a coward for half an hour,' so I said I was tired and intended to return. I went back to the boat in the face of considerable, though not violent, opposition. One does not wish to traduce any one, even a village of head-hunters, but I could not forget that mine was the only long-haired head most of them had ever seen; certainly the only one they would ever have the chance of taking.

Next day the murder, most literally, was out, and the uneasy appearance of the villagers fully explained. Some friendly pidgin-English-speaking natives

had been unable to restrain their tendency towards gossip and had told one of the missionaries that the village where we spent the morning, and where I had found the women so unfriendly, had just—to be accurate, three days earlier—invaded a neighbouring town, killed fifteen of its inhabitants, taken their heads, and captured a boy. What were they going to do with a boy? Undoubtedly make a 'sing-sing' with him, kill him, and add his head to their collection.

It should be explained here that the Sepik River tribes torture prisoners, even though, on the middle river, they do not eat them. A 'sing-sing' is a tremendous festival, taking place by torchlight. Drums are beaten and dances go on hour after hour—savage dances designed to work up blood-lust and fury. The climax is the torturing and slaying of the victim and the cutting-off of his head.

The face of the young man rose up before me, blood-drunken and satisfied; and then I knew that the face of the old man—not yet sated, looking forward to a climax of red horror—was the worst.

It was natural and quite in order that the two Fathers, practically unarmed, should decide to stop the 'fun' before it went too far. It was also in order that they should be in no hurry about it; that they should lunch comfortably, unloose the pinnace calmly, and go off quite as if they were intending to hold a catechism class. It was also just like the mission folk not to stand in the way of my seeing whatever I wanted to see, to take me with them, and discourse on the habits of the egret heron and the way to catch fish, most of the way down to the village.

What followed is quite impossible, only, since it happened, it may as well be told.

The men were collected on the bank again. Among them was a boy, a mere child of about eleven years. He was not confined in any way, but it seemed as though a close watch were being kept over him. The cue of the hour seemed to be innocence—innocence, benevolence, and every Christian virtue. We landed. The Fathers talked to the old man, who explained that he had merely adopted the boy, and meant to treat him as his own son. The boy would say that was true.

The boy, dark, sullen, stunned, said it *was* true. He wouldn't go away if he was asked—would he? ('Answer properly, you young beggar!')

The boy, through an interpreter, said he wouldn't go away if he was asked. Once he looked up. I saw his eyes. I had seen that look once before—in the eyes of Michelangelo's terrible head of 'The Lost Soul.'

I have not the least doubt the Fathers saw it too. But they temporized

tactfully, walked about, looked at the carvings in the men's house. I asked if 'my' head was ready. It was ready. The man who had been working it brought it out—a fine piece of modelling—and was paid a knife for it. Afterwards questions were asked again, and then came a scene that could have been staged nowhere but on the Sepik.

The old man sprang forward, seized a handful of plaited fibre straps kept for the purpose, and began beating out his arguments and protestations upon a log that lay on the ground. As he beat, he yelled, and as he yelled, he cut demi-voltes in the air, coming down at one end or the other of the log with an agility worthy of the Russian Ballet. At the end of each argument or statement, he threw away a strap and took another until the bunch was nearly done, when a second man snatched it up, and repeated the yelling, the speech-making, the demi-volting round the log. It was an amazing sight, and would have been perfect if only the speakers had used the huge carved pulpit chair, with the grinning devil-face on its back, which is the ordinary vehicle of their emotion. But to-day they were so much in earnest that they simply took what came nearest, and that was the log. So do the ends of truth ravel out, whereas fiction is neat and trimmed.

In the middle of it all, the Fathers, seeing that argument was of no avail, took the boy by the arms and hustled him into the pinnace, where I had just settled myself to enjoy the old man's speech. The pinnace was touching the shore. If it had not been . . .

It is hard to say how a fight begins. All one could see was a tangle of heads and legs, and all one heard was a noise just a little more like a dog-show than the noise that had been going on for the last hour. Only when I saw one of the Fathers' boys jump for the gun and get forward with it, and the other—most commendably—leap into the engine-room to start the engine, did I realize there was trouble. I crawled over the engine-room roof; the other Father was sitting looking on, and the first had just detached himself and sprung back onto the pinnace with the boy. Nobody seemed to want my revolver. Nobody was the least bit in the world put out—except the head-hunters. They were making more noise than two dog-shows now, and as the engine and the extremely eager crew pushed us off into the river, the old man flung something down—it was a plane iron with which he had just tried to kill the Father—and frantically beat himself against a tree. At which (I do not expect any one to believe this) the other men left off dog-showing and burst into wild and frantic laughter, of the kind that arises at the 'movies' when the funny man on the screen bursts a custard pie on some one else's head.

And the pinnace went off upstream carrying ourselves and the boy.

Nobody on the launch could speak his language. It was impossible to

explain things to him. He only knew that he had been ‘blackbirded’ yet again, and that people in general were too strong for him. In a corner of the boat he crouched, clad only in his little scrap of breech-cloth, looking stunned and void of every feeling.

It was only a few hours before the launch was invaded by a whole villageful of savages in canoes.

I never saw a better dress—or rather undress—rehearsal of the cutting-off of a ship than that which these friends of innocence gave us. I think it was not altogether undesigned. The launch is a small steamer of ninety tons, standing very high out of the water. But the head-hunters charged her as soldiers charge a fort, and were all over her from keel to bridge before you could have laced your boots.

They were, however, friendly. They wanted to get the boy back by any means short of fighting, and even when they were met with plain refusal—besides some very plain talk from the missionaries—they kept up the same strained smile and appearance of kindness. Being warned that the boat was leaving, they went off, still keeping up their smiles. Some of the natives on the boat explained the matter by suggesting that the visitors had been in the raid themselves and were to take part in the ‘sing-sing,’ though they wished to keep up an appearance of candid innocence in case inquiries were made later on.

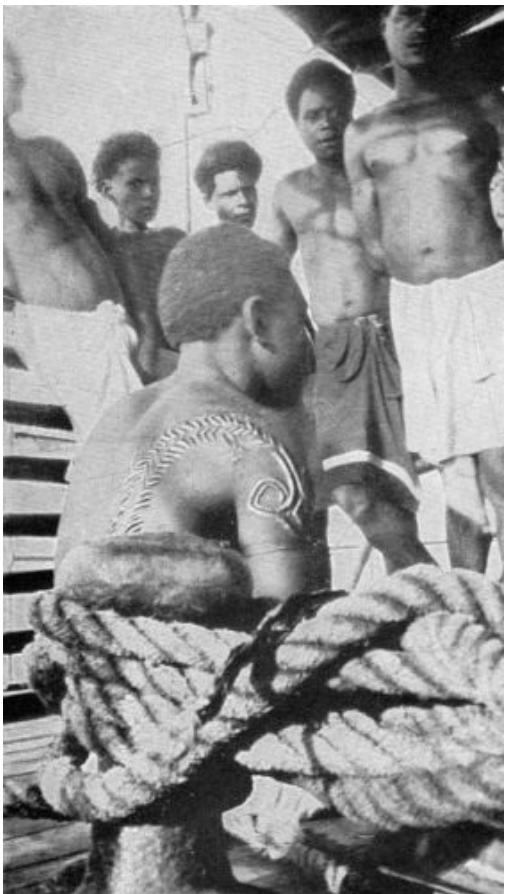
But let me finish the tale of the boy. The interpreter having gone, no one could talk to him, for his village did not speak the common language of the river. In a corner of the upper deck he sat or lay, day and night, despair stamped on his small black face. His parents had been killed and beheaded before his eyes, his friends slaughtered. He had been carried off—once, twice. Was every one the same?

It was the gift of a blue loin-cloth that first woke him up.

With a gesture of scorn he flung his little strip of fur into the Sepik, and tied on the new magnificence, looking at himself in wonder. Much strange food was offered to him. His eyes narrowed and he tossed it away—poison, of course. The other boys howled with delight, and showed him, unmistakably, what should be done with such luxuries as bread and jam, wings of fowl from the cabin table, and secreted pancakes from the same rich source of good things. The boy, obediently answering by this time to the name of ‘Monkey,’ which is the pidgin English for child, was clearly no fool. Next time he was ready, and no one got in ahead of him. Any scraps remaining he placed in sanctuary beneath my deck-chair.

It was like taming a little wild beast. Confidence had to be won by feeding, and by pats and strokes. After a day or two Monkey understood that the white

woman, at least, meant him well. He even consented, trembling and reluctant, to kneel down and be photographed. He used to creep to my chair and look up at me, still with the dead, stunned expression. But when I caressed him, tears suddenly flooded his frozen eyes. He spoke only in odd grunts. The Fathers he still feared; they were men. . . . But one day they took him ashore to see two or three of his own people who had escaped from the raid and gone down-river. The truth dawned upon Monkey: he was not going away to be killed or tortured in another place. He was going to live with good people. There must have been enlightening talk with his own race. At any rate, the child came back with the black despair gone from his eyes. After that he put on flesh visibly and cheered up every hour. When he was finally landed at the mission, where his lot will be of the happiest, I saw him following a crowd of newly recruited farm-boys up to the house, excited, curious, a real boy again. And so ends the tale of Monkey.



SCAR TATTOOING, SEPIK RIVER

The next happening of interest was a visit to a town of no less than two thousand people, a little farther up the river. In the upper middle Sepik there are a good many such towns—all given up heart and soul to head-hunting, and none possessed of any particular respect for the far-off, little-known Government on the island of New Britain, five hundred miles away. Still, this village was known to be friendly, and so far as we had heard, it had not lately been concerned in any special raid. Raids always make a village risky to visit; the people are ‘up,’ blood-drunk, and generally not disinclined to add a sheep or so to the lambs already on their conscience. I do not suppose the Mission Fathers would have let twenty raids interfere with their projected call. Still, it was well that the people of the big town were in an amiable mood, as one had so much the better chance of seeing everything that was of interest.

The approach lay along a narrow river widening into a great silver-green lagoon. Even on the lovely Sepik we had seen nothing more beautiful than this secluded, exquisite spot, with its parklike shores, wide stretches of deep grass, dotted with trees, its beds of rustling, bright green sugar-cane out in the water, its palms stooping, mirrored, over the lake surface, its fairy inlets bridged with leafy liana, its sharp, outrunning points where the stately egret—tall, white as sea-foam—stood or walked, and gazed at us with fearless eyes.

Into the loveliest inlet of all our pinnace went; and then took place the inevitable scene of shouting, dancing, crowding, pushing, the natives howling unanswerable questions in unknown native tongues, swarming all over the pinnace, all over us, all over everything.

This village was ‘all right’; one sensed that from the first. It was a little too vehement in its welcome; a trifle too violent in its attempts to make every one at home; but one could put up with that. It even—unprecedented act!—brought one or two of its older and uglier women down to the landing-place to show its utter good will; and then swept a missionary and myself off to the village proper, howling its delight.

It was not much dressed—a bunch of leaves for the men, a fringe of dyed grass for the women; but it made up for that by its decorations. Some of the men wore wigs of bristling black cassowary plumes; others had false hair of yellow cuscus fur; yet others decorated themselves with white and blue feathers. One very well-mannered old man carried a betelnut outfit with a long lime stick for extracting the lime from its gourd. It was like the other outfits save in one particular—there were four feathers tied onto the stick. What did that mean? we asked. Four men he had murdered, explained the old person, in pidgin English. He was a very well-mannered old man, as I have said, and he acted voluntarily as our guide all through.

There was a narrow log bridge, over which the old warrior politely handed me. We entered at once into the deep green gloom of the forest, for all river towns run back into the bush. The mass of the people were gathered here. Here, too, was the men’s clubhouse that every village owns—tall, finely built, with curious small side windows meant for displaying skulls. There were, however, no skulls in the windows; I do not know why. But inside the big temple there were plenty on an extraordinary ‘skull-rack’ that stretched across from side to side. It was about a foot wide by twenty feet long, and was set with a row of teeth. On every fork a skull was spiked; it was painted red, white, and black in a sort of snake pattern, and was clearly the first object of interest in the place. The old gentleman with the four feathers conducted us to it with the air of a Cook’s guide, and

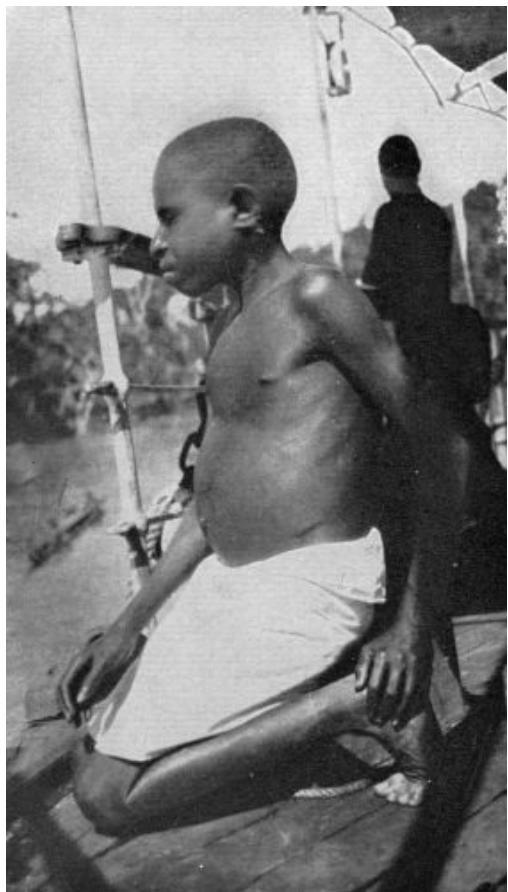
seemed pleased by the sensation it caused.

The house was immense, very dimly lighted and full of treasures which one could hardly see. The pillars supporting the roof—huge tree-trunks—were painted in all kinds of fantastic devices, little red and black devils among the most notable. Canoes were stored away at one side, the typical river canoe, hollowed out of a single great log. The bow of each canoe was a life-size crocodile head, so well carved that one felt inclined to draw back from its ugly snout and gaping teeth. There were stacks of big drums hollowed out of shorter and thicker logs, and most elaborately carved. There were baskets of all kinds and sizes, a ceremonial chair carved with a human figure in high relief, and innumerable mat-wrapped bundles that concealed other treasures.

Nobody could have been more hospitable than these head-hunters. I wanted a dagger; they fetched a dozen made from the immense thigh-bone of the cassowary, gaudily feathered and beaded. No, it was a human-bone dagger I wanted, somebody tried to explain. Anything to please... Would this do?... It was a thigh-bone, plain and simple, brought out of a basket—grim relic of some former raid. The polite head-hunters were distressed when they found it would *not* do. An old man fetched the real thing at last—a long, slender weapon, beautifully chiselled in patterns and ornamented with streamers. Price? Oh, they would not be hard—a knife. Big knife or small? There was some bargaining, but at last the dagger changed hands.

Next the guide brought a couple of long poles, each fitted with a basket at one end, and offered them for sale. Curios ten feet long, however, were not in my line. I asked what they were used for, and immediately a howl of excitement went up. They would show me!

Out into the open we went, and under a dark and rainy sky two warriors



RESCUED BOY ON THE LAUNCH

gave a fine exhibition of single-stick with the gigantic weapons. They are used for the settling of quarrels, and the number of recently broken heads we saw suggested that quarrels must be fairly frequent in the village. I tried hard for a picture. The fighters, full of good nature, consented to pose, but it is not in the nature of a head-hunter to remain still, and the result was not altogether satisfactory.

Photography, up the Sepik, is handicapped by difficulties innumerable. All films, plates, papers, and chemicals go bad quickly in the damp heat of the river forests. The people are dark brown in colour; one usually sees them under the shade of dense trees, and they are incapable of staying still for a second. A gleam of sun is the only chance; and on the Sepik in the early part of the year it is either raining or thundering, or both together nearly all the time. Further, a great many of the people are very much afraid of being photographed, and avoid the camera as they would a pointed gun. When they are not afraid, they crowd round so close as to leave no clear space. Within the houses the light is so dim that an exposure of half an hour would be necessary for any clear result, and no power on earth could keep the natives away from a camera set up with such an object. As for flashlights and magnesium wire, they are dangerous in these very inflammable buildings, apart from the fact that their use would probably send the whole village howling into the bush.

However, when I reached one of the women's houses, every one was most obliging. Some of the most notable pieces of pottery in the house were taken out, together with three skulls that were greatly valued, and I was able to get a good picture for once. The photograph shows a cooking-pot, probably used for boiling heads as well as yams, and one of the big sago jars. Both were from the mysterious village already mentioned. The three heads had been boiled, cleaned, and fitted with masks of sculptured clay. Each displays a different expression.

This house was the home of a man of wealth and high standing. He had four wives and sixteen children, and his possessions in the shape of pottery, skulls, drums, and basketware marked him at once as a native millionaire. Down the floor of the great house ran four long tunnels, each about three feet wide, two feet high, and twenty feet long. They were made of matting supported on sticks. Each wife owned one for herself and her children. What were they? Mosquito-nets after the pattern of the Sepik.

The millionaire himself, standing in the middle of a group of wives and children, offered me a polite invitation to come and spend the night at his house. It would be an honour to the village to entertain this distinguished stranger, he said, or words to that effect. The interpreter's version was: 'Him talk dis fellow place plenty like you stop, see altogether something belong

him.'

The boat was spending the night at anchor in the river; I could have accepted the invitation, and was sorry afterwards that I did not. But the truth was that some of the family were suffering from hideous skin diseases, and the thought that I might have to occupy a tunnel and a mat used by these afflicted creatures was too much for me. I refused.

From the house of the much-married man, as we climbed down the ladder, looked out the scornful faces of two yellow dogs. They might well be scornful; they had what no one else had—each its own private door of entry, small, neat, and arched, with a small private ladder leading up from the ground. The dogs seemed to be well-fed and kindly treated in these villages—another proof of the relatively high civilization of the Sepik head-hunters.

Here, too, there were green, flowering creepers and orchids trained about the posts of the houses; there were ornamental porches and verandahs adorned with latticework; there were gay-coloured bushes set alongside the pathways. The women looked well and plump, and not overworked. Both men and women were of a fine, well-developed type, and skin disease—with the unlucky exception of that one house—was rare.

It was astonishing to note the quality of some of the faces—the wise, kindly look of many middle-aged men, the sharp cleverness of the youths. Brains these folk have in abundance, and, strange though it may seem, they have much natural goodness of character too. The big village had been prominent in head-hunting raids, and no doubt would be again. But one could see that, in ordinary circumstances, the head-hunters were good citizens, good 'sports.' I would defy any one to spend a week or two among these towns, and go away without a liking for the people. There is a sort of jolly Mark-Tapleyism about them, a zest for life, a delight in fine houses and good food and good sport, coupled with a pleasant readiness to share these pleasant things, that would make friends of any one not hopelessly prejudiced by the popular idea of the 'savage.' The Sepik head-hunter has a future. So much brains and character cannot in the end be lost.

There had been a disturbance when we landed, but there was ten times as much noise when we left. One of the men, a great, hefty fellow, flung his arms about the biggest Father and embraced him. Half the women came down to the river—an unusual compliment—and at least a couple of hundred of the men waded into the water or stood on the shore, pushing and yelling about the launch as she went off. Three very respectable and sensible-looking old gentlemen, without any clothes, came alongside in a canoe and pressed gifts of yams and sago cake upon me, rubbing their brown stomachs to explain that it was very good. Then we went away, and I, for one, was sorry, for I knew I

should never see the great village and its merry, hearty people again.

The last picture that stamped itself upon my brain was a flashlight of a young man opening up his vanity bag (carried by many natives) to renew the red paint on his nose, which was beginning to run in the fearful heat of early afternoon. Beside him stood a friend, negligently beating off the mosquitoes for both with a fly-whisk composed of white osprey plumes—about sixty pounds' worth.

The beautiful 'osprey,' or egret, is one of the commonest birds on the river. We saw many hundreds on the banks among the sugar-cane, or standing out upon solitary logs. They are tall, slender birds, very stately in bearing, pure white, with large dark eyes. Though much hunted, they do not seem to be particularly shy. 'Grass' is the pidgin-English word used for their plumes. The natives, so it is said, collect the plumes as they fall about the breeding-places, and do not kill the birds. This may or may not be true, but it is certainly true that much plume-hunting of one kind and another has been done in the past, and I imagine that the law protecting the birds is not very closely observed. At any rate, those of the natives who were willing to trade generally seemed anxious to sell osprey plumes. The price asked was half a handful of cowrie shells from the coast—roughly, about sixpence—for three or four plumes tied together. We did not trade.

There is no doubt about the shyness of the famous birds-of-paradise. The Sepik, in former years, used to be literally alive with them, and they were easily shot from the river. I have met a man who, in the days before the War, went up in a new steam launch to shoot birds-of-paradise, and paid for the launch—fourteen hundred pounds—with the catch of two days. I have heard of another who shot a couple of hundred pounds' worth off one tree. Now you can travel two hundred miles up and two hundred miles down without seeing so much as a feather. There are still plenty of birds, but they do not show themselves. Only on the head-hunters' arms and in their greasy curls do you see the golden plume that has made so many fortunes. They know where to find a bird when they want one.

Since the War it is illegal to shoot birds-of-paradise in the Mandated Territory. There has been some talk of permitting the trade again for a few months at a time, but so far nothing has been done. Of course, illegal trading goes on, and some men make a fair income as poachers. Still, the palmy days of plume-trading are gone; no one will ever make the price of a fourteen-hundred-pound launch in two mornings and two afternoons again.

One is glad that the beautiful birds are to be spared, and that the egret, scarcely less beautiful, is now in no danger of extinction upon the Sepik River. The giant goura pigeon, at the time of my visit, had just been included in the

protective law. It is a very lovely bird, and its colouring—French grey, with flushes of ruby and soft rose—is not the least of its charms. The goura has wonderful eyes, large, geranium-scarlet in colour, and its famous crest is grey with white spangles—in Papua, grey with spangles of dark greyish blue.

There is no bird better to eat than the goura, and in the Territory you may still shoot it for the pot, if you do not use its feathers. In Papua you must not kill it for any reason whatever. It is a gentle, rather stupid creature, and has often been tamed and kept as a pet. The specimens in the Sydney Zoölogical Gardens have been doing very well.

We saw no gouras on the way, but their deep, bell-like note sometimes came across the water to the launch in the early mornings, when one crept, soaked and stifled, from under the net, to give one's self up to mosquito torture while one bathed and dressed.

On the way back to the river-mouth, and on the later voyage down a far, deserted coast to the tiny settlement of Medang, I gathered many things of interest from the people who knew all about the Sepik and its natives. Nothing was told that could not be illustrated on the spot, for we had sixty-two head-hunters with us, bound for the plantations by which the Mission supports itself and carries on its work, and some of them spoke pidgin English, learned in visits to the river-mouth, or picked up from the other men who had travelled. Nothing is more astonishing on the wild, unbroken Sepik River than the constant use of pidgin English. It seems to have become a general means of communication among tribes who speak different tongues.

The scar-tattooing of the river is one of the first things to strike a traveller's eye. Every man of full age is scar-tattooed, in raised patterns as thick as a pencil, over his back, shoulders, and arms. On the point of the shoulder the tattooing is sometimes a real work of art, resembling a coat-of-arms or an elaborate monogram. Down the back the tattooing runs in neat rows of scars, high-raised above the skin; sometimes it shows a pattern of raised dots, placed at regular intervals. Always, or almost always, it is clean, neat, sharply finished. No Sepik man is considered a man till his tattooing is done. The men will not admit him to their conferences in the clubhouse; the girls will not marry him till he has passed this ordeal.

And it is an ordeal. All through his boyhood the dread of the tattooing days haunts the Sepik child. He is never allowed to forget it. Whoever quarrels with him, whoever is offended by him, taunts him in advance: 'Wait till you are tattooed—ah! ah! I shall be there! I'll give it to you then!' And the boy creeps away, fear in his heart. Youths have been known to die under the tattooing.

A day comes when the old men declare that there are two or three boys in

the village growing up fast; it is quite time to tattoo them. They are caught, dragged forward, and, with the whole village delightedly looking on, are flung on the ground and held down by heavy logs, on the ends of which their special enemies gladly volunteer to sit. Then the operators take bamboo knives, which cut like steel when properly edged, and set to work. Before long the ground is streaming with blood, as though at a pig-killing. The shrieks of the victims rise up ceaselessly, but are drowned by the fierce beating of the village drums and the cries and taunts of the lookers-on. The work goes on for hours. At the end, the youths are flung bodily into the water of the river to wash their wounds clean, and then the sap of a certain tree is applied as an antiseptic. This tree is now well known to white people, and its juice has frequently been used for medical purposes. For the cure of native skin diseases it is one of the best remedies known.

After a day or two, red clay is rubbed into the wounds. For many weeks the youths are shut up in strict seclusion, lying on their faces, and hardly able to move or eat. Sometimes the loss of blood kills directly; sometimes a delicate boy dies afterwards. But most survive, and in nearly all cases the scars are astonishingly clean. No white person, so far, has been able to discover how the raised effect is produced with such certainty and regularity. It might puzzle any of our own surgeons to duplicate.

One of the boys whom we were taking down the river sat for a photograph on board the boat, after I had several times failed in securing a picture of scar-tattoo ashore. The youths seemed to think that the camera meant enchantment of some kind (especially when one paced off the distance in order to focus correctly), and either they bolted into a house or turned deliberately away.

Between the boys going down for the first time, and the older hands who had seen white men and their ways before, arose now and then candid quarrels, carried on in the inevitable pidgin English, and inexpressibly funny.

'You savvy kai-kai man!' ('You are a man-eater!') taunted one big bully who came from down-river and had spent years on plantation work.

The slim youth from up-river did not deny the impeachment; he merely flashed back at the other.

'You no savvy anything; you savvy kai-kai tinn' fiss [tinned fish], thass all!'

A roar of laughter from the others stung the semi-civilized fellow, and he shouted the universal pidgin insult, 'Head belong you all the same stone!'

'I no fright belong man he savvy kai-kai fiss. I savvy kai-kai you, you no savvy kai-kai me,' replied the youth. ('I am not afraid of a tinned-fish eater; I could eat you, but you could not eat me.')

The logic was unanswerable, and the big fellow did not attempt a retort.

There were more reports of trouble as we went down the river. Only a few days before we passed, some returned labourers, brought back by a recruiting vessel, had begged for protection as far as their own homes, which were eight miles up in the forest. This the white men did not think it was necessary to give; in all probability they had not heard the rumours current on the upper river, or, if they had, did not believe them. However this may have been, the boys were sent back alone. They never reached their village; the head-hunters were on the lookout, and every one of the poor wretches was overpowered and slain. There were about ten of them—or so we heard—and at the time of our call their bodies lay headless and unburied not very far from the banks of the peaceful-looking river.

Since that date the Mandated Territory has borrowed several of our Papuan Government officers, for the purpose of breaking in and civilizing the tribes, and at the time of writing, much good work is being done.

Lower down, we came upon more trouble of the same kind; certain labourers who had been left hundreds of miles from their own homes were losing the goods for which they had worked, and gradually diminishing in numbers as they tried to work their way homeward up the river through more or less hostile territory.

All Island people know without being told what the result of this will be. The native does not turn the other cheek when smitten. Rather does he look for the next cheek that comes within his reach—no matter to whom it may belong—and smite it as hard as he knows how. Some one will suffer for the wrong inflicted on these labourers, but it will not in all probability be the guilty persons.

What about gold on the Sepik? Most old inhabitants think that there is plenty—not on the main river itself, but on the tributaries and about the plains which lie between the Sepik and the mountain-ranges beyond. The story of a man called Oldham, as told to me, may be taken for what it is worth. I incline to think it is perfectly true.

A year or two ago, Oldham found good gold in the far interior, near the Sepik River. It had taken much finding, as gold does in New Guinea, and by the time the actual reef was located, provisions had given out completely, and Oldham and his mates were forced to approach the natives for food. No gold-miner does this if he can help it, since his only safety in the unexplored districts lies in steering clear of the Papuans altogether. The white men kept a sharp lookout for treachery—too sharp, as it seems, since they mistook a friendly party bringing food for an attack, and opened fire.

The natives got the best of it; Oldham's mates were killed and he himself badly speared. He managed, however, to reach the coast and returned later on with a large number of carriers, whom he loaded with ore so rich that it was well worth carrying away unbroken. A small schooner was awaiting him at the river-mouth. He got his ore safely on it and made ready to sail in the morning. But no watch was set at night, and in the dark hours a sudden squall capsized and sank the boat in deep water. Oldham was drowned and only a stray native or two escaped to tell the story.

It is likely that the discovery will be further investigated, but those who follow in Oldham's footsteps will run serious risk, since there can be little doubt that the natives must have regarded his impulsive attack as a deliberate act of treachery, which they will be only too ready to pay back in kind.

I have also heard of a native who came down the Sepik with a lump of pure gold which he showed to one white man only. The white man, it is said, knows where the nugget came from, but for the present he keeps his secret.

(Since these words were written, the sensational discoveries of gold on Edie Creek have proved that the district is auriferous in a high degree.)

Secret—secret—that is the key-word to the Sepik. Outwardly, it lies fair and free to the sun, a splendid river fit to carry splendid ships upon its breast, hinting at no reserves, suggesting no mysteries. Actually, it teems with mystery and secrecy. Even on the lower reaches there are big native fighting towns so cleverly concealed that the Government officers only come across them by accident, after years of patrolling. The famous pottery town I have spoken of, for instance, has never yet been seen, perhaps never will be. The head-hunters know more—much more than they choose to tell—about streams and old river-beds full of the yellow dust and pebbles that white men value so much.

But the greatest secret of all is the sorcerers' secret. The very existence of this is known to few white people. No Masonic Lodge keeps its affairs more strictly private than does the Big House of the sorcerers which exists in most Sepik villages. There are in many of these houses rooms kept entirely sacred, into which no woman or child is ever admitted. Once or twice white men have seen them, on the occasion of some punitive raid when a village was being burned down. They are not in any notable way different from the rest of the 'Big Houses'—a few more carved and grinning images, a few more spiked heads, drums shaped like crocodiles, painted pillars, dancing masks and wigs—that is all.

Nevertheless, they hide secrets so dark and terrible that there is nothing in civilized language to express their nature. As for the men who take part in the

actual horrors of the secret room—the sorcerers themselves—I saw one who had recently been celebrating the mysteries. I have no words to say what he looked like. His face was not human; it was infinitely below human, infinitely below the brute, and yet clever, *knowing*, like the face of some great Satan in a mediæval picture.

There is a white man near the Sepik who knows. . . . He speaks the native tongues; he has been twenty years in the country; he has acquired an influence possessed, perhaps, by no other man. To him once, in the dead of night, there crept a native recently become Christian, who had promised to relate the mysteries of the secret room. The man came in the dark; he whispered his tale, and in the dark he went back alone. If any native on the river had guessed his purpose or seen him pass by, he would have been cut to pieces. I met that white man, but he did not tell me what he had heard. He has never told any one. All that he says is—‘I wish I could forget. . .’

Part of the secrets of the hidden room I know, and this part will interest many, since it is startlingly reminiscent of certain cults of ‘civilization.’ After all, we of the white man’s countries have climbed not so very fast, nor so very far from the mud in which the Sepik head-hunter still joyously wallows.

The head-hunter—and, one may add, the Papuan in general—is utterly given up to spiritism. What he does not know about trances, controls, possession, and even such phenomena as levitation and the actual materializing of spirits, is not worth mentioning. It is very hard, all but impossible, in fact, for a white man to learn the details of these matters. Most natives will flatly deny the existence of any such practices or beliefs in their tribe. But the old resident has what one may call the ‘feel’ of natives. He can guess things; he can sense the existence of secrets, reserves, where the newcomer would see only blank, savage stupidity. No civilized man compares with the savage in reserve. What you see of him, what you think is the whole man, may, any day, even after years of apparent intimacy, suddenly show itself to be surface only, covering unknown depths. The man or woman who has lived among savages knows the existence of these depths, guesses where, and sometimes what, they are. Hints, scraps of information, accidental lights, help him. And so some of the secrets—never, I think, all—peep into daylight.

The Papuan of the Mandated Territory, especially the Papuan of such unknown and uncivilized places as the Sepik, is a past-master, through his professional sorcerers, in the art of communicating with another world. To some of my readers this will seem sheer nonsense, even as ordinary spiritualistic séances and their results seem nonsense or delusion. But there are many people who believe in the reality of the results attained by white spiritists; and these will understand. The writer is one who believes, without (it

must be added) approving or wishing to take part.

I have written earlier about these questions, but I had not, at any previous time, come so close to the matter as I did with the help of men who had far greater opportunities of observation than myself—on the Sepik. Spiritism there is devil-worship, allied to hideous mysteries that are literally steeped in blood. Things that we have come to believe mere dead mediæval fancies show their heads as actual living facts. The Sepik folk raise evil spirits; they sacrifice to them; they sell their souls to devils for a price. . . .

Nonsense? Superstition? I have seen a man who was no longer human. I have heard of midnight séances, surprised in the forest, where things so incredible occurred that I do not dare to relate them. What is the deadly fascination of spiritism, voodooism, ju-ju? What was the frightful lure of witchcraft centuries ago? Just that which is the lure of sorcery in New Guinea to-day—*results*. The seekers *do* find; those who ask, obtain. Mediums, ju-ju priests, and sorcerers undoubtedly cheat—but not always. They have something to give, and when an inquirer has savoured that something, he is like a wild beast that has tasted blood—he must have more.

This, then, is part of the secret of the hidden room—communication with another world and with all that is worst in it. There is much more, but I do not know it, and if I did, I should probably be like the one or two rare white men who *do* know—I should not tell. Nor do I wish to enlighten my ignorance further. I have seen a big, muscular fellow's face grow pale and his eyes burn with remembered horror as he spoke vaguely and reservedly of what he had seen. I would rather not be so wise.

Here is a puzzle for any who may scoff at the idea of secret powers among these people. The plot of 1904 was perfectly organized and carried out. It extended from the Dutch end of the Territory right down to the British frontier, a distance of five or six hundred miles. It also ramified over the great islands of New Britain and New Ireland, hundreds of miles farther, and into the remote parts of the hills where scarcely a white man had penetrated. The natives involved were of many different tribes speaking uncountable languages. They had no means of communication except canoes and the rare steamer-call on certain parts of the coast. They were hostile to one another and constantly at war. How did they contrive to organize a plot that included the whole of German New Guinea, and was worked out down to the last detail of the number of men who were to collect at a given hour on a given day behind each Government officer's chair? Yet they *did* so contrive, and only the action of a few faithful house-servants prevented the murderous plan from being carried out.

Back to the river-mouth we went, quickly this time, with the steady current

behind us to help; past the great tracts of natural sugar-cane, past the sago region, past the water forests of incomparably beautiful nipa palm. With every hour the deadly heat lessened, the mosquitoes became fewer. And at last we came

Down to the sea again,
To the lonely sea and the sky.

The Sepik is the backbone of the Mandated Territory. Years hence, when the head-hunter is tamed and the river really known, settlement will come; the rich river flats will be used for cultivated sugar and tobacco where now both crops grow wild, or almost wild. The unused sago that rots and drops into the stream will feed hungry thousands. The gold and oil that have not yet been prospected will come into use, and with them, perhaps, the coal that has already been whispered about. Big ships will steam up the great waterway where now the stately egret walks in solitude and the crocodile lifts his grey, ghastly head undisturbed in quiet shallows. The head-hunters—that merry, hospitable, blood-thirsty, wicked, artistic, and jolly crowd—will be civilized and taught to wear shirts and trousers, trained to drive motor cars and repair launches for white masters. I am glad I shall not be there. I like my head-hunters as they are.

CHAPTER III

GOOD TIMES IN TORRES STRAITS

TORRES STRAITS is at the high point where Australia runs up almost into New Guinea. The Straits are, on the map, deceptively narrow. But when one comes to cross them, by the means usually adopted, one is astonished to find that it may take several days. At the nearest point the distance is only ninety miles from shore to shore; but nobody travels merely from Cape York to Mabadauan —the customs and quarantine bogies would get you if you didn't look out, and not impossibly if you did.

From Thursday Island on the Australian side to Daru on the Papuan side is the correct route. Thursday and Daru are ports of entry. And let it be known to those who sit at home more or less at ease (in so far as the British climate and British income tax allow) that a port of entry, like love, is a thing with which one does not trifle. If, misguidedly, one does, it is a hundred pounds fine, perhaps more.



NATIVE VILLAGE, WESTERN RIVER, PAPUA

In the course of many years' wanderings, I had heard a good deal about ports of entry, and they had left me somewhat cold. I thought I knew almost all there was to be known about them, and that what I did not know did not

matter. Whereas—but that will come in due time. I will only say now that ports of entry, under certain circumstances, are capable of arousing the most violent passions of human nature, and even of enticing persons otherwise innocent to open crime. . . .

I wanted to see something of Torres Straits; it seemed a simple and harmless desire. Torres sailed through in 1605, and there has been quite a bit of traffic past since then. The Royal Dutch Packet Company, the company that used to be the ‘B.I.,’ several passenger lines running to Japan and China, and cargo boats uncounted steam through the narrows of the notorious piece of water, day in, day out, for all the year. There are innumerable islands bridging the gap between Australia and New Guinea. It seemed an easy matter. . . .

One had first of all to get down to Daru, between three and four hundred miles from Port Moresby by the route inside the Gulf of Papua. A boat goes once a month. If you have seen and smelled her, once a month seems much too often. She is forty-eight years old, and looks more. She has not been cleaned since she was launched. She is about the size of a small ferry in a small harbour. Her passenger accommodation included, last October, three cupboards without furniture of any kind except a bunk unprovided with bedding, and a number of enormous cockroaches. There was a dining-saloon about the size of two cupboards, with a table, and kerosene cases to sit on. There was also food. . . .

She took three days on the trip; this was good time, as she always anchored for the night wherever night might happen to find her. She lay off one or two calling-places, absorbed copra, and hurried on. She had, as a rule, no passengers.

On the fourth day we came to the end of civilization and calling-places and anchored off Daru Island. Daru is chiefly a jumping-off place. From Daru, exploring expeditions have started many a time; two came in while I was there, and another set forth. They were the genuine article—new wild tribes were found and visited; new rivers and mountains set upon the map; startling adventures, which did not startle anybody, were met and competently dealt with—and nothing at all said about it except in official reports. It was only the assistant resident magistrates and patrol officers of Papua doing their usual work, pushing ever farther and farther forward the frontiers of civilization into the strongholds of savagery, that once extended right to the coastline, but that now take quite a good deal of travel to reach.

Should any one think that he, or possibly she, has nothing to do but take boat to Papua, and start exploring up the Fly country on arrival, I may say here that travel about that part of the interior is in the last degree fatiguing, difficult, and costly. It is a business for the very youngest and strongest men in good

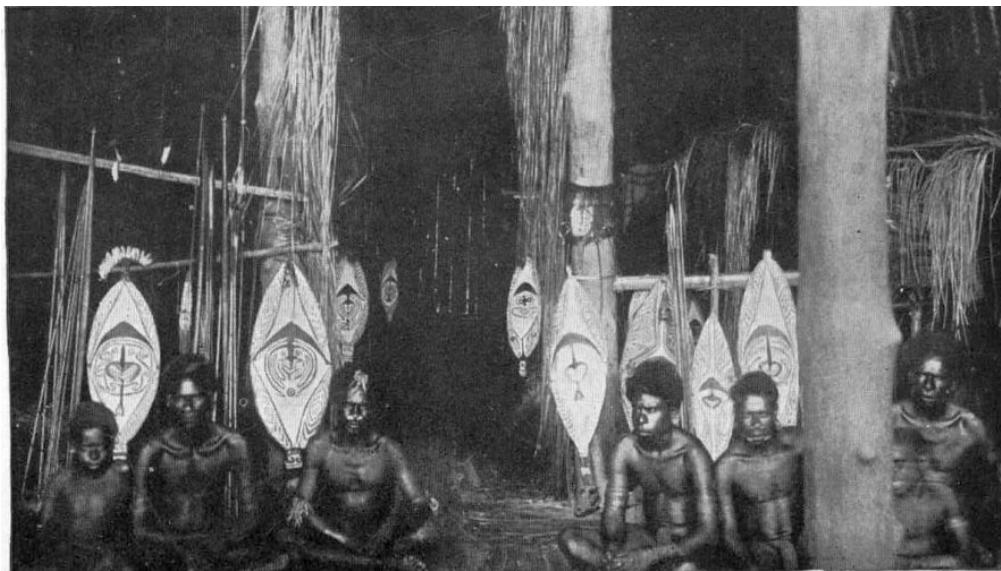
training, doing all that they can; and often enough even these have had to turn back. To see a patrol officer returning from even a successful patrol of several months is to realize what the work means. They leave Daru hearty young men; they come back worn-out ghosts, fit for nothing but rest. Some have lost their lives in the work. The marvel is that so many return. It is not the risks alone—though they are serious; it is the immense fatigues of travel in a country where all is swamp that is not precipice, which is foodless almost everywhere, fever-smitten from end to end, and which tries the strongest to the last shred of his strength.

Government officials come upon strange things in their wanderings. One courteous and pleasant young man made me welcome to Daru by giving me a human head that he had obtained somewhere along the upper reaches of the Fly. It was a really remarkable specimen, prepared after the typical Fly River style. The bones of the skull had been removed, and the skin of the scalp, face, and neck cured and stuffed. The mouth was filled with stones, and the whole work of art finished off with red and black paint.

Arrows wickedly barbed, with points fitted so loosely that they are sure to come off in any wound they make, were among the curios I obtained in Daru. Some were painted in vivid designs of black and bright red. The red was human blood, mixed with banana juice to keep it from turning dark. Every house in Daru owns such curios; skulls are fairly common, and fragments of the human frame in the shape of jawbones, or dried hands, excite no comment. All have a history; they come from 'Up-the-River,' from the far-up reaches of the enormous Fly, where the tribes are still, in the main, hostile and untamed. This River I was to visit a little later, acquiring for myself more than one of the remarkable curios above described.

This river Fly from time to time has been made the scene of barefaced fictions and baseless claims innumerable, made by prospectors who never went beyond the estuary, and travellers whose experiences were limited to known and civilized parts. The Government folk of Papua, who know the truth, have not taken the trouble to contradict these foolish yarns. It may be they have followed the most dignified course; but credit should go where credit is due, and the exploration of the Fly, with its surrounding districts, goes justly to the account of Sir William Macgregor, D'Alberti, and the present Lieutenant-Governor, Sir John Murray; also to the various patrol officers and resident magistrates who have ably carried out the instructions and plans of the Government.

Daru, when one lands from the unspeakable ship, certainly does not give the impression of a jumping-off place into the unknown and the horrible. It is a



MEN'S HOUSE, WESTERN PAPUA

veritable garden of beauty and bright colour, laid out, in the neighbourhood of the settlement, like a nobleman's park. Blue sea, vivid green foliage and grass, crimson and golden crotons that are the glory of the Western Division, poincianas spreading sheets of flame against the sapphire of a northwest-season sky, pink Persian oleanders and ivory frangipanni filling the air with perfume, little red-roofed bungalows buried in the fiery green of mango trees, and overhung with varnished leaves of granadilla vines—that is Daru, from the roadstead. When the tide goes out, and leaves half a mile of mud flat, it is less lovely, but the land colouring is always there.

Ten or twelve whites live on Daru Island—Government, Mission, and a trader or two. The nearest centre of civilization is Thursday Island, one hundred and twenty miles away; beyond Daru, on the New Guinea coastline, there is nothing for a couple of hundred miles, and then there is Dutch Merauke, where the natives are by no means so completely under control as in the Australian-owned portion. The unspeakable boat, or her successor, which is said to be no less unspeakable, calls about once a month. Every few weeks something comes across from Thursday Island. For the rest, Daru dreams and reposes....

Studying the map, one sees that the Australian boundary runs, oddly enough, right up into New Guinea waters, almost touching the land in some places, and enclosing all the larger islands that geographically should belong to the New Guinea side. This state of affairs dates from about 1885, when Australia, being debarred by the home Government from annexing the country

that is now Papua, stretched out and took all the available islands in between, with the praiseworthy hope of holding a few strategic points, in case of foreign occupation. Inconvenient as the result has been, one must allow the intention was good.

But——!

One wants to go to some island twenty or thirty miles from Daru. How does one get there? Only by taking ship—if a ship can be found—one hundred and twenty miles to Thursday Island, getting pratique—which means passing the local quarantine and customs and obtaining leave to land—then travelling back again for a hundred miles. The island visited, what happens next? You are twenty or thirty miles from New Guinea; can you point your bow for the almost visible land and run there? Not so. You must run back to Thursday again, another hundred miles, clear properly for Daru, and return a hundred and twenty miles to the place from whence you came. This is the only correct, only legal, way of visiting the islands adjacent to, but not belonging to, New Guinea.

When these facts had been driven home to a reluctant mind, all that remained was to find something that would take one to Thursday Island. The first move was to secure a house in Daru. Old New Guinea travellers will understand why.

Luck presented me with a charming little sago cottage, completely furnished—the home of an absent patrol officer. It was the coolest, prettiest, most homelike little place any one could have wished for, and the neighbours—what few there were—were model neighbours in every particular. The enforced wait of three weeks went by pleasantly enough. ‘Hurry no man’s cattle’ is the motto of Papua. . . .

I had managed to get a message sent by a little boat over to Thursday, asking for a launch. I expected to get one without difficulty. Trade was bad in Thursday; there were many fine luggers fitted with engines, just suited for the work; the season so far was good. . . .

But when the tiny boat returned, disappointment came with her. Not for money or for love, or for anything else you could mention, would a Thursday Island launch, lugger, or ketch accept charter for Daru. There is small communication between Australia and this part of New Guinea, and a surprising amount of ignorance and misinformation prevails, on the Australian side, regarding Daru and the Fly. Perhaps some of the fiction-mongers above referred to may be responsible. At any rate, the ‘T.I.’ people would not come. It was not safe, they explained. You couldn’t get through the reefs of the Straits unless you knew more than any one had any business to know; and if

you did get through, you would die of fever, and if you did not immediately die of fever, the Papuan head-hunters would get you. Double and treble the proper prices meant nothing to 'T.I.' 'What is gold to a man when his wife's a widow?' they said, in effect, and continued to sit tight on the rather unclean shores of their island.

At this juncture, a mission boat decided to go across to Thursday in order to remove some missionaries from Daru to Mulgrave Island, and I obtained a passage. She was a luxurious boat, fifty tons or so, with a real cabin in which you could lie down; and the use of soap was not unknown to her. She was towing a broken-down schooner about half as large again as herself, but nobody minded that, even though the towhee attempted one moonlight night, when every one was more or less asleep, to climb aboard, and very nearly, in the resulting confusion, put us on one of the thousand and forty reefs that surround the close neighbourhood of Thursday Island.

A miss is as good as a mile in these parts; we scraped the reef, but nobody bothered.

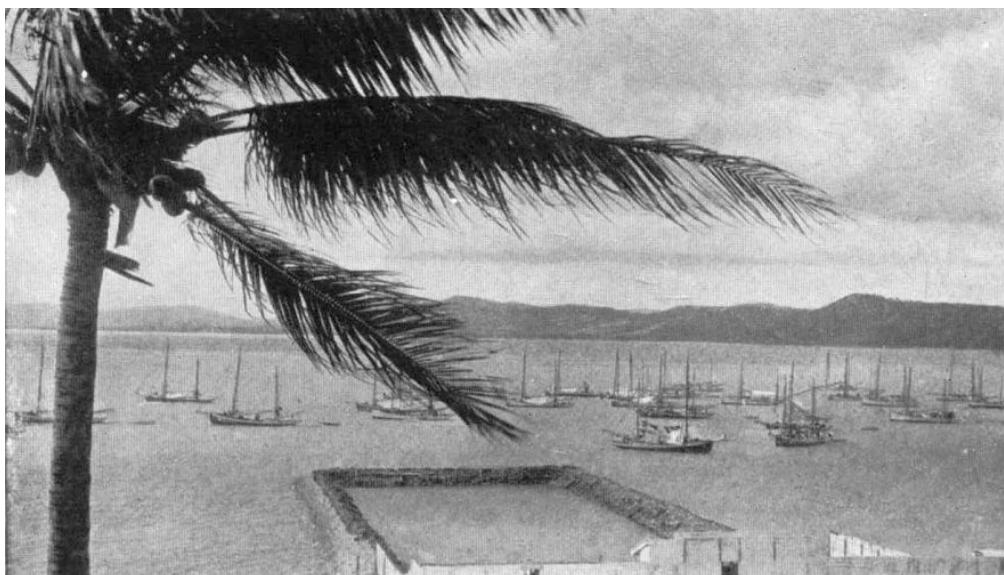
In the morning we were off Thursday, and the doctor and the customs came aboard. I went to a hotel to await the next act, and the missionaries started back again along the way they had come, for thirty miles or so, this being the correct way of getting to Mulgrave from Daru, according to the customs and ceremonies of pratique.

The hotel was a mad hotel, but not unpleasant. There were beds and meals, and for the rest you looked after yourself; your boy could do your wash, and hang it in the sight of society and the Island along the front verandah, without hindrance; you might (and did) find lunatics, and gentlemen politely the worse for liquor, in your own quarters at unholy hours, without anybody, even yourself, being much perturbed about it; you were sometimes told, suddenly, with a finger on a lip, that no one must make a noise because 'the pilots were sleeping' (at high noon, in a temperature of ninety-something in the shade). There were no doors to shut any part of the hotel away from the town; sometimes late at night unauthorized visitors simply walked in and up, and, unannounced, slept in the best bedrooms, as the tumbled state of the rooms next morning proclaimed. Nobody worried, and the manageress smiled through all.

Nobody worries in 'T.I.' Its glory as a pearl centre has in the main departed; many houses are ruinous, deserted, and falling down. Japanese are exclusively employed as divers; they spend little in the town and add nothing to its gaiety when ashore. Chinese run the shops. A few white folk, chiefly Government officials, continue to live within the circle of the little island. There are no amusements save those that people make for themselves;

steamers call seldom, and when they do call merely lie outside, some miles away, to take on or leave off pilots.

Nevertheless, the folk of Thursday are happy in their own way, hospitable, easily pleased, and cheerful. It is not one of the worst places in the world—if only it were a little cleaner; if the goats and cows and dogs were under a little more restraint in the main streets, and the rubbish-heaps behind and between the houses were not so mountainous. For the climate is golden and gorgeous, and the scenery is the scenery of tropic islands, than which there is nothing more lovely in a generally lovely world. Nobody is rich in money, but every one is rich in time; not one of the worst things that a man may buy even with much money, and the sacrifice of other goods.



THURSDAY ISLAND

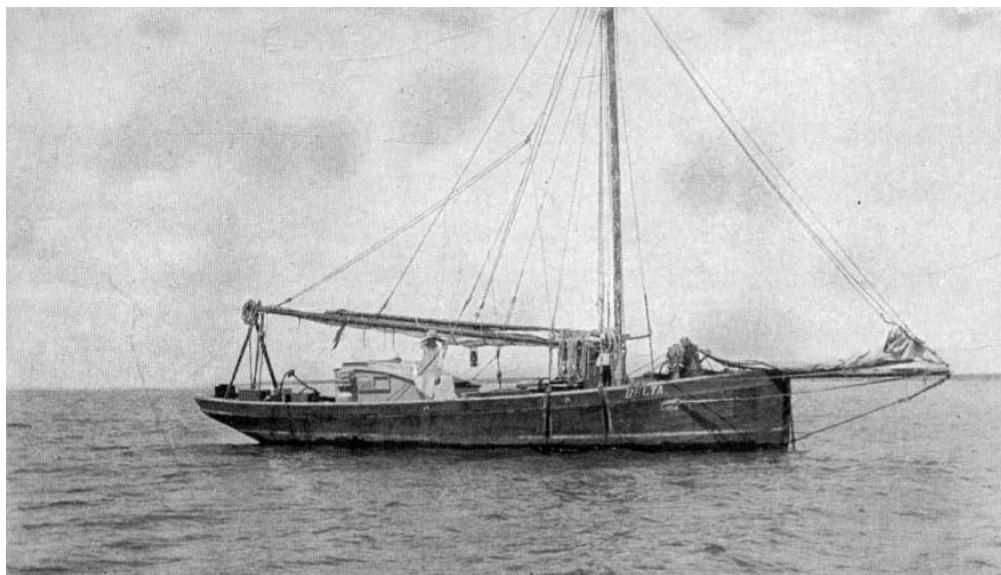
Thursday Island has one unique possession—the smallest newspaper in the world. It is *The Daily Pilot*, and its price is sixpence. A number which lies under my hand is about the size of a sheet of letterpaper, and contains one hundred and thirty-three brief lines of print, including the title! It is made up of steamship notices, telegrams, and local news—a very little of each—and it has two advertisements. ‘The Island,’ strange to say, is proud of this literary gem.

It came to pass—I do not quite know when or how—that a cutter became available for island trips, and I secured her. With a white captain, and my friend Mrs. Leigh, I sailed for Tuesday Island, intending to camp there and, if possible, see something of the turtles in which the Straits abound.

It may as well be said at once that the one thing we did not see on this trip

was a turtle engaged in laying. The island we chose was known to be a haunt of turtles; it was the right season more or less; the captain of the cutter was a perfect encyclopædia of information on all subjects connected with Torres Straits, and he told us we should be quite sure to see laying turtles and turtle nests. . . . However, we ran up against the usual, inevitable season—that-nobody-ever-experienced-before—all travellers know that season; they encounter it on an average four times every year—and the turtles were upset by it, or by us. They did not come ashore.

The cutter, after a few hours of heavy reeling and swaying in the Torres Straits tides (they are perilous at times, and can even sink small vessels), sailed up to a pair of beautiful twin islands with cream-white beaches, sandy spits that ran far into shallows of sparkling blue-green, grey heights dripping with leafage, and trees of wild Japanese quaintness stretching their cedar-like limbs out over the sand. Nobody lived on these islands; nobody lived on any of the islands that one could see all round, shaded from scilla-blue to plum-purple, and scattered over an opal sea. Nobody could get to any of them unless by the process I had followed—travelling to Thursday Island, and getting pratique there. Nobody wanted to go to them—as a rule. Yet they are among the most fascinating spots in the tropic world.



AUTHOR RETURNING TO PAPUA FROM AUSTRALIA

'I remember,' said the captain as we sat after lunch ashore—not round the camp-fire, but as far away from it as we could get—'I remember I wanted a holiday once, and I went for two months on to — Island, up there to the

nor'ard. There was nobody on it. I had my cutter, and stores, and I shot birds. I'd a pig, too, but I couldn't kill him, he got to be too much of a pet—used to follow me round like a dog. He was good company, that pig, and he liked the life, and so did I. I had the cutter safe anchored, and I slept on her, and in the day I'd fish, or get turtle eggs, or shoot, or sometimes I'd just sit and smoke and think of things. There was plenty of time: I like plenty of time——'

“I like a broad margin to my life,” quoted some one.

‘Just that,’ he agreed. ‘I might almost have been there yet, but for——’ He stopped and smoked a minute without speaking. Thursday Island and we knew what was in the gap. ‘Well,’ he went on, ‘I sometimes think I'll go right back again. It was a good place.’

‘What about the other islands?’

‘There's a white woman, a missionary, lives away out on Yam. And at Deliverance there's been an old German for more than thirty years; he gets turtle-shell and sends it to T.I. for stores. The place is full of dogs and cats; they run down on the shore to meet you, yowling. I heard lately they'd got him when he was asleep—maybe it isn't true.’

‘Could any one take up an island?’

‘The Queensland Government doesn't sell them now, because they think the natives should be allowed to keep them. Most of them have no natives on them, anyway. But there's some that were bought years ago. Yes, I suppose a man could get one.’

‘What would happen if a boat didn't call?’

‘There's lots of food on these places.’

‘Is there?’ We looked round at the bright, pale, sun-struck woods, the barren sands, incredulously.

The captain slowly finished the last of his pipe; slowly—for there is no hurry in Torres Straits—put it away, and rose.

‘Come along, and I'll show you,’ he said. We came.

Over sandy soil, among thin, sunny bushes, with sea-wind blowing through, we went to a spot where big trees stood up, heavy with scented flowers. ‘That's tamarinds, when they fruit,’ we were told. ‘This is yam,’ pulling up a long thin vine and showing the potato-like tuber at its root. A little farther, ‘These flowers are wild cherries, and that's plums. Will you have some peanuts? This is the tree kind.’ They grew in curved crimson shells; they were black as beads, but tasted well. ‘Pigweed—you know it?’ We did. It grew all over the sand, green and succulent, a fine vegetable. ‘These little flowers on the vine running along the sand will be wild grapes by and by. There's oysters

on the rocks. You had some of the fish for lunch; one can catch it all the time. Loads of those pigeons, and wongai plums by and by. There's always a few coconuts, and you can get a turtle now and again. No, a man don't starve, even if he got marooned. Water's the trouble on some of the islands. This one has a spring.'

The Australian native who had been following us suggested that it was a good place to dig for turtle eggs. Pointed sticks were got, and the hunt began.

Not down on the beach was the search made. Turtles clearly do not read boys' books or adventure tales, else they would understand that they are expected to lay right out on the open sand; and being gentle, obliging beasts, would probably do it. As it is, their habit is to find some grassy spot just behind the beach and well above high-water mark, preferably in a corner, scrape away the sandy soil and grass, and there lay their two hundred or so white kid-shelled eggs, just about the size and shape of golf-balls, in a pit some two or three feet deep. They smooth the place over as well as they can when leaving, but a sharp eye can easily find traces of the great shuffling flippers. At one spot on the island, a secluded nook among trees that looked extremely like ornamental laurels, there was a clear turtle track, leading up from the beach and returning.

'We had better try here,' suggested the captain. He and the boy struck their sticks into the ground, and felt about with the points. From time to time they took the sticks out and smelt them. Rapid-fire conversation in Binghi ensued.

'He says,' explained the captain, 'that there is something down here, but the young turtles are probably gone.'

They smelled the sticks again. I tried, and noticed a faint odour of what seemed to be fish—not very fresh.

The boy got down on his hands and knees, scraped like a terrier, and unearthed at last a number of shells—broken. So that was that. . .

We went back to the camp, where a tent for Mrs. Leigh and myself, a tent for the cook-boy, and a 'bush' fireplace, made up the housekeeping arrangements. The captain went off to look after his cutter, after telling us how to watch for the turtles coming up to lay at night.

We prepared our dinner early, and ate in the half-dark; lights and fires being prohibited. 'They come up about sunset, near the shore,' we had been told. 'They cruise about in the shallow, just taking stock, and seeing that things are safe. Then, as soon as the tide's full, after dark, they come ashore, if they're going to come. They can lay their eggs in about a quarter of an hour; they don't stay long, because they want to get back with the high tide, same as they come up with it. If you go and sit about on the beach, and don't make any

noise, you ought to see them.'

In the clear starlight, that became clearer with every ten minutes, we did 'sit about on the beach,' for hour on hour, camouflaged in grey cotton blankets from the camp. The tide came lisping up the pale sand, spreading runnels of green sea-fire as it broke; stars showed on the backs of little waves; sparks of phosphorescence continually rose and died. It was wonderful, though a well-known sight to both of us; we were both so much occupied in watching it that we almost forgot the turtles, which we had nearly given up by now.

Then suddenly my companion touched my elbow, and both of us at the same moment perceived something new in the water, something that resembled large golden tea-trays, moving and darting about, a few yards from the shore. It was the turtles shining with sea phosphorescence.

Perhaps they guessed we were there, perhaps they knew that they were conspicuous, perhaps it was not their night for laying. The fact remains that they did not come ashore. We watched the mysterious lights for a while, saw them retreat and disappear, saw the sea creep down the beach again, slowly, as if tired, and then we went back to our tent, and slept beneath the sound and shelter of the wongai trees.

Next night we tried again, but not even the golden tea-trays were visible. The 'unprecedented season' was evidently getting in its work; no turtles came to lay on our island.

We had turtle eggs for a feast, nevertheless. Later on, a boy brought some for sale, and we cooked them as such eggs must be cooked, yolks only—the white is almost impossibly hard to eat. The yolk, dropped into boiling fat, crisps up like a chestnut, and is exceedingly dainty.

The captain would not stay at the island for more than a very few days. Even though we had not reached the dangerous months, a big blow, he thought, might come along any day. That possibility left me somewhat cold; perhaps seventeen years of Papua, where hurricanes are unknown, had made for carelessness in such matters. I left, somewhat reluctantly, and listened without any enthusiasm to the captain's advice to make for Papua as soon as possible.

But when we came to Thursday Island and saw the harbour full of luggers, taking refuge from threatened 'weather,' it became clear that B—— had reason on his side. Not for a little do the hardy pearl-luggers of North Australia, with their reckless Jap and Binghi crews, desert good fishing at the end of November, to run and hide in harbour. We began to think about getting back. It was only one hundred and twenty miles; still, the pilots, as they passed in and out of the hotel, on their way to and from liners lying out at sea, had tales to

tell of frightful weather on the coasts, and worse coming up. Somebody suggested that we should do well to take a steamer down to Cairns—six hundred miles—and there change into another going to Port Moresby, about the same distance. But that seemed absurd to any one possessed of a sense of humour.

The captain of the cutter solved the question by telling us that he meant to go back to New Guinea himself, and that if we didn't mind risking it, in his little cabinless, bedless cutter of two tons, he would take us across. Nothing else was likely to leave for some weeks, and by that time it might be too late.

We decided to take the chance, and packed up for departure. The weather had suddenly become quiet; a dawn of treacherous brightness over a blue-crystal sea saw the tiny vessel start with all due ceremony, just as if she had been a great liner; her papers in order, her passengers listed, and a clean bill of health.

So we sailed for the great dark land of New Guinea again.

It was a pleasant morning; we perched on edges and bits of things about the deck—there being no place to sit—lunched off scraps eaten in fingers, and thought ourselves lucky.

We ran past Tuesday Island and Double Island; Bet Island, Sue Island, and Poll Island lay a long way off to starboard. The day went on, and the weather rapidly changed. By noon it was blowing hard, and the tiny cutter was leaping and rolling like a porpoise at play. It was almost impossible to keep on deck; first one of us and then the other gave up and retreated to the hold, where, without intermission, we were deadly sick until we neared Papua.

The wind increased to a gale; towards night it was something worse than that. The storm yelled in the rigging, the cutter staggered helplessly through mountainous seas. Only our faithful little Kelvin engine kept us going and fighting. The mast had cracked in a fierce gust of wind, and it began to look as if Torres Straits, notorious as a swallower-up of ships, were going to make a mouthful of one more. Down in the hold, the two passengers rolled, sick and helpless, amongst shifting cases and crates; there was no room to lie, sit, or stand; bilge water thickened what little air there was; cockroaches as big as sparrows ran all over us and bit us, and the thought of the huge scorpion that had crawled out of the hold earlier in the day, and been slain on deck, haunted one like a ghost. Scorpions are sociable creatures; it was reasonably sure that he had brothers . . .

The hatch-cover was fastened down, all but one section, through which rain and sea-water continually came. Nobody wanted to have it closed; we had a vague idea that if, or when, the cutter turned turtle, we might be able to crawl

out in time, a comforting belief which would probably have been disproved had there been occasion to test it.

Towards evening, the mist and rain grew so thick that our captain could not see his way, and the wind kept getting worse. Things looked about as bad as they could look when Two Brothers Island, tall and barren, loomed up out of the howling dusk, and half a dozen native shelling-boats became visible, moored beneath the shelter of the island. Thankfully we joined them, and heard, without feeling much encouraged, that they had been there for several days, waiting for the weather to lift. Under the lee of Two Brothers, with still a good deal of wind and sea tormenting us, we rolled and strained at our cables all night. The captain never slept; he told us afterwards that he did not expect the cables to hold, and found it necessary to keep watch. His crew consisted of a couple of Papuans, plucky enough, but useless, as all Papuans are, for watchkeeping.

We had been unlucky enough to strike the tail end of a genuine cyclone; it was a miracle we had got so far.

The weather was as bad as ever, when grey light, over the back of Two Brothers, proclaimed another day. But B—— preferred to go on and take the chances; so we left the native luggers and ketches still sheltering, and ran for Daru. Hour by hour, with the approach of kindly New Guinea, the storm moderated; at ten o'clock it was as fair a sea and sky as ever wanderer could desire. A little before sundown, we glided up the narrows that lead to Daru Island, with a brimming tide and a glassy sea. The vivid shining greens and scarlets of the little town greeted us like lights of home, and the collector of customs, coming out in a launch to give us pratique, added to the dignity of our arrival from another land.

There was a native festival in progress at Daru, and if we had not seen many turtles on our late voyage, the omission was now repaired in full. All Daru was feasting on turtle, and we had our turn. On the lawns behind the houses, turtles were tied up like dogs; emptied shells were to be seen on the beaches, and cooking-fires were busy. In a civilized settlement, the horrible native custom of cutting up turtles alive is not permitted, so one did not shudder with horror every time one saw a native carrying a lump of dripping turtle meat. The Papuan Government does its best to put down this as well as all other forms of native cruelty, but there are grave difficulties in the way, since the people believe firmly that turtle-hunting will fail in any district where the unfortunate brutes are killed before being cut up.

Turtle steak is meat not fish; it resembles veal, and is very light and wholesome. The famous soup is usually made from the flippers; two or three



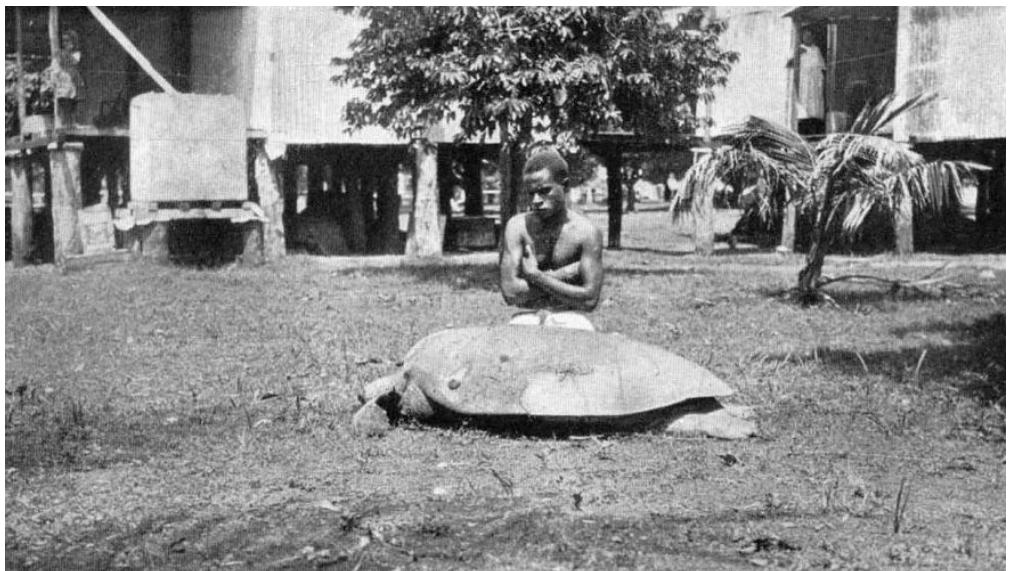
SCARLET-FLOWERING POINCIANA, DARU

days' boiling is none too much. There are many kinds of meat in a turtle—tripe, liver, steak—and all are good.

Dugong had also been speared for the feast, and the fore-shore was a shambles of sea-beast flesh. The dugong, or sea-cow, is often larger than its namesake; it is a harmless beast, which feeds on seaweed of various kinds, and does not defend itself when attacked. The female dugong holds her calf under one flipper and suckles it; it is supposed that the sight of these creatures, suddenly looking out of a calm sea, was the origin of the early tales of mermaids. I have seen dugong come up in this manner, and certainly the rounded head, rising perpendicularly from the water, has a very human aspect, even without the baby that sometimes appears beside it, clasped by its mother's limb.

Dugong flesh is known as a great delicacy. It is very like young pork, and the bacon made from dugong is even better than the common variety of the shops. At one time, so many of these curious mammals were caught along the Queensland coast that dugong bacon was commonly sold in Brisbane stores; but hunting and spearing have so far diminished the numbers of the herds that only in lonely spots like Daru can the meat be easily obtained.

There is a large native gaol on Daru, mostly filled with murderers of one kind and another. Dugong and turtle, especially the latter, are largely used to feed the prisoners. Some years ago they grew discontented, and addressed a petition to the local magistrate, asking him to stop feeding them with turtle and



TURTLE FOR THE FEAST, DARU

give them tinned corned beef instead!

Several of these prisoners were told off to carry wood and water and clean up the house grounds for myself and Mrs. Leigh. As old residents of Papua, we were anxious, if possible, to have murderers assigned us, since every one knows that they make the best 'boys'—being long-sentence men and very biddable. We obtained a couple of murderers, cheerful and obliging in the highest degree. Whatever their crimes may have been (and Daru gaol hides the history of some terrible deeds, not excluding tales of men who have roasted babies on a stick, or cut up and eaten other men bit by bit while the victims were still alive), they made excellent servants.

Daru is a 'snake island,' which means that one must never walk a yard after dusk without a lantern, and must look with care behind boxes and furniture when anything is to be moved. The resident magistrate, who has not been in Daru more than a year or two, has treated over seventy natives for snakebite. No white person has been bitten, however, though some have had very narrow escapes.

In our pretty little sago house, with its cool but snake-haunted roof, we kept an unceasing lookout. Nobody moved a box without looking behind it first; nobody put a hand unguardedly into dark places; nobody moved about at night without snapping on the torch that lies handy to the bed in most New Guinea bedrooms. After all, it was the cook-boy who found a snake first; he almost stepped on a black one just outside the door. Our neighbours, who sometimes went out visiting after dark, always had a lantern carried level with

their feet, and scanned the ground carefully as they walked. Even so, they very nearly trod on snakes once or twice, for the Daru snake likes to go out visiting by night, like his betters, and always chooses the white man's pathway upon which to travel.

I heard one night the slapping fall, inside the house, of something like a heavy coil of rope, but nothing could be found when Mrs. Leigh and myself ran in, light in hand. We moved with care all the rest of that evening, for we knew very well no coil of rope had made that noise—we hadn't a rope, and if we had had one, ropes don't fall of themselves and run away after

Other unpleasant inhabitants of Daru and its surroundings were the sting-rays that infested the shallow waters about the jetty. I photographed one of moderate size, showing the dangerous poisoned tail, which can be struck through any unwary limb that touches it. Some of the big rays are as long as an average bedroom floor.

Hornbills abound near the island, and can easily be tamed. They are among the most intelligent and amusing of pets. There is one that is the friend of all the island. Its wings are not clipped, nor is its liberty in any way restricted; it flies about as it likes, and often makes a call on its acquaintances if time hangs heavy. It used to appear at my cottage now and then, hop up the steps, and execute an indescribably comic dance on the verandah, grinning like a clown, which indeed it is, if ever a bird deserved that title.

This bird is a convert to Christianity and accompanies its mistress regularly to the mission church, flying on ahead of her, and resting on roof after roof until it comes to the church, when it hops in, settles down beside its owner, and behaves quite reverently until service is concluded. Afterwards it flies rapidly home, screaming with what seems like profane delight and relief.

The usual period of waiting—inevitable in New Guinea—brought us to boat-time again. On this occasion we were in luck, for the Lieutenant-Governor's launch turned up unexpectedly and carried us back to Port Moresby in luxury.

What of Torres Straits? Of Daru? This—that they are, like many and many half-known tropic places, beautiful beyond the power of pen to describe, beyond the imagination of any who have not seen the glories of the equatorial world. They are solitary, they are without amusements, as amusements are commonly known. But they are full of interests and excitements all their own; the scales balance well.

There is fever in these places; many avoid it, and many do not. There are, if you go far enough back, wild natives in plenty; but no one who has met the uncivilized tribes of Papua ever thought they were not worth visiting, even at

the cost of a certain risk. There is adventure, so much of it that it becomes a commonplace. There is wild life for those who love it and will pay the price—do not mistake, there is a price, and it is not light. There is a procession of seasons that pass from beauty to beauty, from great heat to lesser heat: cold, darkness, barrenness, and depression coming never. Food that is cheap, clothing confined to simple cotton. Houses, like our little sago house, built of materials found on the spot, by a few boys. Land practically free, and labour cheap.

The other side of the picture? Jobs difficult, almost impossible to get; white men sometimes drifting about ‘broke’ and living on charity. Transport, which is civilization, uncertain, dangerous, and poor. Markets poorer. Loneliness for long periods of time, not to be avoided.

Yet—and yet—the people who live in these places like them; you cannot induce them to go away. In an age of crowds, of speed, of fierce competition for small and doubtfully valuable prizes, an age that has neither time nor inclination to look for simple and natural pleasures, yet misses them, unconsciously—in such an age, the remote islands of Torres, the strange little green and rosy land of Daru, are among the last few refuges of a happy, not unfruitful leisure that soon must die away from the earth.

CHAPTER IV

HEAD-HUNTERS OF LAKE MURRAY

ALL the latter part of the day we had been running along the coast of Kiwai, that great dark island, set among shallows and low mangrove, that produces the manliest, cleverest, and—it must be added—gloomiest race in Papua. Near sundown we had come to the real mouth of the Fly; the eighty-mile-wide estuary lay behind us, and the banks were closing in to a width of two or three miles. Low, wide skies, clouds of brass, purple slants of rain stalking across shallow lagoons; banks forested, furred in black; not a house, a plantation, a boat, or a canoe; so begins the greatest river in Papua.

The Fly pours out every day water enough to provide every one in the world with forty gallons. It has been explored almost to the headwaters, more than six hundred miles up. Captain Blackwood, of H.M.S. Fly, named it when he made a brief call at the river-mouth in 1842. D'Alberti explored it in three successive trips, 1875-76-77. After him came Everill, Sir William Macgregor, Sir Hubert Murray, Lieutenant-Governor, an expedition of Sir Rupert Clarke's, and two or three Papuan Government officials, of whom Mr. L. Austin is the most notable. These traced the great river, marked out tributaries here and there, and traversed a little of the surrounding country. Once in a way, traders have gone up, but there was never much to attract them. Traffic has always been scanty in the extreme; nevertheless, a great deal has been written about the Fly, its strange scenery and wild tribes, and the river has always managed, somehow, to remain 'in the news.' It is probably better known to the world at large than any other river of New Guinea.

With all this, one is inclined to think of the Fly as more or less civilized; to suppose that eighty years must have meant something to its story. One is wrong. A settled and progressive Government has brought safety to the Fly Delta and the surrounding coasts; has made it possible to travel up the river (provided with firearms and some common-sense), and return uninjured. That is the most that can be said. Eighty years have seen the making of only one plantation on the length and breadth of the mighty river—Madiri, a little way beyond the estuary—and of no settlement at all anywhere else.

After eighteen years spent mostly in Papua, I was curious about this matter of settlement on the Fly. A chance of ascending the river came; I took it gladly, since the occasion was a special one, and offered the chance of doing and seeing a great deal in a comparatively short time. The little-known district of

Lake Murray was to be visited and an attempt made to get into communication with its head-hunting tribes. The way thither lay up three hundred miles of Fly and Fly tributaries, so that one would see a large area of country.

Until this trip, in February, 1926, with the Government oil-launch Laurabada, a sturdy vessel of a hundred and eighty tons, ten feet draught, nothing larger than a forty-ton launch had ever been up the Fly and its tributary the Strickland. It was rather more than likely that we should stick on a mud-bank halfway, since the Fly is notorious for shallows and shifting banks, but Papua is the country of long shots and odd chances; so the chance was taken. The party consisted of Sir Hubert Murray, the Lieutenant-Governor; the Honorable Leonard Murray, and Mr. Waldron, engineer; also myself, the first white woman to ascend the Fly.

The Laurabada, for this trip, took a number of Papuan native police, and a good supply of rifles, cartridges, and bayonets. Attack was not expected, but had to be prepared for, since it is never impossible outside civilization.

The first night in the Fly was marked by welcome relief from the fearful swarms of mosquitoes that had made the previous night, at Daru Island, a torment. There we had sat on deck, wrapped in all sorts of odd garments, with the little treacherous anopheles or fever mosquito sticking up in rows like black pins over every exposed scrap of flesh, and the air all round full of the screaming hum that presages a trying night spent under stifling berth nets. This night we lay swaying gently to the pull of the Gulf tides, quiet, cool, and at peace. The Fly was welcoming us kindly.

Madiri Plantation, next morning, marked the end of civilization. Rubber trees, acre by acre, behind; palms on the shore of the river, with canoe sails gliding gracefully between; a bungalow house, with a husband and wife, half planters, half missionaries—tired folk, busy folk, very brave, pathetically glad to see us come, and sorry to see the Laurabada start again up-river, leaving Madiri to loneliness once more. This was the one plantation.

And afterwards, wilderness for three hundred miles from the river-mouth; country ever growing lonelier, stranger, more remote from everything one had seen and known before. . . . A trip across the edge of things and back; a journey through another dimension.

We came to Tide Island about half-past two on the day after leaving Madiri. Tide Island is one hundred and sixty miles up, and marked the end of tidal influence. There was a change in the timber, a change in the general look of the stream. Black forests lightened. Masses of timber thinned into separate fine trees—cedars, huge pandanususes, strange trees that no one could name. The sharp green of sago was there; the fragile, mosslike green of amazing creepers,

thick ropes set with yard-long ferns that climbed from earth to heaven. There were great lagoons, perilous to the Laurabada, where we had to creep hour to hour, trying back, crossing, turning round, with the lead continuously going, and the Papuan leadsman singing out in the true monotone of the sea, ‘And a half five! Quarter less five! By de mark four . . . Half two! By de mark two!’ (Bridge telegraph, ‘Stop.’) ‘Quarter less two!’ (Bridge, ‘Half speed astern.’) . . . But the Laurabada got through.

‘How often do people come up here?’ one asked.

‘White people? Oh, there have been some quite lately. About three years ago—official trip.’

‘No one since?’

‘No; why should they?’

‘Natives?’

‘You saw some on the lower river. There are none for about a hundred miles, now.’

‘Why?’

‘There’s no satisfactory explanation. The usual feud between mountain or inland tribes and coastal tribes doesn’t quite cover it.’

‘How do you know there are none? Has any one been to see?’

‘No. One guesses by the look of the bank—no houses; no natives in canoes.’

‘What is beyond the belt of forest?’

‘Swamp, mostly.’

‘But no one really knows?’

‘No.’

Apart from Madiri and one or two similar small areas, there is no land suited for white settlement on the lower Fly. Three hundred miles up, there is fairly high ground, and soil that seems good. But who is going to settle up there—‘at the back of Godspeed’—when good enough land can be found right on the coasts?

The day of the Fly is not yet. Nor shall we who are past youth now live to see it.

But how it fascinates, this huge river!—more than a mile wide at Madiri, eighty miles from the mouth; often widening to two and three miles, far up, in the big lagoons; hemmed by dark secret forests, that here and there open out to show a glimpse of fairy glades, no sooner seen than gone; haunted by hundreds of huge crocodiles, policed by the stalking cassowary, who is king of his

country wherever he goes, save for all-conquering man. Man, however, does not rule here. Man, on the middle Fly, matters less than the least of the crocodiles that sleep, insolent, undisturbed, upon the endless mud-banks.

We saw no cassowaries upon this trip. One night, however, when we were lying at anchor, far up the river, no lights lit (riding-lights are barred, on the upper Fly, ‘for reasons’), I heard a strange sound in the dead of night. On the far bank, separated from the little Laurabada by more than a mile of dim, grey-silver water, rose a curious, eerie trumpeting, with a resonant tremble in it that made me realize at once I was listening to the famous cassowary drum. I had heard the cassowary before, but it had been one bird alone, and very far away. Now it was a herd of them apparently, and the mile of water only seemed to emphasize the brassy, resounding character of their amazing call. The cassowary is five feet high, with a huge blue-and-crimson helmet, and a leg that can kick like a horse’s leg, being further able to do that which a horse’s leg cannot—disembowel an enemy with its claws. It has been seen swimming across the Fly at a point near two miles wide, nothing being visible but an immensely long neck topped by a blue fierce head. It is, take it all in all, about the most capable and the most determined thing that walks the earth with two clawed feet. I was to have a sample of its cleverness before long. Wanting to hear the drumming more clearly, I rose, put on a pale-coloured wrapper, and, placing a camp-stool on deck outside my cabin door, sat down to wait and listen....

I do not think the cassowaries can have been less than a mile away, and they were probably walking about in dense bush; there was no moon, and only the palest starlight—but they saw my pale dress, heard the creak of the camp-stool, and instantly stopped their drumming. I waited a good while, without result. When I returned to my berth and lay down, the drumming, after a cautious interval, began again.... Small wonder that the cassowary is seldom shot, almost never captured. Nature has guarded him well.

It took us two days from Madiri to reach the point known as Everill Junction, where the Fly parts into two great streams, one being known henceforward as the Strickland. Up the Strickland lay our route; we were bound for Lake Murray, up a tributary of the Strickland known as the Herbert River. Nobody knew there was a river there until 1913, when two Government officials, Messrs. Burrows and Baker, with an engineer, Mr. P. Leigh, were making a patrol up the Strickland, and had the happy thought of running their little launch up an opening that went off inconspicuously to the left. This proved to be an unknown river of considerable size and very great beauty, leading to a large, unknown lake strewn with islands, and inhabited by an

extremely interesting, though warlike, people. They called the new river after the Judge of the Territory, Mr. Justice Herbert, and the lake after the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Hubert Murray.

Lake Murray has been visited a very few times since then; all in all, the white people who had seen it at the time of my visit were only seventeen—the seventeenth white person, and first white woman, being myself.

The journey, up to Everill Junction, had been made so far at an unheard-of rate of speed; no less than seven knots, against the current of the Fly. In the Strickland we went quite as fast, and here, for the first time since leaving the lower river, signs of life began to show. We were no longer in an uninhabited wilderness. Every here and there along the banks, at intervals of a few miles, appeared the skeletons of camping-grounds; frames and ridge-poles of deserted huts; small clearings; trees cut down and falling into the stream.

'What are these?' I asked a wise old Papuan sergeant, who had been to Lake Murray before.

'Thass camp belong New Guinea man,' he answered. 'All the time, he come, he go, he don't stop, because all the time he fright along another man come taken head belong him. Little time he stop, by 'n' by he go 'way again.'

They were pathetic, those deserted camps, the temporary resting-places of a driven, scared people, who live—if it may be called living—in constant fear of murder. On these river-banks, in 1914, Mr. Massey Baker saw corpses that had been left over after a successful raid, probably one made by the neighbouring Lake Murray natives, who are 'bosses' of the river. The bodies were all headless; some of them, in addition, had been flayed as far down as the breast. Head-hunting is the chief sport, the only excitement, in the lives of Fly and Strickland natives. They attach immense importance to the possession of heads, to the preparation and painting of their specimens, and the proper display of the finished work. They can sever a protesting, fighting head as ably as a butcher can cut the throat of a sheep, although the knives of shell or bamboo generally used by them are very unsatisfactory tools. No one, so far, has succeeded in speaking to these people in their own tongue, so that the reasons for many ceremonies and customs are unknown; it is supposed, however, that the idea of trophies representing skill and daring mingles with the well-known savage conviction that the strength of a murdered man passes into his murderer.

Cannibalism is also a part of their lives, but head-hunting, taken purely as sport, comes first. There is plenty of good food to be had about these rivers—fish, fowl, and sago for the taking, as well as bananas and pumpkins grown in food gardens—so that cannibalism, in all probability, is more a luxury than a

necessity.

'This feofle he eat fig, wallaby, cassawy,' volunteered the old sergeant. 'Flenty kai-kai' (food). 'Flenty pish he stop along river, this man he catchem pish all the time.'

'Is that fruit on the trees there—good fruit?'

We were passing giant trees loaded with what seemed to be ripe peaches; other trees bending under the weight of something very like dates—bundles of golden fruit that must have weighed a hundred-weight apiece. None of these I had ever seen before, nor could the white members of the party tell me anything about them. The forests of New Guinea are so wide, so little known, that even a trained botanist often finds himself at a loss in classifying the new forms that everywhere meet his eye.

Here, strange vegetation ran riot; the marvellous creeping fern that I had already seen; palms of weird shape and curious growth; tremendous forest trees hung all over with what looked exactly like pink silk stockings—trees yellow-green, feathery, fluffy, like the quaint little border plant one used to see in old-fashioned gardens, called prince's feather.

All the way there had been few flowers; even the scarlet D'Alberti creeper was not visible anywhere—but so lovely, so marvellous, were the forms of leaf and frond and tree, that flowers were never missed. Three hundred miles of tropical hothouse, gilded by a sun that no hothouse ever knew, is the three hundred miles that leads from the sea to Lake Murray. . . .

'I dono, sinabada,' was the sergeant's cautious answer. 'I think maybe he no blanky good.'

Papua is full of tantalizing mock fruits, mostly useless or poisonous. Up to this I had seen mock apricots, mock cherries, mock plums, mock grapes (growing oddly right out of the trunks of trees), mock apples; but mock dates and peaches were new, and I wished it had been possible to stop the ship and examine them more closely. It has been said—and probably with truth—that Papua possesses many unknown fruits which could with cultivation be trained into new and valuable additions to our gardens. Certainly some of those one saw on the Strickland looked suitable.

But in the interior of Papua one is always more or less in a hurry. No one can go alone; a fairly large party is necessary for purposes of protection. That party must be fed, and it cannot be fed from the country, even where food is available, since no prudent traveller trusts, or depends on, the wild tribes of the interior. Therefore, the length of the trip is always conditioned by food supply and difficulties of transport. On the rivers, where transport is simpler, the perils of rising and falling water, shoals, snags, and rapids forbid all lingering. It is

fatally easy to lose your boat up a Papuan river, and the loss of your boat means the loss of everything, not excluding life. . . .

Which explains a good many things; among others, the neglect of botanical study.

About five o'clock the police, who were in the bow, raised an excited cheer, and began pointing and waving towards the left bank. Canoes were gliding timidly through the low brush that overhung the water's edge; one or two hovered at the mouth of a tributary creek and, terrified, drew back. 'Sambio, Sambio!' yelled the police, waving their arms.

'Sambio,' the cry of greeting used on the upper Fly, was first noticed more than thirty years ago by Sir William Macgregor, but no one, so far, knows exactly what it means! It appears, however, to be an 'Open Sesame' of some kind, and the few white people who have been up the Fly have all used it freely for the purpose of making friends.

The word, it seemed, had not lost its magic, for when they heard us, out crept the timid canoes, making, for all their timidity, wonderful time against the fierce current, and almost catching up the powerful launch. The people in them were strange and wild beyond description; unclothed save for an ornament or two, with long artificial hair knotted into their own and hanging down their backs below the hips. They carried huge bows and six-foot, painted arrows, capable of going through a plank, and spitting a man like a sparrow. Most of them kept their bows in their hands, ready for use if wanted. One could not help admiring their pluck in venturing forth at all. They knew scarcely anything of white people, and those whom they had previously seen had travelled in comparatively small launches. The hundred-and-eighty-ton Laurabada must have loomed as huge, to them, as the last and biggest Atlantic liner looms to a fishing boat of Cobh. But they did their very best to catch her up, shouting unintelligible things which, one guessed, were meant for, 'Hold on; we want to visit you; you're going too fast!'

A sight that excited and amazed the police extremely was something not seen before on the Strickland; something that peered timidly out of the forest, and retreated, coming back to gaze again—a woman. Probably the sight of myself on the bow of the boat had brought her out. It is certain that no Government official—and these include almost every visitor of the few who have been to Lake Murray—had previously seen the women of the district; in accordance with native custom, they had been kept carefully hidden. The woman in the forest was rather personable-looking; young, well-fed, and oddly dressed, in a complete frock of bark. This usually marks the status of widow; but there are some strange forms of 'weeds' on the Fly, and one could not be certain. Once, on the middle Fly, a trader saw and photographed a widow who

was entirely nude, save for a heavy netted veil covering her head and face! This widow, if she was one, wore no veil, only a piece of bark cloth on her head, and the neat little bark frock. She was, unluckily, too far away, and too much in the shade, for photographing.

After this excitement, things quieted down, and we ran the rest of the day without event. At night we anchored in a wide elbow of the river, surrounded by high forest. No tongue could tell the glory of the sunset on the splendid stream, the exquisite, nameless greens of reeds and cane and tall bamboo; and no words known to any human language could express the strange, drugging peace that crept about one's mind, fascinating, hypnotizing, winding the spell of the wild places ever closer and closer.

These edges of earth, these mysterious places 'at the back of beyond,' call in a way incomprehensible to those who have never known them. They are as perilous as precipices, or deep seas. They have the same lure. Men have flung themselves from precipices, jumped into seas, because they could not help it. One is very sure that time and again men have plunged into just such wildernesses as this, 'because they could not help it'—and have never been heard of more.

Going native is a different matter, a thing known and understood. This other has no name.

In the morning it was very bright, and everything that was not blue was green, and everything that was not either was gold. And as we went along, faster now, because we were in the Herbert River and the current was lessening, we saw new beauties every minute; new vistas of what seemed like the loveliest of green meadows, planted with groves of graceful foliage; bright lawns running down from ramparts of forest; sometimes a view of distant spreading fields that seemed all ready for the plough, fair, quiet, civilized. . . .

It was all a mirage. The meadows, the lawns, the fields, were nothing but marsh, mud sometimes, and sometimes water covered with long deceptive grass. Scarcely a marsh fowl could run on them without sinking in. For unknown miles and miles this country continues. Natives know the way about it; natives can pass over it in their gliding canoes cut out of a single log; natives, it is supposed, have their fastnesses and fortresses hidden away here and there; but white people here had never been away from the river, and, for the present, were not likely to go.

There were many egret herons, tall and stately and surprisingly courageous. They stood on floating logs, staring gravely at the Laurabada, and did not fly until she was quite near; they perched on trees, watching, and never moved away as we passed. Like bird angels they looked, exquisitely white and

pure, fragile and unearthly. The cruelty of plumage-hunting and plumage-trading are not to be feared for these lovely creatures; they will not suffer as other egrets have done, for the Government of Papua with its protective laws dealt early with that danger, and so white bird angels may walk and fly in peace. Birds-of-paradise, too, which are numerous about the Herbert and the Strickland, will run no risk of extermination, such as has occurred in parts of Dutch territory. Natives trap and shoot them and use their feathers for adornment, but that is comparatively a slight drain on their numbers. It is the murderous trade of the white hunter that brings whole species down to vanishing point, and he is barred from the Fly.

Towards the middle of the day—the third day since leaving Madiri plantation—the river began to widen out all round us; the forests thinned, and finally disappeared. Everywhere the Herbert now ran through low meadows of extraordinarily bright green grass—false meadows like the others, for they were in truth nothing but swamps. By and by we were met by a great concourse of white, flying, screaming birds, some middle-sized, some so large that one looked at them a second time before believing the testimony of one's eyes. They perched on lone trees in flocks, they rose together, speckling all the sky, they shrieked and quacked and called. And we knew that we were in the middle of Lake Murray's famous flocks of wild ducks and wild geese, and that Lake Murray itself was close at hand.

A little farther, the marshes opened out, grew paler and more watery, and at the last were water and nothing but water; blue water, stretching far away, with bright green islands standing up out of it, and darker forests hemming it in. A long way off, the far side of the lake was visible, just a pale purple streak. The ends we could not see. Lake Murray is twenty-six miles long, and varies from three or four to six or seven miles wide.

The Laurabada, conned with care, was slowly run into the opening of the lake. She was taking risks, but journeys through the interior of Papua cannot be separated from risk, and nobody troubles much over one more or one less. The lead kept going, the engineer 'stood by,' and we crept carefully out into the lake—a place of fairy loveliness had one had time or leisure to look at it. But that was just what one had not. Canoes were gathering, filled with interested and excited natives, who paddled swiftly round and round, expressing their amazement by cries. No such tremendous ship as this hundred-and-eighty-tonner had ever entered into their imaginations. They were not the least bit afraid of her, or of us; the Lake Murray man is far too full of what our American brothers call 'pep' and 'bounce' for that. They were only curious, and especially anxious to get a look at the remarkable phenomenon on the



NATIVES OF THE LOWER FLY RIVER

cabin deck; the thing that wore queer clothes, and spoke in a queer voice, not like a man's; that was apparently a white woman—a creature they had not seen, and probably scarce believed in. All of them had come well provided with weapons, just 'in case' . . . They had also come provided with curios and oddments for sale. Good trade had come out of previous visits, and the Lake Murray native never neglects a chance of bettering himself. It is true that he has tried to murder his visitors quite as often as not; but in all probability he had what he considered good reasons—desire to obtain trade stuff in bulk, instead of small, tantalizing instalments, desire to secure really unique heads for his collection, simple desire to make a row—'or any other old reason why.'

To-day, he seemed peaceably inclined; nobody drew a bow on anybody, and nobody, in consequence, felt obliged to make threatening motions with rifles. There has never been any irreparable trouble with these people; but it must be said that tact and care on one side have had more to do with this happy result than peaceful spirit on the other.

They brought paddles for sale, curiously carved and painted; beautiful chains of feathers, meant to tie about the head; dancing-clubs ornamented with red and grey berries, feathers and seeds, and carved in openwork; arrows, every one a work of art; fly switches made of white duck feathers, and most artistically finished; also human heads and human jaws.

Fly River preserved heads are famous all over New Guinea, and the natives



A FINE TYPE OF HEAD-HUNTER, LAKE MURRAY

of Lake Murray are perhaps the ablest exponents of the art to be found in any part of the Fly River system.

The heads that they brought in their canoes and exhibited with touching pride were probably those of enemies. It is supposed that they also preserve the heads of friends and relations, but these, naturally, are not offered for sale. The Lake Murray taxidermist, in possession of a suitable corpse, removes the head, at the same time stripping off a large part of the skin of neck and shoulders. He opens the scalp at the back, removes the bones of the head, and smokes and cures the skin, converting it into thick soft leather. This he stuffs out into an extraordinary shape, half human, half animal, lacing up the split at the back and the base of the neck with strips of cured skin that are exactly like porpoise-hide bootlaces. After stuffing, it is painted all over black, ornamented with white and red; the nose is elevated by means of a piece of bamboo, and the open mouth filled with white stones to represent teeth. Long locks of fibre, representing hair, are fastened on; sometimes feathers are added. It is impossible to deny the cleverness and, in a sense, the artistic merit, of the work. These heads are their especial treasures, and the fact that they brought some out for sale suggested that they were very badly off for 'trade' stuff. In truth, we did not see a knife, a bead, a scrap of iron, an inch of cloth, among the whole tribe, save those that we brought ourselves. One four-shilling knife, one head, was the standard price, and we could probably have bought every available head, alive or dead, on the lakes, on the same terms.

These people, although at war with almost all the other tribes, and

exceedingly shy and wild, manage to do a little trading with natives who live farther down the river; witness their possession of certain ocean shells, used for ornament and clothing. It seems strange, in view of this fact, that they cannot obtain knives, which one would suppose to be the first essential of the head-hunter's existence. Knives of bamboo and shell, however, are all that they possess. Their daggers, like nearly all native daggers, are made of human or cassowary bone. The long, sharp, and effective points of their great arrows are also bone for the most part.

Up to the present, no one has been able to talk to the Lake Murray people. Their language is peculiar, unlike that of other tribes who are known and more or less civilized. Government officials are now at work collecting words from neighbouring tribes, which may be used as a basis for a vocabulary in time. But during our visit, no talk was possible; the overworked 'Sambio!' was all that any one could understand.

Wild and shy as these people are, they are exceedingly courageous. Only a few natives had sighted the Laurabada as she came in. These few, however, though almost unsupported, had no fear of the great ship. They hovered all round us, poising and darting in their canoes like water-flies; they held up stuffed heads, and offered paddles and arrows, shouting unintelligible talk...

In the mean time, the leadsman kept imperturbably calling, 'And a half two! Mark two! Mark two! Quarter less two! Mark two!'—which last, as we drew ten feet, gave one to think a little. Our navigating officer, cigar in hand, was conversing lightly with a higher dignitary, keeping all the while one ear open to the leadsman's call.

'I think I'll take her back a bit,' he said...

('Quarter less two!' interjected the leadsman. This gave us just six inches clearance, but a miss is as good as a mile.)

'... Because a lake like this is always liable to sudden rises and falls; it might go down a foot or two in the night, and then we'd be aground.'

'And that,' observed the higher official, 'would be a silly sort of way to end our lives.'

'Quite, sir'—he drew on his cigar a little. 'I think of running her over there, into about three fathom.'

('Mark two!' said the leadsman.)

We ran back into three fathoms and anchored there. Nobody commented on the obvious fact that running aground would have meant the descent of every head-hunter within six and twenty miles, eager for looting as carrion crows for meat, and a fight that would have ended when our cartridges ended—followed by the end of us.

Presently a small launch was slung out, and we three whites, with a native engineer and four police, set out to look for villages, there being none in sight. We took a camera, some afternoon tea, and plenty of cartridges done up in neat packets. Two of the police stood on the bow, looking extremely picturesque in their dark blue and scarlet tunics and jumpers, and armed with rifles and bandoliers. These living figureheads were intended to con the launch, since nobody knows much about the depths and shoals of the lake.

The Lake Murray native is not easy to find. He shifts most of his villages every few months or so—apparently with the idea of discouraging ‘pay-back’ raids. Three years earlier, a Government patrol had visited the lake when there were villages close to the entrance; now we ran seven miles before seeing a sign of one.

Hidden villages there may have been, and probably were; but the first sign of life, other than the canoes that had visited us, was a tiny, picturesque collection of brown huts, perched on the summit of a small high island. This we made for at top speed, somebody remembering that it had, after all, been visited before. On the first occasion, the villagers had tried to shoot the Lieutenant-Governor, and a general massacre was only averted by tact and nerve on the part of the whites. The second call was peaceful. This was the third call; the chances of peace, therefore, appeared to be about fifty-fifty.

The village, when we came within hail, looked much as an ants’ nest looks after a stick has been poked into it. Head-hunters were running all over the place, up and down the hill, in and out of the houses; some of them were dancing; others rushed into shallow water up to their shoulders, and frantically waved arms. Still nearer we ran, trying to find a place where the little launch could be safely manoeuvred through the waterweeds without fouling her propeller; and now it was clear that the island was giving us, if anything, too enthusiastic a welcome. I say too enthusiastic, for a reason that will be explained later; South Sea travellers will guess what it was without being told.

They rushed forward to greet the launch as we ran in; they brought canoes along to help us through the mud. Most of them were yelling, and all who could find any firm foothold were dancing. They were an extremely fine-looking lot of people, naked, much decorated with shells, teeth, and feathers, wearing long artificial hair down their backs in a tail, so closely interwoven with their own that it was impossible to tell where the false began and the genuine ended. Some of them carried bows and arrows, but most were empty-handed. One man, who danced backward before the party as it ascended the hill, had a human head tucked under his arm; it remained entirely unexplained, then or thereafter. I incline to think myself that he was busy decorating it, and just happened to bring it along, as a housewife might happen to bring her

crochet in her hand when running out to look at a passing circus or procession.

It became apparent as we went up the hill that the villagers were pleased with our call—on the whole—and they were especially intrigued by the sight of that strange and unheard-of creature—a white woman. The four native police had to interfere once or twice, to prevent rude crowding. All round the enterprising head-hunters came, staring, touching, shrieking with excitement when they noted that my skin was lighter than a man's, asking by signs for gifts of knives and cloth, peering curiously at the hair coiled under my hat. They asked a hundred questions about me—which no one understood—and volunteered a great deal of information—which informed nobody. Old Sergeant Simoi succeeded in explaining to them by signs that I wanted to see their women, and, after some parley, they despatched a messenger to 'parts unknown.'

The houses of these people appeared to be very poor; they were mere sheds of sago, roughly built. Across one rather large house ran a partition like a low cattle fence, dividing the men's quarters from the women's. Weapons and heads were hung up somewhat casually. There was nothing like the elaborate architecture known on the coasts and on the lower Fly. Here, the people are too nomadic to undertake the work of heavy building. Their constructive abilities seem to find expression in feather-work, carving, and especially the decorating of heads—all of which arts they carry to remarkable perfection, considering the absence of decent materials and tools. A true artist is the Lake Murray head-hunter; be it canoe-paddle, arrow, club, or head, his hand adorns whatever it touches, and his sense of form and colour is impeccable.

We bought a few curios, showing as little as possible of the trade stuff we carried. We did not buy everything that was offered, since much of it was mere rubbish. The people were greedy for knives and cloth; they kept on pressing their wares by signs, but we took no notice.

Then came a diversion. Not very far off there was a low, beautiful island, darkly wooded, surrounded by emerald-green marsh grass, and set brilliantly between the turquoise of the still, broad lake and the milky blue of the sky. From this, small black canoes like little water-flies began to creep; they came accompanied by a sound of sobbing and wailing, and within them, as they came slowly nearer, were to be seen small stooping bodies. It was the women of the village, who had been sent for and told to come out; they were obeying their lords, but it was clear they did so with reluctance.

So far as I know, the women of the lakes had not been seen by any previous party, of the very few parties who have visited Lake Murray. I can, at all events, answer for it that none of the Government people had seen them, and Government officials comprise almost all who have been to the place. The

conduct of the women certainly suggested that they had not previously met white people. They hung about in the marsh at the foot of the hill, refusing to go any farther, and could not be induced to land until I went down and showed myself. Then they came, but reluctantly, hiding their faces, and still wailing. Even the gifts of red cloth which I offered them did not reassure them; they looked at me as if I were some wild and terrible animal, and when I tried to speak to any of them, they turned to their husbands and clung to them for protection, hiding on the shoulders of the men. It is worthy of note that the men treated them kindly, laughing at them, as a husband will laugh at his wife's little feminine vagaries, but assuring them (so far as one could judge) that it was all right, nothing to be afraid of. . .



WOMEN COMING IN FROM REFUGE ISLAND, LAKE MURRAY

The head-hunters of Lake Murray are murderous and bloodthirsty savages, but it seems that they know how to treat their women better than the women of the peaceful tribes of the coast are treated. These brown girls were plump and good-looking for the most part; they bore no signs of the ceaseless toil that wears out the women of the coastal districts and turns them into ugly hags while yet in their twenties. They were well-fed, and they seemed—if one may judge by the small, significant incident mentioned above—to have more confidence in and liking for their men than most Papuan women.

We all went up to the top of the island; the men showed us the interior of the rough, plain, sago-built house that seemed to be the chief building of the village; and the women came in and took their place behind the partition that

marked off the women's quarters. I put a white singlet on one of them to the accompaniment of wild yells from half the tribe—the woman herself seemed entirely indifferent. I also offered her a small looking-glass, holding it before her face, but neither she nor the other women seemed to have any idea of what it was; plainly, they had never seen such a thing before. All the same, I left it with them, being reasonably confident that feminine vanity would show the way to its use before very long.

One can imagine the competition for the possession of that glass later on, when not only the women, but the men, had realized that you could see yourself in it a hundred times better than in the clearest, darkest pool; and more, that you could carry it about with you all the time, though you couldn't carry pieces of Lake Murray, which had been your only mirror hitherto.

It was a rather barren visit on the whole. Until a vocabulary of the language is compiled, little can be done with the people beyond the cultivation of general good will—a difficult matter with so excitable and treacherous a folk.

On the first call these villagers had charged the Government in full line of battle, being only stopped by a volley fired over their heads. One of them had drawn an arrow and aimed at a white man's breast; some one fired a rifle over the native's head, and he was so amazed that he fell, but immediately he leaped up again and prepared to attack once more. Warriors lay under the houses as the party passed and attempted to shoot arrows, being checked only by the police, who poked bayonets at them, and suggested by signs that something more than poking would result if the shooting were not stopped. In the mean time, the Government people behaved as they always do in such circumstances—walked about and took no notice of anything, unless an actual attack was made. This is the modern method, which certainly demands more nerve than the old-fashioned way of burning villages and shooting down tribesmen, but is very much more effective in pacifying a district. The Lake Murray natives are hungry for the possession of the magic steel that lightens all their tasks; nothing interests them very much save tools and knives, but these they will at any time do murder to get—if it seems safe to do murder—and hence the chief danger.

It was not as peaceful as it seemed on the day of my own visit. Having had some experience of head-hunting peoples—who are usually the finest and most interesting tribes of their respective districts, but always nervy and uncertain in conduct—I had already noticed a general 'boiling-up' in process, and realized that it might very well result in boiling over. The men had not had all the goods they wanted from us; they must have known we carried a store in the small launch, and that if they cut us off, they would certainly benefit by a



LEAVING A VILLAGE, LAKE MURRAY

good deal of loot, not to speak of some really valuable heads. They were all dancing continually now, all yelling, not after the wild-dog fashion that had greeted our arrival, but in a concerted, college-yell sort of way that suggested a definite object. In fact, they were working themselves up; and when a cannibal and head-hunting tribe starts that process, there is only one end to it.

'I think,' mildly suggested the leader of the party, 'that perhaps our welcome is wearing rather thin. We may as well be getting back again.'

And it was so.

We went down to the launch with our four police, escorted by a good many scores of over-excited savages. And we got in and got away. And they did not attack any one. It is a flat ending to a story, but most endings to such stories are flat; because when they are not, there is seldom anybody left to tell the tale.

When we were three miles or so from the village, out of sight behind another island, the engine did what launch engines usually do—stopped. The native engineer twisted its tail and hit it over the head, and by and by it went again, and by and by it stopped again. We lay for certain half-hours moveless on the burning blue water, and for certain other half-hours crept, as wounded duck might creep, through the marshes of Lake Murray towards our distant nest—the Laurabada. The village we had left did not see us, because we were not in their line of sight when the breakdown occurred. Nor did it occur to any roving body of raiders that there was a lot of treasure floating helpless on Lake Murray, and that riches might be rapidly acquired, because most of the canoes

on the lake were making a Cook's excursion of it round about the big Laurabada. So, a second time, the thing which might have happened did not happen, and a good story was spoiled.

The subject of raiders was not even mentioned by the Government officials. Until the engine got going again, they read the last from Mudie's, smoked, and looked at the scenery. Why worry?

We passed, on our way back, some beds of the remarkable floating grasses of the lake. These grasses lie on the top of deep water, but can be walked on as one walks on a carpet. There was not time to make the experiment this day, but on a former visit the white people had walked quite a long way on the water of the lakes, supported by these weeds. The surface rose and fell in waves, but it held firm, as long as every one went straight ahead. When the party returned, however, some of them sank in and had to be rescued—their footsteps had disturbed the grasses and made holes in the floating carpet.

Most of the islands are surrounded by this curious grass, which is dangerous to launches, since it may foul a propeller at any moment. I cannot imagine anything more likely to turn treacherous friendship into murderous fury, at one blow, than the fouling of a launch near any lake village. It seems a little absurd to talk of danger in connection with a people who do not know the use of firearms, and who are so pitifully unprotected when compared with ourselves. Nevertheless, numbers tell, utter unscrupulousness tells—especially when the more scrupulous side displays a chivalrous anxiety to avoid first blow—and in the end the native weapons of club and bow and arrow are not to be despised. We were glad to have avoided collision.

'I shouldn't care to try and swim ashore anywhere among these islands if we were upset,' said one of the party, glancing with distaste at the matted beds of floating weed. 'You'd get tied up and sunk.'

'If you did not,' contributed the chief authority, 'you would certainly be knocked on the head as soon as you got ashore.'

Impossible to believe that battle, murder, and sudden death hide everywhere among these lovely islets, emeralds set upon a sapphire shield; that headless, flayed bodies may be found floating among the silver-green weeds where water-fowl perch and nest; that a column of blue smoke, most peaceful and homelike of sights, rising up among trees, may show the place of no domestic hearth, but of a hideous smokehouse where severed, dripping heads are taken to dry. Strange to think what an earthly paradise Lake Murray might be, save for the fiendish practices of the head-hunting tribes. It is lovely, healthy, cooler than most of the inland districts of Papua, full of animal and vegetable food, swept by no hurricanes, seldom touched by cloud, and never

by frost or snow. Sun and green islands, blue lake and purple shores, paradise birds cleaving the skies with their wings of living gold, wonderful nights of stars, when the light canoes, swift and mobile as dragon-flies, skim through drift of sparkling planets. A river road, smooth and easy, but gloriously long, cutting off this lakeland paradise by three hundred miles from the lonely coastline where the Fly meets the Coral Sea, severing it from all the shouting, speeding, stock-brokering world of civilization by distances incredible. Such is the country of Lake Murray, which might be heaven, but truly is more like hell.

For the present it is unlikely that mission work will be attempted on the lakes. The establishment of a missionary station would mean that the Government must also plant a station there, with native police and a white magistrate at enormous expense—since no missionary party would live for a week, if abandoned on the lakes without protection. The slaughter of such a party would mean just what every one is anxious to avoid—a punitive expedition, closing the lakes to friendly advance perhaps for generations. Later on, no doubt, missionaries will come, and, with the Government to help them, will do good work.

As soon as the language is understood and interpreters found, it is intended to take away one or two of the young men for training as native police, and also a boy child, simply for petting and spoiling, so that he can be returned to the lakes with a thoroughly good impression of the white people. To take any one away without explanation would simply mean the ambushing and murder of the next white visitors, as ‘pay-back,’ so the plans of the Government must wait a little yet.

Gradually, in this manner, the head-hunters will be brought into touch with the ruling race; tamed, taught, and civilized, as far as may be good for them. They are a people brimful of energy and go, most unlike the gloomy, apathetic tribes of the lower Fly—with whom, indeed, they seem to have no connection. It is supposed that they did not reach Lake Murray by way of the Fly, but in long past times came down over the ranges of the interior from some unknown outer source, probably Malaya. Certain marked differences from the coastal people in dress and custom suggest difference also of origin. The women are clothed, they wear decent petticoats of bark or grass, and, as I have already mentioned, they seem to be treated with a good deal of kindness. The extraordinary tails of artificial hair worn by the younger men seem to hint at some vague, traditional admiration for long, straight locks, such as those of the Malay. It is noticeable that the older men have a great dislike of baldness, exemplified by their wearing of bark-cloth head-coverings, and by their curious custom of painting bald scalps. One old man whom we noticed had

decorated his head in elaborate patterns of red and black.

Some have supposed these natives are connected with the extraordinary people of the Sepik River in the Mandated Territory, who came overland to the middle Sepik, a very few hundred years ago, from some part of Malaya, and succeeded before long in dominating all that part of the country. Certainly the clever, warlike, cruel, artistic people of Lake Murray suggest recollections of the middle Sepik to any one who has visited it. So far as I know, at the time of my visit, no one but myself had seen both places.

It may as well be noted here that neither the Sepik nor Lake Murray is open ground for travellers in general. Trouble has already been caused on the Sepik by careless folk, and it could easily be brought about in the same manner on the Fly. One single visitor of the wrong kind, one impulsive, inexperienced person, liable to get excited at an awkward moment, might upset the careful handling of the Lake Murray folk that has been going on since the discovery of the lake, and precipitate just what every one is anxious to avoid—a murderous attack followed by a massacre.

Returning to the Laurabada, we found her the centre of a small fleet of canoes, filled with lake people who were very anxious to do a little trading. More heads were offered for sale, and quite a number of human jaws, beautifully cured and preserved, coloured a dark red, and hung locket-wise on pieces of native string, were also brought for sale. One or two of the natives had managed to get on to the Laurabada, although this was against orders, and they were still there when we came back, making the best of their time by exploring her all over. A big, hearty warrior, in no clothes and a handful of feathers, seemed to have jumped to the conclusion that my cabin was worth raiding, because I had taken trade goods from it. While I was out on deck, he made one of those sudden dashes that only the naked muscular savage can make, and had all but got into the cabin when a policeman and a sailor saw him, and together dragged him away. After this, they were all turned off the deck and requested to rejoin their ships. Since no one had missed anything, we gave the Lake Murray people a good mark for honesty; but the mark had to be cancelled later on when the Lieutenant-Governor discovered that certain of the savages had penetrated into his private sanctum, and stolen a pair of trousers, a coat, and—amazing choice!—a ‘History of Ireland’ in Gaelic! What they wanted with the latter remains one of the many mysteries of Lake Murray.

I do not know how long the canoes would have stayed about the ship had not Nature taken a hand in the scene and hustled them off-stage. One of the sudden, fierce lake storms began to threaten, with purple clouds and stabbing lightning flashes, and in almost no time every canoe was away. The burst of speed they put up, paddling across the big open space towards the shelter of

the far-off islands, was something worth seeing. The light hollow log canoes of Lake Murray, thin and smooth as shells, are exceedingly difficult for a stranger to stand in, even to sit in; they require to be balanced like a bicycle, and have almost no hold on the water. But these very peculiarities make them fast as a launch, when a team of muscular, naked head-hunters, with bent knees and swaying bodies, urges its way furiously across the lake, with long, wide-bladed paddles. I should not like to be a helpless stranger, strayed from some distant village into the lovely Herbert River, if one of these canoes came whooping up from the lakes, manned by lakemen on the lookout for heads.

We lay at anchor all night, and nobody came near us. Once or twice during the night, when I awoke and heard the sound of water lapping rapidly, I wondered whether it was really the sound of water or that of approaching canoes. It might have been one or the other, but it happened on this occasion to be wind alone.

We left early, and started down-river at a cracking pace; never, assuredly, had the waters of the Herbert, the Strickland, and the Fly parted before the keel of anything going along at thirteen knots an hour, which was our pace, with the aid of the river currents. The journey down was eventless, with one exception —an encounter with that strange and terrible thing, a river-bore.

The bore of the Fly is notorious, and no wonder. When a river possesses a trumpet-shaped estuary, narrowing rapidly from eighty miles to one or two; when it sends down, every day, water enough to supply every inhabitant of earth, and when that flood of water encounters the flood of ocean tides swept resistlessly up the estuary, it is easy to understand that disturbance will take place at the meeting-point. There is always something of a bore in the Fly at high tide; but with spring tide, it becomes most formidable, and every creature living on the lower river fears it. The bore is the victory of the sea over the river; when it sweeps up the Fly (or any similar stream), driving back for a while the river water, it builds a terrace right across from bank to bank, from three to eight or nine feet higher than the level in front of it. Anything confronting this, or overtaken by it, will probably be thrown end for end, tumbled over and smashed. Especially is this the case if the bore is met in shallow water, where it is at its worst. Countless canoes have been caught by the bore and destroyed; not a few whaleboats, staunch thirty-foot clipper-built little vessels, manned by trained men, have met with more or less disaster. I had been anxious to see this celebrated monster, but did not know there was a chance until some one roused me from a lounge and a novel with the call, ‘Come up on the bridge; the bore’s coming!’

All the whites were ‘on top’ in half a minute, looking with glasses across the huge space of the lower river, at a thin white line advancing with amazing

swiftness from the far-off sea. The bore came on as fast as a galloping horse; whether one could hear its ugly roar or not from the safe distance that we kept —half a mile away in deep water—I cannot say, but some of us fancied we did. It was not in the least like a sea-wave; it came on fiercely, tossing its head in a peculiar, angry fashion, like that of a very vicious horse. Small wonder the natives personify it and fear its approach above any other of the dangers of this most dangerous river.

With our powerful engines and plenty of sea-room we had nothing to fear, but I was told that even the Laurabada, if caught by the bore unawares, would be stripped of every deckhouse, and probably stove in.

We anchored in the lower estuary. The Fly took one more 'lick' at us before we left; for the holding ground was bad, and the ship dragged all of five miles, and it was more good luck than anything else that found us safely afloat next morning. She is a wicked river, but a beautiful river, and wonderful beyond all telling!

CHAPTER V

SORCERY AND SPIRITISM IN PAPUA

SPIRITISM is supposed to be a new thing to civilization, though there have been outbreaks of something exceedingly like it from time to time, under the name of witchcraft. It is nothing new to savages; it is, probably, as old as the savage himself. And in Papua, the very home of sorcery, the lowest cannibal has forgotten more than most frequenters of modern séances ever knew.

The whole business of sorcery plays so large a part in Papuan life that it has long been recognized by the legal system of the country. It is an offence against the law, punishable by fine or imprisonment. The record of arrests by native police and cases tried by magistrates show as many accusations of sorcery as did mediæval law courts in the days of witch-finders. But the British Government of to-day does not proceed on the lines of Matthew Hale. It merely asks for evidence as to the ill effects of the sorcerer's practices—there is always plenty, since murder and oppression form an inevitable part—and, being satisfied, it claps the sorcerer into jail. He is not imprisoned for practising magic, though that is, for reasons of convenience, the actual charge, but for making himself a danger and a nuisance. And on the whole the system works well.

During a residence of many years I have seen a good deal, and, at first hand, heard a good deal more, about the sorcerers of Papua. I know a number of them fairly well—they are a reserved and cautious race—and have even succeeded in getting them to tell me, more or less, what they thought about the business. And I am obliged to say that I think there is 'something in it.'

Extremely fine masks, showing much imagination of a rather sinister kind, are used by sorcerers in many parts of the country. They are also used for dancing by other natives, but the sorcerer has the best, the finest, and most horrible. Some faces suggest the worst kind of nightmare, also a jump-on-your-back little demon that is ugly enough to frighten any nervous person out of a night's sleep.

These things are supposed to represent various spirits. If the Papuan believes in spirits as strongly as he seems to do, he is certainly a brave man to invite attention from creatures that are supposed to look like these.

In some parts of the country, the marriageable bachelor, who often experiences difficulty in finding a wife, is fond of gathering together various young men of his own age, unattached, and holding a spirit séance with them,

to find out which of them is to be married first and how soon. They place every confidence in the result.

The real home of sorcery in Papua is the wonderful Mekeo plain country, a spot seldom troubled by tourists or travellers, beautiful, fertile, and thickly populated by the finest-looking natives in Papua. The Catholic mission has been at work there for over forty years, and in that time has changed the Mekeo country from a home of murderous man-eaters to a place that is entirely safe for any one to visit—that is, if the visitor does not object to poisonous snakes, pythons, wild boars, crocodiles, and swarms of exceedingly vicious mosquitoes, nor yet to the certainty of malarial attacks, or the chance of blackwater fever, which latter is often fatal.

These things, however, sound much worse than they are, and I have never enjoyed anything more than the visits I have made to Mekeo. On one occasion, after a long day's march through beautiful deep forests, I passed through a handsome village, built down one long street, with a tree-house set some forty feet up in air at the end of it, and many clusters of shady betelnut and coconut palms. Beside the finest of the brown thatched houses, a very tall and powerful native, almost naked, was standing. His huge bush of woolly hair—the Papuan has the largest head of hair in the world—was teased out to an unusual size. He was curiously painted with river mud, which had dried white on his chest and powerful bare legs. I asked my interpreter, a kindly missionary, why this man was so oddly decorated, and was told that he was a well-known sorcerer, a great enemy of the Mission. The mud signified that he wished to kill a man. The immensely teased-out hair probably contained a live poisonous snake, coiled round the top of the man's skull. If I annoyed him, he was perfectly capable of letting it attack me. . . .

I did not annoy him. I did not even ask him questions. His appearance and expression were discouraging to the interviewer spirit.

These sorcerers of Mekeo are the product of a strange system of training. There was, until lately, in the depths of the great forests a secret place where sorcerers received their training from one another. The village near it, Mo by name, had long been known among natives as a kind of sorcerers' university. The course required about two years' time, and no outsider was ever told of what it consisted. Freemasonry itself guarded its secrets not more closely.

At the end of the time, the young sorcerer came forth fully equipped. Many have died out and not been replaced, but a good number remain. Any of them can curse a neighbour to death as easily as you or I could hail a taxicab; poison in secret ways; even, it is said, kill a man and bring him to life again. He can use a private wireless system, of immemorial antiquity, that carries news where there is no apparent means of communication. He can see through

things that are opaque to others. He can make himself invisible—so they say. He can, quite certainly, do things with poisonous snakes that no other snake-charmer would attempt, and he does not prepare the snake by removing the poison fangs, since that would make it useless for his purpose. The Government catches and gaols him as often as it can, but, nevertheless, he is not extinct.

Near one of the big villages there is a Catholic Mission, little loved by the sorcerers. On a certain afternoon a sister had just set lunch on the table; it was soup, and the tureen was rather large. Needing salt or something of the kind, she turned her back to get it. She knew that there was no one in the room or on the verandah when she did this, and the action took only a few seconds. Sitting down at table, she helped herself, and was about to begin, when she observed that the tureen was moving a very little. If she had not been on her guard, she would have lifted it up to see what was wrong, but suspecting a trick of some kind, she simply knocked the tureen sharply over. Out from under it leaped a long black snake, and struck at her face.

It was a narrow shave, but she avoided the creature, and immediately after killed it. Then she ran out of the house, and was just in time to see the long legs of the local wizard disappearing into the forest. She did not know how the man contrived to get the snake under the tureen, and offered no opinion. But other people thought the whole business seemed rather like what is known, in spiritistic circles, as an ‘apport.’

It is well known in Mekeo that any one who offends a leading sorcerer is likely to die soon after, in the night, from the bite of a black snake. The natives told me that the sorcerers train their snakes to bite any one they wish, by a secret process of their own, and that they let the creatures loose by night, near some crevice in the victim’s house. The snakes do the rest.

The favourite place for keeping snakes, in a sorcerer’s home, is a large iron saucepan with a close-fitting lid, which can be bought from the traders. Visitors from other houses are very chary about interfering with the cooking apparatus in a house where the owner is suspected of sorcery. When out on business the sorcerer carries his snake either in his hair or in a section of bamboo that hangs like a locket on his breast.

Clairvoyance seems to be another of his accomplishments. Some years ago, in a river flood, one of the youths of a certain Mekeo village was swept away and drowned. While the flood remained, there was no chance of finding his body, but the parents prepared to look for it, as soon as that should be possible, in the place where such grisly flotsam and jetsam was usually found. A white man was standing near the flooded banks of the stream, watching the turbid, mud-coloured water rush past. Two sorcerers, at a little distance, were

watching also. The white man asked them what they were looking at, and they calmly replied that it was the body of the youth. ‘That’s nonsense,’ said the white man; ‘you could not see him through all this muddy water, and in any case it’s impossible he should be in that part of the river at all.’ Sorcerers rarely argue. The men only smiled and pointed out the exact spot where, they said, the body was lying. There was no eddy, no trace of anything that might have suggested such an idea. But when the waters went down, that was where they found the boy.

In all savage countries there are tales among the whites of news sent with incredible swiftness from village to village, outstripping white men’s telegraphs. Drumming is supposed to be the means of communication in Africa. In Papua, drums are certainly used, but they could not carry over the blank, uninhabited spaces, days’ march across, that in many parts of the country separate the mountain tribes from those of the plain. Further, these tribes are usually hostile to one another, and too suspicious to pass a message on, even if one could be sent.

Yet news has come, many and many a time, about the various expeditions which have penetrated into the unknown interior. Incidents of the trip have been reported and become current among the coast natives, while the explorers were far out of reach of all ordinary communication. Usually the reports were discredited, until time proved them to be true.

‘Table-rapping’ has always been known among the Papuans. They use various sacred images for the purpose of producing raps, two raps for ‘yes,’ and one for ‘no.’ They do not deal with serious questions; details of a future existence do not appeal to them, and they have no desire to know what their dead relations are doing, being unalterably convinced that the said relatives are sure to be up to no good. They ask the spirits to tell them where and how they can find their enemies, when a fighting raid is contemplated, and whether they are to expect a good feast of cooked man—not excluding woman and baby. If the answers are unfavourable, they wait for a better time to make their raid. According to their own account, ‘the spirits do not lie’ in these important matters.

So far, the Papuan sorcerer runs very close to his civilized cousin. In other matters, however, he seems to have found, or never lost, certain strange powers common to mediæval wizards, which our modern spiritists do not understand. It is impossible, hearing the account of the enchanted house well known in Western villages, not to think of Merlin’s famous ‘charm of woven paces and of waving hands,’ used by the sorceress Vivien with such dire effects on Merlin himself, when she shut him into the hollow oak against his will, and left him there as dead.

The sorcerer of the West possesses a charm not unlike Vivien's. He builds a strange, secret little house, the sole purpose of which is murder. Once a man enters this house, he loses all power of resistance, and can easily be killed. Strangers are lured by promise of the fine things to be seen inside—bird-of-paradise plumes, carved shields and drums, and other native treasures. Natives of the village are simply told to go in, and they seem to have no power to refuse when thus ordered, even though they know what is coming. This sounds like hypnotism, but the theory does not exactly fit, for it would seem much simpler, if hypnotism were in question, to apply it straightaway without the intervening medium of the enchanted house, which is troublesome to build, and must be burned down every now and then and started afresh if it is to keep up its sinister powers.

There is never anything inside the house, and it is used for no purpose but the killing of the man who has been lured or ordered into it. For ages the practice was carried on without being known to white men; but of recent years, as confidence in the power and good will of the Government increased, complaints have been made now and again by the victims' relatives, and justice has been done upon the murderers. It is not likely that the curious cult of the enchanted house will survive very long.

A sorcerer's professional outfit is curiously reminiscent of the contents of the witches' cauldron in 'Macbeth.' Wandering once through the Mekeo forests, I met a sorcerer whom I happened to know. When not engaged in active practice of his profession, he was—and is—a rather pleasant person who is interested in gardens and knows a little pidgin English, picked up about trading stores. I saw that he was carrying the usual bag over his back (for your sorcerer seldom goes out without his stage properties), and offered him a stick of tobacco to be allowed to see the contents. Very good-naturedly he tumbled them all out on the ground. They made up a curious collection—bats' wings, frogs' feet, small human bones, a baby's mummied hand, bundles of leaves and herbs carefully tied up, and probably poisonous; also several rather fine quartz crystals, which he seemed to value greatly. He would not explain the uses of any of these things, merely smiling when asked what he did with them. But no doubt the course he had taken in the sorcerers' university had taught him the special powers of every item. This sorcerer had a habit unusual among Papuans—that of stealing or begging any seeds of foreign plants he could get from the white people, and growing them in his own private garden. I think he hoped to discover some good new poison among them.

He and his cronies, not long ago, chanced upon a discovery that at first sight must have seemed epoch-making. Mekeo is a place where beautiful birds abound, and at different times, bird collectors, licensed to shoot and snare for

foreign markets, had been allowed to collect a certain number of specimens. Entomologists, too, had visited the country from time to time, finding it a wonderland of beautiful butterflies. All these people made use of the natives to help them in their work, and before long, the sorcerers, with an eye to business, had found out that there were certain very fine poisons in the possession of the whites—arsenic, for curing bird-skins, and cyanide of potassium, used by the entomologists in their killing-bottles. Perhaps the collectors were careless; perhaps they could not have kept the stuff from the sorcerers if they had tried. In any case, the deaths from poison began to run up so quickly that suspicion was aroused, and the whole matter gone into. It was then found that the sorcerers had been making private caches of arsenic and cyanide, and had found the drugs so useful that they were prepared at any time to buy them from the collectors' native assistants at very high prices, or, if that failed, to frighten the men into procuring what was required.

At present, the Mekeo sorcerer is fighting a losing fight. Government on the one side, the mission on the other, are giving him a bad time all round. His prestige is lessening, and his amusements are constantly and rudely interfered with. But it is not likely that he will ever quite lose his hold—either in Mekeo or elsewhere—since sorcery, under other names, is practised to this day by the very people who profess to govern and improve the savage.

CHAPTER VI

THE SEA VILLAGES OF HUMBOLDT'S BAY

ONE stormy wet-season afternoon the steamer that comes once in many weeks left Ternate for North New Guinea with myself on board as a passenger.

I think there are no such views in all the world as those one glimpsed that day through trampling squalls; nowhere such tall volcano cones springing up like giant chimneys in the sea, some crowned with clusters of soft rain-clouds, balanced mushroom-wise on the stalk of the spiring peak; some sending out on the wind long drifts of dark-coloured smoke. Once in a while, when flying columns of pale sunlight swept through the squalls, chasing the blue armies of the rain and lighting up patches of pure emerald on the flanks of the sea-surrounded volcanoes, the beauty of the scene passed far beyond all words, all hope of description.

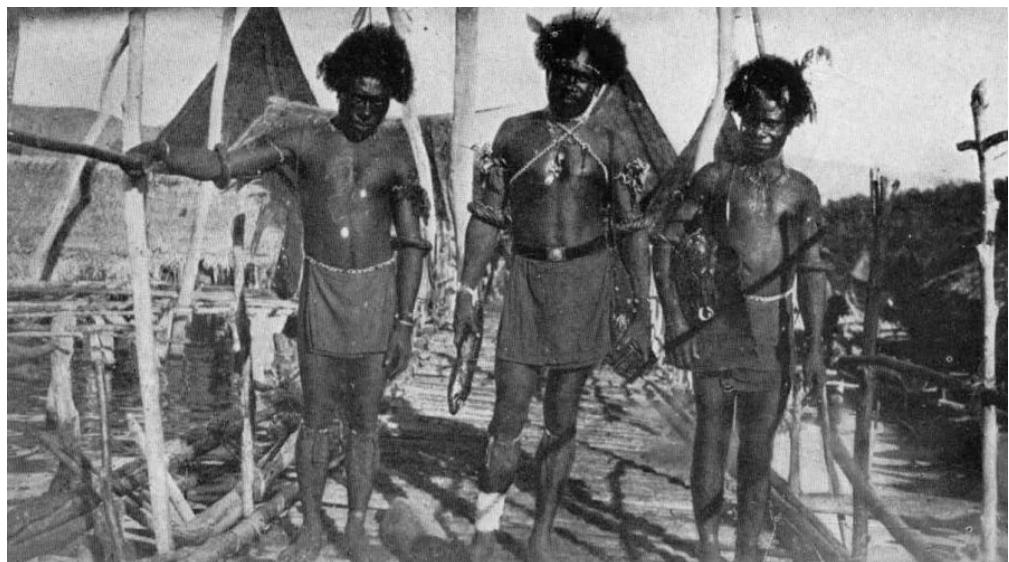
The Moluccas are undoubtedly lovely; they are among the most fertile lands on earth; they have a history that is full of romance. Yet, in spite of all this, I was counting the days till we should reach New Guinea. There is no denying it; wonderful though these Far Eastern islands are, one can weary of them. They have not the mystic, dreamy, lotus-eating charm of the South Seas, nor the gripping attraction of New Guinea—New Guinea, the mysterious land that lies between the gorgeous East and the dreamy Pacific, yet is like neither of them, like nothing in all the world except her own marvellous self.

Once pass through the ocean gates that lead to New Guinea, enter the Pacific, and you leave the workaday world behind. You have gone over the edge—arrived at the lands at the back of nowhere. Here, at last, the burden of the ages slips from your shoulders; the struggle is left behind. In New Guinea there is peace.

I think it is the great peace of the country—despite the existence of so many warring tribes—that lures and holds the white man. The distances are big, the land is rich, there is enough and a hundred times more than enough for every one, white or black. The soil is as fertile as in Malaya; and New Guinea has what Malaya has not—huge areas of untouched virgin land. These emptinesses, the great free seas of New Guinea and the mysterious, ever-promising, ever-calling unknown rivers, mountains, and valleys of the interior suggest to even the most unimaginative a feeling of endless space, endless time. The Papuan—leisured, cheerful, blood-thirsty, it may be, but a ‘good fellow’ all the same, and a thorough sportsman—is part of the picture. You do

not fairly reach him until you have come to Hollandia, the settlement in Humboldt's Bay.

The long island of Jappen, the little native ports of Saonek and Sorong, the island of Manoekwari, where the Governor of Dutch North New Guinea lives, are mostly Malay; for thus far has the active, hardy, money-loving Malay made his way. He exploits the Papuan shamelessly, sells him drink and firearms, and farms his taxes, with the usual result. He also induces him to pull chestnuts out of the fire in the shape of paradise birds, obtained far back among the 'dangerous' tribes, and pays him as little as may be in return.



NATIVE CHIEF, HUMBOLDT'S BAY

At Humboldt's Bay, Malay and Papuan meet; for the first time the land seems to belong to the latter. The Malay and his faithful friend the Chinese occupy the whole settlement of Hollandia, a 'town' of one long street and three or four short ones, built of sago-thatch and sago-stem. There are half a dozen primitive stores where the Papuans who come in from outside in their carved canoes may trade and be royally cheated.

Hollandia is the centre of the bird-of-paradise trade, which now exists—legally—in Dutch New Guinea only. The wonderful birds, perhaps the most beautiful of all God's creatures, are protected in Papua and the Mandated Territory. You cannot find birds-of-paradise anywhere in the world save in New Guinea and one or two neighbouring islands. They are the pride and glory of the Mysterious Land. For many generations they have been sold to the whole earth, and only the immense ranges and perilous rivers, the fierce tribes

and fever-haunted swamps of New Guinea have saved them from extermination. For a long time so little was known about them that until fairly recent times it was believed that the bird-of-paradise had no feet, and spent its life perpetually in the air! Many charming and poetical similes were based on the tale before it became known that the feet of the birds were always removed by the hunters, to facilitate drying.



GIRLS, HUMBOLDT'S BAY

It was not shooting time when I arrived and, in consequence, hardly any one would talk about the birds, their numbers, their value, the method of their capture, or anything else concerning them. I have little doubt that in this forsaken corner close seasons are not rigidly observed. One or two people, however, who were not concerned with the exploiting of the birds, *did* offer a little information, and I learned that the price before the War ran up to as much as six pounds a bird; at present it was about two pounds ten shillings.

The yellow bird-of-paradise—a very lovely species—is practically the only one hunted about Hollandia. Its plumes in the sun look like spun glass of a golden colour; its breast is vivid emerald. It cannot now be obtained near the coast. The Papuans who hunt the birds go far inland, many days' journey into the country of the worst and most ferocious cannibals. Malay hunters go with them, living as the natives live. The birds are sometimes killed with a blowpipe and arrow, but more commonly with a shotgun. I was told that last season twenty-eight hunters had been killed in North New Guinea by the wild natives of the interior, but the trade still goes on. The Chinese, who keep the stores and do most of the buying, never venture away from the coast nowadays. They used to go inland with the hunters, but the cannibal of the hills, who is

something of a gourmet, found out that a fat Chinaman tastes better than a Papuan or a Malay, and so many Chinese lost the number of their mess in consequence that now no Chinaman ever leaves the comparatively safe regions of the coast.

When the hunters come back from the hills, they return loaded with birds-of-paradise that have been cleaned, stuffed with arsenic and dry fibre, and tied up in bark-protected bundles of twenty apiece. The Chinese merchants take the birds, wash them in the river, and pack them in cases for export.

The cannibal of the hills—who lives about twenty miles behind Hollandia—is quite certain that he wants nothing to do with either the white man, the Chinese, or the Malay. Occasionally he expresses his feeling in emphatic terms, as once last year, when he wiped out a whole party, sparing just one man, whose right hand he chopped off, to return and warn other intending visitors. He does not content himself with simply spearing or clubbing a stranger. If a hunter is captured alive, he is taken to the village, where the young boys are brought out and ‘blooded’ on the captive. They are given spears and brands, and encouraged to torment him, the whole village looking on and applauding. When every one has seen enough, the boy who does best at this preliminary sport is given the coveted privilege of splitting the wretched prisoner’s skull with a stone club. At the subsequent feast, the boys are allotted the best bits, to encourage them in manliness and to make them strong.

Arriving at Hollandia as I did, in the midst of the worst rainy season they had had for many years, I could not get up-country, for the floods were out all over the lowlands and the valleys torn up by rivers. When it rains on the north coast of New Guinea, it *does* rain. In a *single hour*, not so long ago, as much rain fell as London gets during a whole average year! I had no difficulty in believing that story when the flood returned upon Hollandia, swept through the valley, laid many of the houses partly under water, and tried to climb into the—fortunately—high-piled house where I was staying. An appalling thunderstorm accompanied the wind and rain, and in the middle of the night and the storm one of the house-boys suddenly died of an obscure disease. I had just got over the same illness myself, and realized that I had cause to be thankful.

Although it was impossible to get up-country, the floods did not prevent visits to the extremely interesting sea villages of Humboldt’s Bay, which, but for the abandonment of cannibalism, remain as they were in the days before any white man had visited the country. As a matter of fact, very few do so even now; there are only two white residents in Hollandia, and no travellers ever come that way, with the rare exception of exploring parties. Two or three of these have started from Hollandia, as it is a good place from which to gain

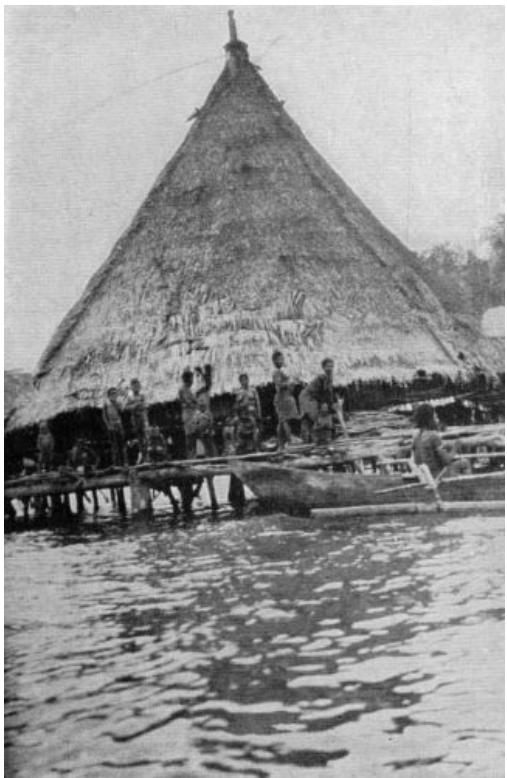
the interior in normal weather.

I took a boat, therefore, and saw one after another of the water towns of Humboldt's Bay. The houses in the first stood up out of the sea on very long piles, and were almost all built on the extraordinary Humboldt's Bay pattern, which has been handed down by the ancestors of the present people from time unknown. I have never been able to obtain any explanation of it, even from authorities who might reasonably be supposed to know.

The pattern resembles closely that of the pyramids of Egypt; it is four-sided and presents from every angle the same triangular view. It is not particularly well suited to the material used—sago-leaf thatch and split-palm flooring—and it includes in nearly every case useless projections high up in the roof like tiny blind dormers. Small openings shaped thus might conceivably be of use for ventilation in a heavy roof of tile or stone, but in thatch they can be nothing save a survival—meaningless now—from some type of building long lost in the mists of antiquity. There is no race in the world of whose history so little is definitely known as the Papuan. Any one's theory is as good as any one else's. If one chooses to suggest that the tribes of Humboldt's Bay came long ago from North Africa, and carried with them the pattern of the pyramid, I do not know who shall say one nay.

Into the largest house in the village I climbed, getting out of the boat onto a stage of open poles with the green sea washing below. Immediately I entered an atmosphere of riches and of peace. For these people *are* rich. On the immense floor of the house were seated, far apart, many parties of men and women, eating, sleeping, doing nothing at all. The place was full of food; it might have been provisioned for a siege. Great clay jars, like the thieves' jars in Ali Baba's cave, stood in many corners; each contained sago enough to feed a family for months. Dried fish was heaped up on overhead shelves; coconuts lay piled ready for eating or drinking. Outside the house there was a long, decorative frieze of turtles' skulls, blanched by sun and wind, a permanent advertisement to all who passed of the good living enjoyed by the village.

Native wealth—mats, thick and thin, spears, baskets, arrows, carved canoe paddles, mounds of fishing-net, dozens of ebony drums—lay heaped and hoarded on shelves stretched across corners of the house. The women wore little kilts of bark-cloth; the men had expensive belts of trade beads to hold up their loin-cloths. Everybody wore jewellery of carved shells, dogs' teeth, and tortoise-shell about his neck and ears. Every one was in good condition and contented-looking. There was a canoe to every man: a fine, long dugout handsomely carved in patterns of birds and fish, swift and easy to paddle for the longest distances. The house was dimly lighted—nobody wanted to read or write—and at any hour of the day



PYRAMIDAL SEA HOUSE, HUMBOLDT'S BAY

settlement. A whaleboat, lent for the occasion, furnished a better, if less romantic, means of travel than that offered by the many carved and outriggered canoes available. The crew, young men of Tabati, were greatly pleased with the boat, and sent it along at an astonishing pace, six paddlers taking the place of the usual oarsmen. Once in a way they broke into wild, sea-windy songs, things that were the very essence of savagery, and the sound of waves, and something more—something that lies at the heart of savage life, and that no man, learned or unlearned, has ever yet succeeded in defining.

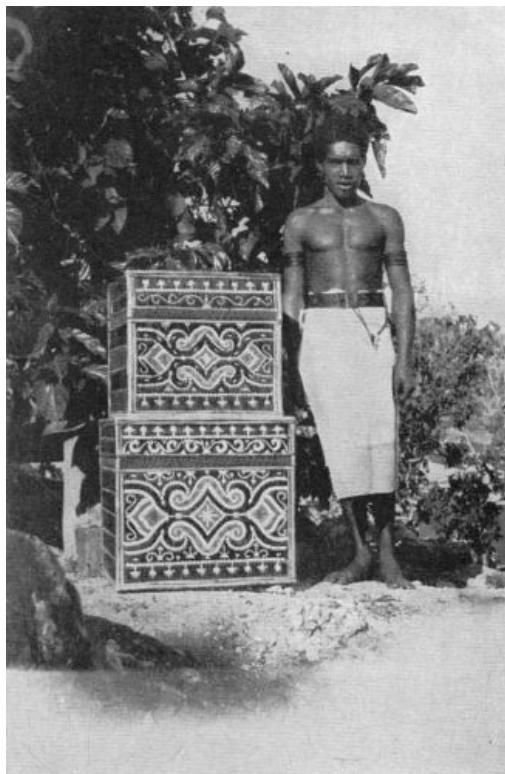
'*Yap-a-nee, Yap-a-nee, Yap-a-nee!*' one of these songs began, blowing down, as it were, from high winds to low. The youths took it up from one another, tossed it about, sang it with a strange, impersonal smile upon their lips. They did not know they were smiling, even as they did not know they were happy. I think they hardly even knew that they were singing.

Within a few hundred yards of the village, round a corner, the boat stopped, and remained lolling about in the great Pacific rollers, while her crew, with the simplicity of children, produced a bit of 'trade' looking-glass, handed it round, and adorned

was delightfully cool. Through the slatted floor came an enchanting pale green light reflected from the depths of the sea; and all day and all night there was a pleasant sound of water, salt and cool, washing among the piles.

I thought of London that February day—London with its hunger and its cold; its savages, far less clean and kindly than these ex-cannibals of Humboldt's Bay, far poorer. These men, I repeat, are rich. To have food in plenty, as much warmth as you wish, many superfluous possessions useful and beautiful, leisure unbounded—is not this riches?

Some days later, I went to visit Tabati, another colony of seaside millionaires, arranging this time to spend the night there, as it was half a day's journey distant from the



SHELLWORK BY DUTCH NEW GUINEA NATIVES

spend the night—a roof of sago-thatch set low on sago-stem walls, and approached, as were all the houses, by the most uncertain of open bridges.

Tabati is another of the sea villages. Its houses run far out into water that is never less than ten or fifteen feet deep. Most of them are pyramid-shaped; some are of the more slovenly modern pattern. There is a high street, a promenade, railed in on both sides, but the rest of the place is connected by mere tight-rope contrivances, a few poles carelessly laid on swaying piles, unprotected by any rail. One wonders what the mortality among the smaller children may be, and then one remembers that in these sea villages the children can swim as soon as they can crawl—sometimes sooner.

The hospitable house apparently harboured, besides its owners, all the small boys of the village, who left the visitor not an instant to herself. This torture—it is nothing less—is common to all savage towns, and, short of murdering the children, nothing can be done to mitigate it. *Fais ce que veux* is the motto of the savage child, and no one hinders him.

The house owned the unusual luxury of two rooms, and in the inner one I put up my bed and tent, hanging the latter over a rafter beam so as to enclose a

themselves for the triumphal entry into Tabati. It was truly a triumph! They had got the loan of a whaleboat, and they were bringing a strange, foreign woman with them, who was actually going to stop in the village!

Black paint was smeared on foreheads; large bunches of white bamboo-shoots were tied round arms, to flutter in the wind; red hibiscus flowers, reserved for this last moment, were stuck into thick, woolly *coiffures*. Then, with a dash and another wild burst of song, they sped round the corner into the village, pulled the whaleboat up on its haunches, so to speak, and sprang to the landing-stage.

It began to rain with fury, and I fled to the house where I was to

little private space for washing and dressing. Among savages privacy is unknown, literally from birth until death, and they find it hard to understand why any one should desire it. The walls of all New Guinea houses are semi-transparent (where there *are* walls; sometimes the roof rests directly on the floor), and day and night each crack or opening is filled by interested eyes.

There were unpleasant moments during the night when the camp-bed sagged and creaked on the too-open sapling floor, making one wonder, first, whether the floor would hold up—it did not look like it; secondly, just how much chance one would have of getting out alive if one made a sudden dive into fifteen feet of sea-water, entangled in a collapsed bed and a tucked-in mosquito net. But in the morning the six-inch gaps were six-inch gaps still, and the loose poles of the flooring still held together more or less.

. . . It was the bread-and-butter that did it. I had breakfasted on that luxury, accompanied by tinned meat, and the chief of the villagers, hovering outside, had cast such longing looks on the food that I had been impelled to give him all that was left. In Tabati they know about bread-and-butter and other rare delicacies, but they seldom—one might almost say never—get a chance of tasting them. The chief was overjoyed. He cut the loaf into the finest of slices, buttered them carefully, and, keeping a good portion for himself, distributed the rest among his favourites. After this, covered with butter and satisfaction, he took me for a walk about the village, and, with the air of a monarch conferring a decoration, told me I might see the inside of the Laki-laki house, about which I had already been inquiring.



SETTLEMENT OF HUMBOLDT'S BAY

The Laki-laki house, or men's house, is, under different names, the chief feature of all New Guinea villages. It is the temple, the clubhouse, the college, the bank and safe-deposit of the town. In it are stored the chief treasures of the tribe—feathers, images, dancing-masks, drums. The young unmarried men spend all their free time there, learning from the older ones the traditions and rules of the tribe. Women are never allowed to approach it; the penalty is instant death. No female foot had ever polluted the threshold of the Tabati Laki-laki house until the chief admitted mine, and one could see that the youths thought it a hazardous and unconventional proceeding. It may have been because of this that the chief suddenly staged a little scene that would have done credit to any picture studio—a scene with a distinct symbolic meaning. I was fortunate enough to get a gleam of sun by which to photograph the tableau, and the young men made no objection; they seemed to like being pictured.

One youth held up a formidable knife, another seized a spear. Over the head of the first the chief, with a ceremonious air, lifted a brand taken from the cooking-fires. Near the other, a second youth held high in the air a green branch of palm. So they stood while you could have counted twenty, and then stepped aside to let me into the house.

Knowing a little of the universal sign language used by savage races, I translated as follows: 'It is death for you to enter this house.' (Knife and spear.) 'But you are our guest and we have fed with you.' (Brand from a cooking-fire.) 'Therefore it is peace.' (Green branch, the sign of peace all over the world.)

After all this Bluebeard's-chamber business, there was very little to see; only a large openwork floor, big as a ballroom and lighted from underneath by the shine of green sea-water; a high, dim roof, slung with painted dancing-masks and moss dancing-wigs, with carved ebony drums and bunches of knives and spears; many soft cool mats lay on the floor, more than one little fire in its safe bed of damp ashes, and a good many bundles of betelnut, the Papuan's whiskey. The strings of skulls that decorate many communal houses were absent. Tabati has had to give up its ancient ways when such run counter to the ideas of the Dutch Government. 'Our fathers were cannibals, but we are not,' explained the chief, who, one felt reasonably sure, had enjoyed many a meal of boiled man in his early youth.



NATIVES OF HUMBOLDT'S BAY STAGING FRIENDLY SYMBOLICAL RECEPTION

The little wooden men who sit grinning on the top of a very high-peaked village home tell their own tale. Some of them—not all—are capped with human skulls. The skulls are not white and shining; years have weathered them to a curious greenish-grey. It is long since Tabati canoes came home with the dripping load of heads; long since the girls danced on the landing-stages of the town to welcome the warriors' return. This generation of youths has not seen, as the old men have seen, the torturing of captives, the preparing of human limbs for the feast. The chief, who is no chicken, could tell tales if he would. But he doesn't; he knows there is a Government on the coast.

If any one, wishing to travel along the North New Guinea coast, were to ask me how you do it, I should feel tempted to answer, illogically, 'You don't.' After Hollandia and the near Dutch boundary, there is no means of transit. In the early part of the year it is an extremely stormy coast, and quite unprotected. You may risk yourself in a canoe if you do not mind being upset several times, and drowned possibly once. You cannot hire, buy, or beg a boat of any kind, for the excellent reason that there are none. Hollandia depends on the monthly steamer for all connection with the outer world, and the steamer, once there, turns and goes back again.

You can stop in Hollandia—which is simply a prison some dozens of acres in extent—until you get tired, and then you can go out and drown yourself in a canoe, facing the rollers of the wet monsoon, or you can go back with the monthly Dutch steamer.

As for me, fortune favoured me by the call of a mission launch, just as I

was making ready to get drowned, and all my troubles were immediately over.

CHAPTER VII

TREASURES AND SECRETS OF PAPUA

PAPUA is a treasure-house, but its treasures are hard to get. Nobody is very rich in Papua, despite the fact that the small white population (only twelve hundred) lives within touch, almost, of precious metals, gems, orchids worth more than their weight in gold, and other valuables the existence of which is guessed at, though unproved.

Concerning the precious metals, I shall have something more to say. The flowers of the country, many of them valuable, are amazing and beautiful, but, contrary to common opinion, they do not decorate roads, forests, clearings, with the blaze of splendour that most people expect in the tropical world. It is in the temperate regions that you must look for masses of brilliant wild flowers lying open to the sun. The huge forests of equatorial lands keep their flowers, for the most part, where no one sees them but the birds—up on the top of the dense ocean of leafage that spreads far above the damp, entangled growths on the ground. Strange jetsam from this sea finds its way to the world below—a handful of gorgeous flowers, like butterfly-blue gladioli; a bit of thorny creeper, with weird blossoms like goblets of red flesh; a mass of something white, trailing, scented with an exquisite, nameless perfume.

The D'Alberti creeper, said to be peculiar to New Guinea, is, however, a flower that may be seen, with luck, in a good many places, and it is surely one of the most sensational flowers in the whole world. It is a parasitic plant, and climbs the tallest trees of the forest, wrapping them from root to crown in a robe of the most vivid scarlet. I have seen it thus on a river-bank, sending a hundred-foot column of flame up to the blue, burning sky, as if the forest were on fire. I have seen it, too, flinging itself from side to side of a dark-green forest arcade, making a bridge of fairy beauty from nowhere to nowhere. It is in detail very like wistaria coloured scarlet. There are blue and white varieties, but they are rare and by no means so lovely as the red. Being a parasitic plant, it is difficult to rear away from its natural home; so difficult, in fact, that up to the present no one has made it grow for more than a few weeks. The D'Alberti, queen of tropical flowers, is haughty, as a queen should be, and will not bear captivity.

Orchids grow by the cartload in all the bush country. Clearing with my 'boys,' a gang of native axemen, I used to watch closely the process of felling of any old rugged tree, as it is on these trees that the best orchids are found,

and some of the boys were quite clever enough to strip off the plants and hide them, until they could find a chance of going into the settlement on steamer day, when they used to take the roots to the steamer, and sell them to travellers at ten shillings a kerosene tin. As the kerosene tin holds four gallons, it is obvious that the purchasers must have received good value.

Almost nobody in Papua, save an occasional collector sent out by some scientific institute, knows one orchid from another; the flowers are used only to decorate verandahs, and to plant about walks and avenues. An orchid house is the commonest of ornaments on some small plantation, owned perhaps by a half-caste Malay or an impecunious trader, and many houses in the settlements have pergolas covered with orchids. White orchids and pink, yellow orchids and brown, the butterfly orchid and the star-shaped—these are the names given to blossoms that perhaps are worth hundreds of pounds apiece—and perhaps not. Nobody troubles.

There are other strange flowers, little known. Camping on the top of a mountain near Port Moresby, I saw, one day, in the bed of a creek, what looked like a daylight illumination. Rows of candles seemed to be burning on the rocks near the water. I climbed down and found a strange flower in full blossom (the month was August). It was shaped somewhat like an arum lily, but was rather narrower and heavier. Its length was ten inches; the spathe, as thick and soft as morocco leather, was folded about a pistil as big as a banana, and both were vividly yellow. These flowers stood upright, set stiffly among large leaves upon their long green ropes of stem. They ‘made a splendour in that lonely place,’ the like of which I had not seen before, and have not, elsewhere, seen again. I photographed the flowers and, later, showed the picture to a high authority in Sydney Botanical Gardens. He told me that the flower was not known to botanists; he could only guess vaguely at the family to which it belonged. Still, in August, it blossoms on the top of Wariarata, and any one who cares to take the trouble may find it.

Papua is full of good things about which no one troubles. This is not to say that the good things are for the taking of any one who comes. Far away though the country may be, difficult to reach, supremely difficult to get about in, it is no Tom Tiddler’s ground, where one may ‘pick up’ gold and silver, or their equivalents. If there are valuable things as yet untouched, it is because difficulties stand in the way, and because most residents of the country are too busy, or too poor, to spend time and money in ventures that may never return a profit. Also, things that lie at one’s own door are never very interesting—it is, proverbially, the distant field that is greenest. . . .

Still—what about the diamonds?

There are diamonds in Papua; most people know it, after a calm,

unenthusiastic fashion that rather deprecates any fuss being made over such a storybook, picture-show idea. And, indeed, the history of the rumoured field is painfully like the cheapest sort of film plot.

It was in the days of the East End gold-fields, some twenty-five years ago, that men who had been in South Africa first began to remark the formations seen about the Aikora River district. Blue clay, of the same kind as the clay of the great Cape diamond fields, is common in those parts. Further, the men who know diamond country say that the lie of the strata in general carries out the prophecy of the blue clay. And every geologist who has ever made a survey of the known parts of New Guinea has the same tale to tell—a typical gem country. Prophecies of big gem discoveries have not been few.

Why, then, was the Aikora never prospected?

It was, thoroughly, and with fair success—for alluvial gold. The natives in those parts and at that time were exceedingly treacherous; you have to ‘mind your step’ in the Aikora, even to-day. But in spite of attacks, the miners went through the country, found what gold there was, exhausted the field, and moved away again. . . .

I asked one of them, years after, why he, or others, had not followed up the diamond trail.

‘Because,’ I was told, ‘it’s so difficult to prove that diamonds are *not* in any place. Prospecting for gold is comparatively simple. You can quite soon prove that it’s not there, and go on till you strike better luck. But with diamonds, that isn’t the case. Prospecting is longer and more expensive, and if you wish to do the thing properly, it will take you quite a good while to prove that the diamonds aren’t there. Most of us prefer to go after gold.’

To-day, no one lives on the Aikora. It is a river difficult to navigate, difficult to follow, it leads through feverish country, and you cannot rely on getting any food, save what you bring with you. The whole district is buried in immense tropic forest. There may be diamonds there, and there may not. No one has tried to find out, no one now living, at least.

Old residents think that some one did once prospect for diamonds, or else chanced to find them. There was a miner, at the beginning of the century, who came down to Samarai very ill, lingered there for some months, and died. To a friend who had nursed him he left a bag containing various odds and ends. Among these were one or two diamonds and a sapphire or so, of good quality. It was supposed that he had found them somewhere up in the Aikora country, and that he had intended to go back and develop his find when he had recovered. But he did not recover. His grave is one of those that lie in the tiny, superseded graveyard of Samarai Island, looking out towards the palms and

the sea.

The heir of his effects tried to find the source of the diamonds, but did not succeed. Others tried later on, following up the course of the miner's various journeys, which seemed to point to Cloudy Bay as a likely place. But nobody was very much in earnest about it, and the matter dropped.

Sapphire Creek, seventeen miles from Port Moresby, and on the highroad to the hills, has always been something of a puzzle. Nobody knows how it got its name. People have suggested that the blue colour of the water had something to do with it; this seems plausible, until one discovers, through close acquaintance with the creek, that it never looks blue at all. Everybody is quite certain that the place must have been searched for gems, but nobody knows, or has heard of any one who ever did prospect it. Its gravels are very much like those of gem-bearing country—that is all one knows. But—sapphires don't show as such till you hold them to the light, and they take some finding in any case. The name may yet justify itself.

'There's Whiskey Creek near it; no one knows how that came by its name, but I never found any whiskey in it, worse luck, nor any one else either,' suggested an ancient miner, when asked if he thought there might be gems in Sapphire. Well, in twenty-one years, to my certain knowledge, nobody has tried to find out.

There is typical opal country about Port Moresby; but no serious prospecting has ever been done, chiefly because almost every one is convinced that somebody else 'must have' done it.

Lumps of true opal have been accidentally found more than once. Port Moresby thinks that if somebody hasn't looked, somebody ought to. Then it asks the latest price of copra, and when the boat will be in. . . .

Gold was for many years the chief treasure of Papua, and it is supposed by those who ought to know that there is a good deal of it yet to be found, though all the well-known alluvial fields have been worked out. The recent sensational Edie Creek discoveries took place just over the border of the Mandated Territory; they have brought nothing to Papua except the certainty that we have not yet exhausted our own gold deposits. It may not be long before more is heard of this.

Visiting and staying on some of the older fields, one saw much of the Papuan miner and his life. Nothing could be less like the typical rowdy, lawless field of fiction than the real gold-mine, as found in Papua. A Papuan gold-field is the sort of place to which any man, completely weary of the world, and desirous of perfect peace and solitude, might confidently retire. Claims are usually far apart, separated from one another by dense forest. The

field is always difficult to reach, always a long way from civilization. Often, on the older fields, each mile of the way was marked in blood; the pioneers died by scores of fever, ptomaine poisoning, dysentery, attack by hostile natives, sheer hard work. . . . The newest fields hang halfway between the extremes of civilization and its opposite, as represented by the planes that fly from coast to inland mountain, and by the wild and dangerous cannibal tribes that surround the diggings. But in any case the old bad days are over.

Humour, of the queer dry kind that accompanies a life of hardship, was by no means absent from these older fields. The waking of Tommy-the-Clock is still remembered by those who survive the Lakekamu days.

Tommy-the-Clock was so named because of an incident which happened at the Yodda Field on one of the rare visits of an Anglican clergyman. With the rest of the diggers. Tommy attended service in the little bark church—put up on the field by a kindly missionary, and commonly used as a theatre for cock-fights. Tommy was quite devout, but in the middle of the prayers he caused, unintentionally, a serious disturbance by the explosion of an alarm clock which he had stolen from the store that morning, and concealed down the leg of his trousers. The incident took the imagination of the Field, and he was never called anything but Tommy-the-Clock thereafter.

In time he died, at the Lakekamu, and his mates proceeded to bury him. During his life, Tommy had been famous, or infamous, for the variety of strong language that he could use on occasion. One admiring friend had even brought up a phonograph, and taken a record of his most notorious effort. After his death, when the coffin had been taken away to the forest, and there put underground, Tommy-the-Clock's mates assembled in the bar-room of the store. The phonograph was produced, the record put on, and the whole crowd, with perfect gravity, listened once again to Tommy's star-shells of amazing profanity. When the record had scraped out to an end, somebody called, 'One more drink for Tommy-the-Clock,' and the whole room, rising, filed solemnly past the phonograph. Each man, as he went, said, 'Luck, Tommy,' and poured his beer down the phonograph. At the end the record was broken. And so they waked Tommy-the-Clock.

It must have been a near relative of Tommy-the-Clock's—if nerve goes for anything—who found traces of gold about one of these mining graveyards, and immediately set to work washing out the gravel, regardless of the skeletons and skulls that turned up now and then in his 'wash.' A set of teeth, in fair order, came to light beneath his shovel one day. The digger, who was a thrifty man, took them to the storekeeper and offered to sell them. As the storekeeper had been in need of that very thing for some time, he accepted, and paid for the teeth in good whiskey. With a little wire and a good deal of patience, he

managed to make them fit, and, undisturbed by thoughts of the former owner, wore them for long years.

It was, I think, a prospector of Ferguson Island, who had what one may call the Adventure of the Chain Bed. The original owner of the camp had either sold or hired it to the digger, and gone away for some months. He had not been popular with the very naughty little men of Ferguson, and they had made more than one attempt on his life.

One night a small, wicked Ferguson chief crept underneath the piles of the house, located the bedstead, and, expecting to find no resistance save a fold of canvas, thrust his spear through the slats of palm that made the floor, up into the bed. There it met, unexpectedly, with the new spring, and the barbs of the spear, far from penetrating, were stopped and caught, so that the chief could not get back his weapon.

Wakened by fierce howls, and by what sounded like sobs and tears, the storekeeper jumped out of bed, took a lantern, and went down beneath the house. There he met an extremely angry little cannibal, dancing on one leg, screaming, and demanding back his precious spear. What sort of a white man was this, he asked, who set traps for people's spears, actually stole them from the owners? He wanted his spear at once, and he wanted damages—kerosene, or something else from the store, he did not much care what. But his feelings were hurt, his spear was probably spoiled for sticking anything bigger than a cat, and nothing short of a present would set things right!

One is sorry he did not get it; such magnificent impudence deserved reward.

Old gold-field days come back as one writes—days not so very long ago, and yet old indeed as the history of Papua goes—Papua, which was a waste of savages twenty-five years ago, which is now a commercial country of some importance, largely civilized and tamed.

There never was anything on earth, surely, like the 'Hotel' of the Lakekamu Field, where I stayed, waiting for a launch to take me down the river, during a fortnight or so. It was run by the storekeeper and his wife, a kindly and well-liked pair, both of them as respectable as any couple inhabiting an English cathedral close, although their guests, at times, were picturesque rather than conventional. The store and hotel were contained in a bark-and-thatch building of two rooms, one room being the bedroom of the host and his wife, the other being the indispensable bar. Meals were served on a log table nailed to the verandah outside. There was no charge for my bedroom, because it was a twelve by fourteen tent and fly, put up outside by my own boys, and no charge for meals, because meals were always free.

Men slept in rows on the floor of a bark-and-thatch shed close by, where the storekeeper's goods—tinned meat, flour, and rice—were kept. Their own mosquito-nets, pillows, and blankets made their bedding, and there was no charge for 'rooms' in their case, either.

All the same, the hotel did charge for something—whiskey and beer—and the amount consumed by the guests was supposed to furnish the entire profits of the establishment. I did not take either, but the host assured me 'it was all right anyhow, and I mustn't think of paying anything at all.' I have travelled the earth over since then, without striking any place that received guests on similar terms.

Less philanthropic, even in those days, was the 'hotel' of Port Moresby kept by a well-known ex-digger. It had, at the time of my first stay, twenty-one years ago, no other women guests, but there were a large number of miners and a few Government officials and storekeepers. These were sorted out—by what process I cannot venture to guess—into two different tables, known respectively as the 'gents' table,' and the 'blokes' table.' I was honoured by a seat at the former, but it had its disadvantages, like most honourable positions, since the blokes, unhampered by convention, and seated nearest to the kitchen, had the strategic advantage over us, and used it to intercept most of the best bits on their way to the superior, and more highly paid, table of the gents. If a fowl had wings or breast, none of us ever knew it—legs were our only portion; and as for a chop or an egg, when such rare delicacies appeared, they never survived the raking fire from even the first half of the blokes' lucky table.

With all my odd experiences, I never expected to keep a hotel—and a free one—myself; but that was what it came to, in Port Moresby, in 1912, the year of the Lakekamu gold rush, which ended so disastrously for most of those engaged in it. I had been lodging for some time, owing to the lack of other accommodation, in the half-built upper storey of a hotel which had been begun by some hopeful builder, and afterwards abandoned. There was a caretaker who let the few existing rooms, and so collected the rents, it was supposed, for his own benefit alone. Unfortunately, he was drowned by the natives of Kapa-Kapa (or so it was supposed), when landing near that village with a large sum of money in his possession, and no one came to take his place. The other inhabitants of the strange, deserted building drifted away; at last I only was left. Since I had nowhere else to go, I stayed on rent-free, happy and solitary, until the flotsam and jetsam of the Lakekamu rush began to make its appearance.

After that there was more company than I wanted. At least a hundred miners were camping all over the deserted hotel, and every one of them persisted in regarding me as the landlady. Clad in the rough, worn khaki

clothes of the fields, they would come to my room, and politely ask if they might stop. I abandoned all attempts at explanation before long, and merely gave the permission asked for. At nights, down in the grassy space below the unfinished first floor, where some one had meant to build a dining-room and bar, the gold-miners hung their hammocks, stretched their blankets, and fixed up their nets. They lit fires and cooked suppers; they played cards by the light of hurricane lamps. They sat, not round the fires, but as far away from them as they could get—for it was terribly hot—and told each other yarns of all the gold-fields in all the world, and all the odd mates who had died there. They were a rough, wild crowd, the worst of Australian fields for the most part, though some were of a better class. And I lived with them in the ruined, unbuilt hotel for many weeks, and they were as quiet and as well-behaved as a Sunday school out on a prolonged country ‘treat.’ Afterwards I heard that, persistently regarding me as the titular owner of the place, they had agreed among themselves I was not to be annoyed, and an inviolable rule was made that any one who wished to get drunk must go and do it elsewhere, not returning till he was entirely sober.

Heavy squalls that came late at night were a feature of that hot season; at times, the huge, crazy place, set on its impossible stilt legs, rocked so violently that most of us used to get up and come out of our rooms, holes, and hiding-places into the safer open. Often we expected the whole structure to fall in ruins, but somehow it never did.

‘I reckoned it would not,’ said, one stormy night, an old grey man who had seen strange things in many parts of the world. ‘I was pretty sure it wouldn’t. You see, some months ago, that fellow who used to have the place before you lent it to the town for a dance on the upper floor. Every one was a bit surprised, because he never lent anything he could help. But when the dance was over—and they did dance, too—he said, “Good-night, and thank you all; now I know that top floor *will* hold, and that’s what I wanted to know and didn’t!”’

By twos and threes the disappointed miners drifted away. The camp was empty; and now, where they used to play cards and yarn by the glow of hurricane lamps, the guests of a modern hotel dine under electric light, with fans humming overhead, and ice tinkling in the glasses, and the orchestra of a picture show playing outside. And I do not suppose that I shall ever again, voluntarily or involuntarily, keep hotel for the alleged riff-raff of a gold-field. But if I did, I should undertake it without any apprehension. For I know the gold-miner.

Papua has kept her many secrets well in years past, but the last few months, at time of writing, have seen a change. The splendid work of the

Australian Royal Air Force, and of an American commercial company, have together done much towards opening up unknown parts, and providing future explorers with a rough idea of what their work will be, before it is begun.

'Still-and-all,' as they say in Ulster, the country will keep its doors shut for many a long day. No ordinary plane can descend in the dense forest that blankets almost all inland Papua. For the present, hydroplanes have to do the work, landing on the rivers, or here and there, where air force surveys have marked out lake country. All that is in between—and that is a very great deal—can be looked at only, not touched—as yet.

Inland exploring will be carried out, in future, with a definite idea of what is to be found, even if the finding is very hard and dangerous work. But Papua, still, must be handled with gloved fingers. She can bite. Every airman takes his life in his hand when he flies over a country that would swallow up his plane, in case of accident, as utterly as the sea; that, in some places, would swallow himself—not figuratively, but literally, if it had the chance. And the man who has nothing to do with planes—about ninety-nine per cent of the population—cannot go inland more freely than before. Nor has the steamship service to Australia improved with passing years.

Time does march, however. Never again, one supposes, will the chief 'liner' running between Papua and Australia find itself in the strait that troubled the Cooktown schooner, thirty years ago. They had no engine, it was the southeast season, and head winds kept them back. The little ship's company, including several passengers of both sexes, ran short of water. Beer only, which in those days never ran short, was left.

'We drank beer for morning tea, for breakfast, for lunch and tea and dinner,' one of the survivors told me. 'We washed in beer, it was dreadfully sticky. We had nothing else for a week. . . . No, it wasn't done when we sighted Cooktown, but we were almost getting tired of it . . . for washing, I mean.'

There are secrets still untouched in the heart of New Guinea—more gold to be found, more oil; rivers to be traced, unconquered mountains to be climbed; large areas of unknown country to be visited, where one may discover races and customs unlike anything hitherto known to man. The country is a storehouse of new things. Every now and then a collector, sent out by some rich man or scientific society, finds butterflies and moths that no one has seen before; birds, too, undescribed in any work on ornithology. There are rumours of new animals—and sometimes, as in the case of the tree-climbing kangaroo, rumour justifies itself. Again—the legend persists, unsubstantiated through generation after generation—the 'devil pig,' many sizes larger than the common wild boar, has been seen by natives, but the white man has only come

upon its tracks. There are tales of an iguana larger than the largest, six-foot specimen known to hunters and collectors; a creature with the fierceness of a crocodile, much feared by inland tribes, who declare that it chases them even up trees, and tears them to pieces. It may exist, or it may not, but since the discovery of the Komodo dragons, in Malaya, the former supposition has become more probable. Tailed men are said, by the natives, to exist somewhere inland. Detailed accounts are offered of their anatomy and their ways—but the explorer, pressing day by day into the unknown, finds, day by day, that the tailed man ever eludes him. Invariably, the Papuan with a tail ‘all same doggy-dog,’ is just over the next range. . . .

Veiled women, wearing the full costume of an Eastern lady, eye-holes and all, have been found by explorers in the heart of a country where, as a general rule, short grass kilts, or nothing, are the custom.

A Government expedition, some years ago, was confronted by men in armour; it is true the armour was made of iron-hard split cane instead of metal, but it was complete, and not at all unlike the mediæval patterns worn by our own ancestors.

There was—is—a place where an expedition, starved out, had to turn back; where no one has ventured since. At that place, a lookout cut on the top of a mountain shows the explorers a distant view of something that recalls the wildest tales of Edgar Allan Poe. For many miles the whole country slopes and tilts downwards towards one central place, as the water in a basin slopes when the plug is withdrawn. In the middle of all there seems to be a gigantic funnel or opening. Where it leads to and what it is, no one knows. It is not the common volcano formation; the place is said to look as if ‘the country had turned inside out and fallen through.’ Some day, another expedition will go a little farther, and the secret will be told.

Outside the settlement of Samarai, a pretty island town, another of Papua’s mysteries lurks beneath the waters of a narrow strait. There, at a depth of some twenty-five fathoms, there is a giant octopus, living in an extinct submarine crater. It has been seen by quite a number of divers; the strait is a well-known pearl fishery, and both shell and pearls in large quantities have been obtained from it in past times. Now the place is fished out; nothing remains but the masses of magnificent shell that crust the neighbourhood of the giant octopus. The depth is great, but divers might venture, if it were not for ‘her,’ as the creature is called. ‘She’ has been described to me by one Silva, a diver, as possessed of eyes two feet in diameter, and tentacles longer than the masts of an island schooner. It was proposed at one time to get ‘her’ with the aid of an electrically exploded dynamite charge; but that necessitated careful placing of the charge, and no one could be found who fancied the job. Since the War,

more than one person has talked of depth bombs; but depth bombs are not stocked by the stores, and anyhow, as an islander callously stated, no one has any particular use for 'her,' even if 'she' were blown out of her hole.

One supposes, all the same, that the chance of securing genuine pieces of one of the rare elusive octopoda (or decapoda) may in time inspire some scientific society to look the matter up. The strait known to be inhabited by 'her' is a very narrow strip of water, only a few hundred yards across, separating the island of Gesila from the mainland of Papua. Mail steamers call within two miles. Small octopoda are very common about the edges of the strait, which seems to suggest that Gesila is a place specially suited to the octopus family.

Sea-serpents have been seen off the coast of Papua, and one of them enjoyed the unusual distinction of being vouched for by a high dignitary of the Catholic Church, the late Archbishop Navarre, who was in his study on Yule Island when an enormous sea-beast, of form unknown, rose out of the ocean and terrified every one on the shore so much that the people rushed inland and shut themselves up in houses—even the native armed police taking part in the general flight. The Archbishop saw the animal, and calmly watched it till it sank, after which he went on with his theological treatise. . . .

Pygmies have been, from time immemorial, known to exist among the mountains, but very few of them were seen until late years, when several pygmy tribes have come under scientific notice. The Dutch half of the country has the smallest people. In British Papua there are tribes that can fairly be called dwarf, attainable in about three days' journey from the coast of Mekeo. The women are no taller than an eight years' child, and the men are often under five feet. I have stayed among these people, and found them friendly and very interesting, amazingly strong and athletic, and fond of performing incredible feats of agility among the rocks and precipices of their country. They are very good musicians. Naturally they are cannibals and of a quarrelsome type, but in these days they are giving up much of their ancient fighting ways, and becoming peaceful. They do not, like most pygmies, use poisoned arrows; spears and clubs are their only weapons.

(At time of writing the American sugar research company has just discovered a new race of pygmies, living on a chain of lakes behind Lake Murray, and visited them by plane.)

Until a very few years ago it was supposed that native life ceased at seven or eight thousand feet, the higher and colder regions being inhabited only by wild dogs and mountain pigs. But it occurred to some one to go and test this theory, with astonishing results. Up to ten thousand feet wild men were found, unacquainted even with the existence of white people. They are a miserable

and degraded race, who suffer considerably from the cold of the nights, since they have no clothes and no blankets of any kind; and it never seems to have occurred to them that if they migrated a few thousand feet downwards, cold need never trouble them again.

Lately, Champion and Karius, the famous young explorers, saw a creature on Mount Victoria that had the body of a black-and-white dog and the head and face of a cat! No one so far has succeeded in shooting or capturing a specimen.

There is plenty of interest and excitement to be had out of Papua and its neighbouring countries for the most blasé traveller; plenty of profit too, for those who have some money to spend. Lately, an American sugar research party, in a few weeks' work, aided by a fine plane and capable airmen, found fourteen new kinds of sugar-cane, growing semi-wild in native gardens, and worth their weight in jewels for the sugar plantations of the United States. The search for oil goes on; any day may send the first big strike soaring towards heaven. Gold is transforming the territory that was once German; there again millions are to be spent on road-making, and many thousands have already been spent just to find the gold.

Luck may attend any one who journeys through the little-known parts of the interior. Interest is certain to do so, and adventure may. But no one need suppose that it is a matter, in any case, of a trip between steamer and steamer, and the spending of a few pounds extra. Money and time are wanted; plenty of both.

On the coasts and about the nearer inland places, one can see and enjoy a good deal. Close to the settled districts—in the native towns about the coastline here and there, that were savage not so many years ago—the traveller can find much to interest. Amazing native art and architecture, wonderful dances, astonishing dresses, curious, intriguing native customs, beautiful scenery, the loveliest bird life in the world, tropically splendid flowers and butterflies—all these lie within easy reach. There may be a local boat going down the coast: if there is not, it will be necessary to hire a launch and crew. Food must be brought from the ports. Travel of this kind is not so very dear: it is safe, and it is wonderful. . . .

Up in the interior you must have your carriers, a score or more; you must bring their food and your own, and tents and firearms for yourself and your licensed shooting boys, to ensure a supply of game. A few days' tramp inland takes you far from all traces of white influence, except the wholesome repute and fear of ‘Govamen.’ Here you can see the little men of the ranges, practically dwarfs, and their incredible houses bracketed on to needle-shaped peaks; you can witness dances still more wonderful than those of the coast,

hear strange savage music, see mountain scenery that no words can picture, or pictures represent. You can touch primitive man, living still in the Stone Age; you can (perhaps) sleep in villages of cannibal tribes, and find them good fellows, and friendly, though they will interpose an iron wall of reserve between themselves and any inquisitive questions about their man-eating ways. You may know the strange experience of looking, as over a precipice, down the long, long rise that your race has mounted, step by step; you can learn things that you will never impart, because there are no words in white men's tongues to represent them. You touch mystery here; adventure hangs upon your steps. . . .

Risk? Yes, to some degree. In the borderland, where little-known almost meets unknown, the tribes may show treachery; friendship may turn in a day, in an hour, to something else. It is more likely that nothing of the kind will happen; still, the chance is there. Much more immediate is the chance of trouble from fever. There is plenty of malaria; most people suffer from it more or less. If it happens to be 'more,' and if the attack takes place very far inland, there may be grave difficulty in getting back, or there may be no getting back at all. But, again one must repeat, this is only possible, not likely.

The crossing of flooded rivers and the adventuring of rapids in launches or canoes are the greatest dangers of the back country; dangers that cannot be avoided. Your carriers may run away, taking the stores with them; that is a serious trouble, as you may be starved, or reduced to such a low state for want of proper food that you cannot resist the attack of the always-present malaria. Still, Government patrol officers and a good few missionaries encounter these risks year by year, and survive them. Also, they encounter the risks of snake-bite, of attack from crocodiles, of accident, slight or serious, on the precipitous mountain tracks, and very seldom come to grief. The pleasure, to any one in good health and condition, and not afraid of roughing it, is well worth any risks there may be. The cost is another matter. You must have a few loose hundreds lying round if you want to travel right into the interior, and make camp at various places for some months—less is scarcely worth while.

Real exploring is for the very few, the supremely fit; for the strongest man at his best, and for those who have funds running into thousands. It means months of desperate exertion, danger of every kind that New Guinea can show. It has killed many a good man in the history of the country, some directly, others indirectly. African exploration is a mere flapper's game compared with the difficulties of Papuan travel, where there can be no carrying in litters, no use of any pack animal, save man; where much of the way is sheer torrent and precipice, and the terrors of the 'limestone country' almost daunt the hardy explorers of the Government themselves. Of this, the last chapter tells more.

People who think of settling in the country are advised to bring with them as much capital as they can raise—not less than two or three thousand—youth if possible, health certainly, and a disposition to make the best of things in general.

There are possibilities in the way of coffee-planting, coconuts, cacao, and several minor cultures. Rubber has made money; at present, the rubber planters are losing heavily.

Land is practically free, on ninety-nine years' lease. Labour is not dear, or difficult to get. In a recent report, the Lieutenant-Governor expressed surprise at the lack of response to the fine opportunities now offered for planters. These chances are, perhaps, more for companies than for the solitary planter.

No one should go to any part of the island continent of New Guinea in the hope of making a fortune. Fortunes are not made by individuals in the tropics. Other things, it is true, are to be found there, almost as desirable—to some—as fortunes. There is freedom. In the Western Pacific a man may do almost as he likes—live cheaply or dearly, as he chooses; spend his money on the things that he fancies, rather than on the things that a million neighbours think he ought to fancy. He can choose his friends, far away from the hen-witted mass of bridge-playing, party-going folk, the people who take committees as a drug addict takes cocaine, the people who, without waiting for death, have miraculously contrived to be ‘dust and shadows’ while they still live. He can take up his own land at a smaller cost than would be possible in any other country, work it by coloured labour, and taste the joys of making and growing things, without hard, personal toil. He can build beautiful houses of bush material for the cost of a bathroom ‘down South.’ He can recruit a crew of native sailors, and captain his own boat. If he can raise the money for a plantation, he should be able to feed himself and his family on it well and cheaply, and he will—with fair luck—be able to make a decent living out of it. For a single man there is something to be done yet in honest trading, up and down the coasts. Work at a salary is not easily found, and pay, in almost every line, is small. The independent man has best chance.

CHAPTER VIII

CANNIBALISM

To us who have lived in Papua many years, the attitude of newcomers and visitors towards the New Guinea cannibal is inexplicable. We are unable to understand why the tribal habits of a few man-eaters should excite such extreme and morbid interest in the outside world as they appear to do. Newspapers, especially, seem to be filled with an inextinguishable thirst for news about cannibals, or for the wildest of fiction masquerading as news.

Residents do not trouble much about the cannibal. Man-eating tribes are not to be met with, nowadays, save in the far interior, where the casual tourist never goes. Some few years ago, quite a large number of house-servants and outdoor labourers, in Port Moresby and Samarai, were cannibals, more or less reformed, and none the worse servants for that. Nowadays, only the older men, getting beyond work, could point to such a lurid past, and they are very far from wishing to point to it. Cannibalism, this long while, has not been 'done,' in the best native circles.

Nevertheless, so long as the world continues to exhibit a curious interest in the man-eater, talk about Papua is not complete unless he is mentioned. And it is true that thirty, or even twenty, years ago, he was a prominent feature in the landscape. Seldom, however, did he come up to the popular idea.

Fancy—and at times fiction—pictures the cannibal as a fierce, determined, literally howling savage, whose attitude towards plump and eatable whites is, broadly, that of the bird towards the worm. Actually, he is, for the most part, a nervous, timid, over-excitable creature, distrustful of the strange white race, afraid of it, and anxious to keep out of its way. When unavoidably confronted with something that is horribly and unnaturally white, mysteriously overdressed, and armed with strange fiery things that kill much more effectively than his own poor weapons, he does not stop to parley. If he cannot go away unseen—if, for example, the white demons are advancing on his village, with the clear intention of killing and eating every one in it (for what can he know about mining or prospecting?), he will fight, making up as best he can for his weakness by force of numbers and situation. He is not likely nowadays to capture a white man, but if he did, he would probably deal with his captive after his accustomed fashion—torture, followed by roasting alive. In the 'old' days of twenty-five years ago, he did this sort of thing often enough, because he lived near the coast or on it, and constantly came into

conflict with whites. He was, and is, firmly opposed to the occupation of his country in any way by white people. The various gold rushes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, penetrating as they did into totally unknown country, were the cause of many attacks.

I have talked to men who had seen the famous, or infamous, ‘Larder Valley’ of the Northern rivers; where the trees were hung all over with joints of white flesh, where white men’s intestines were found soaking by bunches in the streams, and dressed meat of human limbs—arms or legs, carefully boned, rolled, and put up in leaves—was picked up by the roadside. This was about the time of the Boer War, and it was fully avenged, in those somewhat lawless days, by parties of miners who went out and swept the villages clear of human life.

Such things happen almost never nowadays. There had been no attack upon whites for a long time, when, in 1921, two whites and a Chinese were killed by natives up the Fly River, the remains of one of the whites, Bell, being unidentifiable, save by his tooth-plate. The Fly runs through a district that is still unsettled and imperfectly known, though various exploring trips have done good work thereabouts. No similar incident has taken place, on the Fly or elsewhere, since 1921.

Where Government influence has touched the cannibal of to-day—and Government influence goes a long way inland now—he understands the risk of attacking white people. Since 1906, when the Commonwealth Government took over Papua from our own direct control, the native of the country, ‘half devil and half child,’ has learned much, and, on the whole, learned it very peacefully. In 1907, I saw and travelled among the natives of the western river deltas, who were at that time the very worst of savages and man-eaters. The same men, some years ago, were cultivating rubber and coconuts on plantations, and acting as cooks and washboys in Port Moresby houses. Their children have gone a step farther; they have learned to drive motor cars and motor lorries, and to do telephone work in town, a marvellous advance since 1908, when the natives of the coastal rivers used to raid one another’s towns for man-meat, and when white men were chased by flotillas of canoes, filled by armed savages, right into the Pacific Ocean.

I did not visit the rivers alone in those days; it would have been plain suicide. I went with a party who took armed native police and travelled in a small steamer. In many places we were the first white people that the natives had seen, and they were, as a rule, undecided as to whether they would run away and hide or try to wipe out the strangers. There were, however, no serious attacks.

Since then, the people have changed much, but the surroundings scarce at

all. A year or two ago I called, on my way to Thursday Island, at a Gulf town that was formerly most unsafe. It looks much as it used to do—long, black strand, with short, wicked waves beating on it; an immense ‘Ravi,’ the native communal building that is half a temple and half a clubhouse, standing like a giant, up-ended boat cut in two, against a dark Gulf sky; men all but naked, and women clad in a fringe of grass, straying about the beach; canoes drawn up, cooking-pots of clay bubbling on long ranks of fires. . . .

Twenty years ago, the old, shaven-headed women who stoop over the fires to-day, their wrinkled cheeks and leathery, wrinkled bodies perspiring in the heat, would have been cooking, just as they are now. But they would have been young brides then; their wrinkled faces would have been round and smooth, oiled with coconut oil and painted with red ochre. Instead of scanty and ugly grass fringes, they would have worn the pretty, full, striped fringes of the girls; shell lockets and beads would have dangled about their necks. In the cooking-pots, ranked all together, as to-day, the dinner would be bubbling, but that dinner might have been man-meat, boiled with herbs from the bush. One of the pots might have had a plump baby inside, neatly trussed like a fowl. . . .

This time they were cooking dinners of a more innocent nature, dinners that you and I would like very well ourselves. One pot had thick soup in it, a purée of sweet potato, bright yellow in colour. The woman in charge was busily thickening it with handfuls of forest-made sago, white and crumbling. She dropped this slowly, stirring all the time, so as to let the sago thicken without lumps. The next woman, a girl of to-day, with bright, brown, peering, monkey eyes, and a chain of dogs’ teeth about her neck, was cooking a quantity of small dainty crayfish, in a liquid that looked like milk, and was actually the white cream that is manufactured from ripe coconut meat, grated and squeezed, with a little water! On the top of another pot, green leaves, close-set, with a pleasant smell creeping out, announced that fish was being steamed. Yam, like giant, crisp potatoes, very white inside, was being cut up and boiled, not in water, but in the same white coconut cream used for the crayfish. . . . Not a bad dinner for any one, Papuan or European. People who can cook well need scarcely regret the loss of what was supposed to be the daintiest of meats, man-flesh.

Nevertheless, there are some who do regret.

There is, or there was lately, a village constable on the northern coast who administers ably enough the affairs of his small, isolated hamlet, far from civilized influences. This V.C. is mission-taught and well educated. He can read and write, and calculate the eternal sum about the eternal number of workmen working on a job, or the inevitable tank into, and out of which, water simultaneously pours, without making any more mistakes than you or I would

make. His dress is the Government village constable uniform, of navy serge jumper and sulu, with a large brass medal, inscribed 'V.C.' hung round his neck on a brass chain.

This V.C. has a father, a nice old man, who knows no arithmetic and wears no clothes, but who is very polite to white visitors, and quite ready to talk with them through the interpretership of his clothed and educated son. Some time ago, a Government official visited the old man, and the following conversation occurred:

'You have eaten men in your time, haven't you, K——?'

'Yes, Chief, I have eaten men.' (With faint regret in his voice.) 'That was before the Government said it was wrong, Chief. Of course I don't do so now.'

'Of course not, K——. But, tell me, weren't the men tough eating?'

'Well, Chief, I won't say that the men were not, but the babies were never tough; a baby is always the best of eating. Our women were very fond of babies, I remember.'

'How—fond of them?'

'Fond of them to eat, Chief. Indeed, they were too fond of them. They were always bothering us to go out and get them babies to eat; and, of course, it wasn't always convenient to do so.'

'One would think not. And has your son ever eaten man?'

'No, Chief, he will tell you himself he has not. He is too young. Besides, he was brought up in the mission school [Anglican], and they would not have liked him to eat anything of the sort, even a baby. My son is a very well-brought-up man.' He looked at the V.C. with the pride, familiar all the world over, of the father who has seen his son rise a step in the world beyond himself... .

There is another old man in the same district who has been a famous fighter in his day, though that day is long over. When last I visited this northern coast, a good many years ago, Bushimai was still something of a terror to his black neighbours, and no one had forgotten his goal-breaking adventure, when he escaped from Port Moresby, at the other side of the country and of the thirteen-thousand-foot main range, finding his way home through incredible difficulties, and taking his provisions with him, 'on the hoof.'

Six other escaped prisoners accompanied Bushimai on that wild trek. They never reached home—except vicariously: Bushimai ate them. It has been suggested that he borrowed 'For the Term of His Natural Life' from Port Moresby Library, before starting. I am sure if he had been in the habit of

reading books, Bushimai is the very man to have taken hints from Gabbett. But his natural genius for expedients seems to have enabled him to think out the thing for himself.

He had not forgotten this exploit, which resulted in another and longer term of jail. When the Government dignitary came round, Bushimai was quite ready to talk about it. He seemed to think that he had passed through a difficult dilemma with credit and resource. He knew, of course, that ‘Govamen’ was prejudiced against that sort of thing; but then ‘Govamen’ had caught and punished him for it, so the slate was clean to Bushimai’s simple mind.

‘I suppose you found them very tough?’ asked the official.

‘I did not find them tough at all,’ answered Bushimai, with some feeling.

‘Well, I can tell you that a friend of mine down the coast was talking to me the other day about that very thing, and he told me that men were always tough.’

‘Then I can tell you,’ said Bushimai with heat, ‘that your friend was no cook!’

‘No cook?’

‘Certainly not. A man is never tough if you cook him right. I grant you,’ said Bushimai, through the ever-ready interpreter, ‘that a man will be tough if you cook him carelessly; if you put him in a pot and boil him at a gallop, for instance, but no decent cook ever does such a thing. We bake men—or, I mean, we used to bake them, before “Govamen” told us it was wrong—in good stone ovens, built into the side of a hill, with the proper herbs and leaves added. And I can tell you, my chief,’ said Bushimai regretfully, ‘that they are not tough then. Far from it.’

‘You used to get lots of them when you fought, I suppose?’

‘Yes, when we fought, we got lots of fun of every kind. You have fought, too; you will know.’

‘Yes, I fought in Africa, when the men of your tribe were babies, many years ago.’

‘It is true, you are not at all young now. But I am older. Ah! isn’t it a pity that we are both too old to have a fight together? You are a very strong man, and so was I.’

‘It is certainly a pity. Will you have some tobacco?’ . . .

I did not see Bushimai, though it was reported that he was coming down to the coast. Two of his sons came instead. He has a large number of sons and daughters, having been numerously married. The daughters are, and have been, the belles of the Northern Division; the sons are reputed to be splendid men

and good subjects. Of the two whom I saw, one was not very remarkable, but the other would have stood out prominently among notable men in any company in the world. His muscles were like the roots of trees, he had a brilliant, fierce, intelligent face, and he moved with the spring and strength of a leopard. He was gaily dressed, in a waistcloth of painted tappa, much fringed, a number of red shell-money necklaces and bracelets, and a crown of interlaced dogs' teeth. He came on board the *Merrie England*, and surveyed, without any apparent surprise, her size and her many wonderful fittings. Even the 'light in a bottle' (electric light) that had brought forth howls of frightened wonder from native passengers and visitors, all the way up the coast, did not stir his calm. He looked at it unwinkingly, made no comment, and turned away again to his canoe, only pausing on the way to sell a basket of yams to the cookies at three times its value. . . . I think he hypnotized them; he was quite capable of it.

CHAPTER IX

DREAM HOUSES

AMONG the realized dreams of these past years are the houses that I have built and owned from time to time.

The first was called, appropriately, ‘Coralsands.’ A white man and a team of natives built it for me from my own designs, in a week or two, on the top of a high, narrow promontory that ran far out into the loveliest of Papua’s coral seas. There was almost nothing in the house that was not immediately procured from the bush. It was very long and narrow; it had a deep roof of sago-leaf thatch, brown and beautiful. The frame was bush timber. The walls were double, the outside being sago-sheath, and the inside sago-stem. There is no building material more satisfactory or more pleasing to the eye than these, which can be stripped from the nearest sago patch in almost any part of the country. Sago-sheath, which in its natural state protects the base of the young leaves, is a stout waterproof material, obtainable in good-sized sheets; it is satiny-smooth, and its colour a beautiful brownish-grey. Sago-stem, as its name implies, is simply the stalk of the immense leaves, cut into suitable lengths. It is very light, and has a fine natural polish.

The floors of the house were black palm, split and laid closely together. This palm is as tough as whalebone, and you can cut lengths of seventy or eighty feet from it should you have occasion to do so. One or two palms will floor a house. Floors made in this way, if properly laid, are level, with very slight corrugations; they allow the free circulation of air from underneath, and let all dust sink through. Nothing could be healthier or cooler.

This house had shutters of plain wood, but sago-sheath could have been used, and would probably have been better. There was no glass; the length of the house and number of windows allowed one to open and shut according to the direction of wind or rain, and have light at any time.

The sitting-room, which had a marvellous outlook over many-coloured coral reefs and sea, was decorated with a frieze of pearl-shell, which shone marvellously against the soft browns of roof and wall. Its ornaments were nearly all shell or coral, brought from the reef below, and the gardens were adorned here and there with curious coral baskets and basins, bleached snow-white in the sun.

This house was on Sariba Island, two miles from Samarai Island, where the second of Papua’s only two towns is situated. I had a cutter and crew, and used

to sail backward and forward from the house to Samarai. I lived alone there for two and a half years, did much writing, much touring about the reefs and islands in my boat, and a good deal of thinking. The latter ended at last in the sale of the house to a local missionary society, and the building of another on the Papuan mainland opposite.

This house, which had three hundred acres of forest belonging to it, was named 'Marana'—daylight—because it looked towards the east. It was in the heart of the forest, with a distant glimpse of sea far below. There never was any place more beautiful.

The house, too, was beautiful; built of the same materials as the last, with a frame of finer timber, and more elaborately worked sago-stem and sago-sheath. I lived there almost a year, cleared a good deal of ground in the enormous forests, with the aid of a team of northern river head-hunters, and prepared the way for various economic plants. Misfortune—not mine—and death that followed it obliged me to leave 'Marana.' I have spoken of it here because I know that there are many people who would intensely enjoy, as I did, the work of building, clearing, burning off, planting; who would give up a good deal of amusement and small luxury, in order to own their own lands, see their own timber fall, draw from the inexhaustible forest the materials for almost everything they might want to make or have, and, with it all, experience what no dweller in civilized lands can know—the meaning of true freedom.

If I were asked what I have most enjoyed, in all my life, I think I should say the clearing of that forest—my forest. No one who has not done clearing can imagine the delights of it. You have obtained from the Government so many acres of forest, paying nothing for it but a few shillings for your ninety-nine years' lease; you know that you will have no rent to pay for ten years, and after that only a few pence an acre. The place is yours to dispose of for a century....

Your team of 'boys' for clearing work has been collected and signed on; they are your servants for three years, provided you treat them well, and their wages will be no more than ten shillings a month each man. Just before full daylight, when the wild birds of the bush begin to sing and scream, foremost among them the rude cry of the bird-of-paradise, you will wake, automatically (for one goes to sleep early, in the bush), and, flinging on a wrapper, go out on the verandah for roll-call. The sun is rising now, and your native labourers, dressed in cotton loin-cloths, or in the native next-to-nothing of dried leaves, stand in line, ready to answer names, all but one boy, who has been told off to go ahead with the cooking. After roll-call comes medical parade; cuts and sores are dressed, medicines, if necessary, given out. Then you go to breakfast. By the time you have had your leisurely meal, the boys will be at work under

their gang leader, and the cheery sound of axes or the slash of clearing knives comes back from the still-standing wall of forest, making you realize, if you have never done so before, the full significance of the term, 'echoing woods.' First go the knife-men, with their three-foot-long weapons, slashing away at the underbrush and clearing up for the axemen who are to follow. One by one the big trees fall to the accompaniment of wild screams and singing, and by the middle of the day, your boys, under your orders, have transformed a good slice of landscape into something very different from what it was at dawn. . . .

Power? Authority? You can revel in both to the top of your bent. They come to you red-hot. You have been down to the sea, taken your whaleboat across to Samarai. You return, after a day of absence, walk up the long dark forest track and see, ahead of you, a break of light that was not there yesterday. For the first time in centuries, the sun has touched the earth of those dusk acres. For the first time, since those hills beyond were made, man may look upon them from the valley below. And you have done it. . . . Power?

When the noon halt comes in the work of the day—afterwards, too, when the work is ended, it is time to see what has been discovered. There is always something. What! a stream, where nobody guessed there was any! Look! that's a hill of good size, the very site for a house—but while the forest was unbroken, it remained unseen. Why, there's a clump of sago, in that low, marshy spot; food for the boys for months, if you knock them off to cut and make it, by and by. There's a good half-dozen of kassi-kassi logs among the fallen to-day; you never thought you had any, but the bush knew better, and there's your hardwood for the frame of your house; and won't the grindstone be needed, when they set about cutting it up! For kassi-kassi is hardwood indeed, vegetable steel. . . . Vegetable whalebone, too, has come down with the felling; that's black palm, for floors. And there's red cedar, glorious timber; a fine trunk, big enough for a carpenter to make you a dining-table out of one sheer slice. There are thousands of yards of 'bush rope' on the ground; liana, some folks call it, natural cordage, strong as best manila, and nothing to pay for it.

Nothing to pay. . . . You are to find out the full meaning of that by and by. There will be store bills to pay, and wages, and the price of the many things that are always being wanted by that daughter of the horse-leech, your little sailing vessel. You will buy furniture (if you cannot find a carpenter to make it), you will buy kitchen stuff . . . but not one of them will you value half so much as the things that you do not buy. The potatoes and pineapples that grow, magnificently, on the virgin soil you have cleared; the sago jellies that come out of the forest instead of the shop; the stalks of green maize, food for gods, grown among the fallen logs, maize that is ready in two months from planting,

that goes on cropping and cropping all the year; tomatoes that spring anyhow and every how, without care; eggs from fowls who feed themselves on bush insects, and scorn your civilized diets; all these things will have a savour for you that no other food could possess, just as the timber, the rope, the roofing, taken from your own land, are worth far more to you than sawn American pine and sheets of iron bought in Samarai.

R. L. Stevenson, on his Samoan plantation, used to lament the perversity that caused him, again and again, to spend his mornings doing half a crown's worth of work in the grounds, rather than twenty pounds' worth in his study, and further, to feel absurdly virtuous over this same waste of time. Every one who has owned land, tropical land especially, will understand. If I remember rightly, R. L. had a good deal to say, too, about the pleasure of directing native labourers; of imposing your own will and caprice upon a landscape, and seeing it change at your desire. He must have been well paid for his 'waste'—in one sense at least.

Tree-planting in the tropics is a delight to impatient people. If the soil is good (and the soil of a cleared forest always is good) results are surprisingly quick. You can put the seed of a delightful flowering tree in the ground on Christmas Day, and see the tree up and blossoming, twenty feet high, by next Christmas. You can thriftily lay aside the stone of the prize mango some one has sent you, bury it, and in three years pluck your own fruit from a heavy-trunked mango tree that looks as if it had been there forever. You can sow poinciana seed, and make the landscape a fire of scarlet-blossoming avenues in eighteen months. The little black shot from your breakfast pawpaw will be fifteen feet high, with a sackful of dangling melons under a crown of palmy leaves, eight or nine months after you have thrown it out of the window. You can amuse yourself making holes with the point of your parasol in unworked ground as you walk, dropping in a maize-grain, and stamping it down with your shoe, confident that there will be quite a decent stalk of corn there in a few weeks' time, with no more care. If you want a marketable crop, there must be digging and raking, but how much more amusing to supply the kitchen with the parasol point and the shoe!

Of life in the forests alone, much more remains to be said, more than could be said with any hope of being understood. Those who have known and desired and possessed the forests will understand without being told.

There are dangers; not the dangers of falling timber, snake-bite, fever, unruly labourers, that readily occur to the mind. These are the pepper and the salt of forest life; one might miss them if it became too safe and civilized. No, the danger is something more subtle; it lies in allowing yourself to like the life —too much.

There are certain well-known stages in solitary bush existence. The first is loneliness. Morning is busy, cheerful; no one is lonely in the morning. With late afternoon, things change; night is coming, night, the cousin of death. . . . At sunset, instinctively one watches the track for visitors, knowing quite well that none are to be expected. Dark is heavy, haunted.

The second stage brings resignation. One can get on without the world, without people, other than these shadowy brown folk who do not count as such. One reads much, thinks a good deal. Less than before, one wants to get out the boat and go to the town. The dark is—only dark.

The third stage comes with a certain secret delight. Who said people? Who needs people? How could one sit for hours watching the orchestra of the wind in the grasses and the trees, seeing, almost hearing, the tiny treble of the smallest fronds, the deep, slow bass of the great boughs, all striking different notes from demi-semi-quavers up to semi-breves, but all in the same time, moved by the same perfect beat; how could one hear the crackling of bark that expands in the sun, the secret malicious whisper of thatch-edgings under the southeast breeze, the little tick-tock of the gecko talking to its mate—if people were in the way? People! . . .

If people were here, the voice of the forest would be silent. No longer would the Papuan cuckoo, that sings a strange, small tune among the summits of the cedars, exult, almost wickedly, in its knowledge of the things that are withheld from you. The strange, dead stillness of old clearings, places where a giant tree has fallen, razing its way through timber and underbrush alike, where the bush stands about like a wall, and there is no remembrance of any outer world, would no longer seem alive to you; you would not know, as you know now, that that sinister silence does not simply occur; it is kept. You would not feel the spirit of the forests drawing you, as the Falls of Niagara draw the little boats that whirl on the river miles away. You would not shake with anticipation at the thought of secrets unknown to man almost within your grasp. You do not want people now; you are indifferent to them.

That is the third stage. The fourth, when it comes, finds you determined against seeing any white person. Natives do not matter; they are ghosts in a land of shadows, for all but the daily work that still goes on. You neither like nor dislike natives, but you are growing to hate the race that is yours. If you see sails beating in from beyond the reef, if the far-away crash of footsteps on dead leaves warns you of shod feet approaching, you hide.

The fifth stage, if you go so far, is death, of body or of mind.



THE AUTHOR'S FORMER HOME ON SARIBA ISLAND
Built of sago palm decorated with pearlshell

I have been through two, and halfway through the third. Perhaps it was as well that Fate came and closed the gate of the forest, and opened the door of the towns.

The last house which I built, and which I still own, is a cottage of timber and iron, four rooms, set on the lip of a precipice that overlooks the famous waterfall of Rona, twenty miles inland. This was built for the most part by a half-caste carpenter, under my orders. It is far from the great forests; pale eucalyptus and barren grasses grow about it, and during a great part of the year, fires scorch the neighbourhood, for it is in the 'dry belt' of the Central Division. But for beauty and wonder, when great Rona, three hundred feet high, is thundering in spate, and the spray spreads rainbows over the thousand-foot cliffs surrounding, there is nothing to match it.

My own home, in Port Moresby, the one in which I hope to end my days, was not built or designed in any way by myself. Perhaps its peaceful loveliness, above the blue of a sea that never changes, a loveliness undimmed by any memory of sadness, is the best of all.



RONA FALLS, PORT MORESBY, FROM THE AUTHOR'S COTTAGE

CHAPTER X

STRANGE THINGS IN THE SOLOMONS

By those who live in them, the Solomons—half in jest, half in earnest—are called ‘The Sorrowful Islands.’

There is some ground for the slur. Beautiful as these islands are, even to their titles (what other group owns such a bouquet of names as New Georgia, New Florida, Ysabel, San Cristoval, Bougainville, Choiseul?), they have a most unpleasant climate, hot, damp, and varying little from season to season. Fever is common, and there is not much in the way of commercial or other profit to attract the would-be settler.

No, on the whole one cannot advise the man who loves island life to choose the Solomons. Yet I have had good times in the group.

It was in 1909 that I first passed through on the way from Papua to Sydney. Jack London and his wife were there at the time, but, although our ships actually crossed, I did not meet them. Poor, splendid Jack London, the Villon of the nineteenth century, with his shining talent and brave heart, and his bizarre delight in brutality and the criminal world! He had only a little while longer to go in those days, and the conditions of life in the Western Pacific were fast pushing him down the hill. The very sun of those equatorial regions, life to so many, was death to him; he hated and feared it. Fevers racked him, the hardships of island life shook his ebbing strength. He fled from the Solomons; the Red West of the Pacific was not for him; rather the icelands and midnight suns of the Klondike, the silver, temperate summers of California, where so soon he was to end.

To each, his passion for one spot of the world. And there are some, even in the Solomons, who love their homes beyond all telling; who will never look for a kinder climate, as long as they remain above earth. . . .

Between 1909 and 1929, the Solomons have changed very little. A few more houses crown the peaky hills of Tulagi, a few more launches ply from island to island; considerable areas here and there have been planted with coconuts. But in the main, they are as they were then, when the world was a good deal younger, and Jack London was alive and writing, and I, a smaller but a happier soul, had scarce begun to wear out typewriters.

In Tulagi of those days, the few inhabitants usually came aboard the steamer as soon as she arrived, with the intention of enjoying a tremendous

spree. They did so, on that day of 1909; and we of the passengers who did not find our delight in unlimited whiskey, arranged something quite as 'sporty' and much more interesting—a dynamite party. It was, and is, illegal to fish with dynamite, but nobody cared for that. With a daring spirit in charge of the excursion and the dynamite, we all went off from the ship in bathing-kit and rowed to a spot where shoals of fish were likely to be found. Thrills were not wanting, for the leader of the expedition persisted in cutting his fuse as short as possible, and in keeping hold of the plug till the last moment, regardless of possible accidents. When you go dynamite fishing, you begin by inserting a detonator and a bit of fuse in a plug of dynamite and making a watertight joint with soap or clay. Holding the plug ready, you watch your opportunity, and as soon as a shoal of fish is seen, you light the fuse, keep it in your hand as long as you dare, or as your companions will let you, and throw when you judge that you are likely to lose your life if you do not. As many as a hundred fish may be killed and disabled by a single shot; I have seen an entire shoal of mullet floating, helpless, on the top of the water, after one charge. I have also seen quite a number of one-handed and one-eyed men, who had paid with their hands and eyes for the luxury of a fish dinner. . . .

In Papua, years ago, on the Yodda gold-field, there was a miner who often went out dynamite fishing in the river. He was always careless, and one day his carelessness went too far. The plug exploded prematurely, blowing off both his hands. His mates, when they found him, carried him to his camp, and tended him like so many mothers. Grateful for their kindness, he, nevertheless, kept ceaselessly begging them to let him die. He did not want to go on living, crippled, he told them; what was there in the world for a handless man to do? And further, he had a right to choose whether he lived or died—so said the unlucky miner.

They called a meeting. The Yodda miners sat in solemn council, and discussed the matter, with the coolness, the thoroughness, and the perfect disregard of time that characterize these children of the bush. At the end, as they could not agree, the question was put to the vote. Should X be allowed to die, or not?

The ayes had it. And one of their number, a friend of X, went up to his tent, and then and there loosed the bandages that kept him from bleeding to death. So he died.

No one was to lose hands or eyes on this occasion, and nobody was to benefit much, in any case. The stick of dynamite, properly 'skied,' went off at the right time, and every one, as agreed, jumped promptly overboard, careless of the fact that the water was swarming with sharks. We didn't get a single fish; the charge perhaps had been heavy, but at any rate they had sunk—all that

the sharks did not snatch. Never before or since have I been in the water so close to a shark that I could have hit it; and I am not anxious to renew the experience, even though everybody assured us that sharks would not touch human beings while there were plenty of fish about. Possibly the explosion may have shaken up the sharks, big as they were; at all events, we had no accidents.

Among the boat party there was a middle-aged official, a man with a famous name. He had not joined the swimmers; he sat in the whaleboat, fully clad, and looked on enviously. It seemed that he knew all about dynamite fishing, and had practised it in many waters; but he did not attempt to join us in our sport. No scruples about law-breaking kept him back, assuredly; if he had been troubled in that way, he would have stayed in his cabin, and pretended not to guess what was going on. We all knew that he was an excellent swimmer—but there he sat, arms folded, looking on at the fun, with a sigh. . . .

Years before, when he was very young, and little burdened by the thought of family ties and family obligations, he had been stationed among the Gilbert Islands, where, at that time, the most wonderful tattooing in the Pacific could be seen. In a mad freak, he decided to have himself tattooed. It was done, most thoroughly, by a distinguished native artist, and young X was marked for life. They said that the patterns and pictures stood out marvellously on his white skin, in different shades of blue; that even when undressed, he appeared to be fully clad. In fact, no savage of the seas could give him points.

Time passed, and X left the Gilberts, and began to rise rapidly in Government service. With his cleverness and his family connections, it became apparent, before long, that the highest seats of all were not impossible to him. But . . .

But—tattooed white men are not ‘bien vus’ by Government dignitaries, in the Islands. And promotion, for X, never seemed to go beyond a certain point, in spite of his abilities and his fine record. The good things passed him by; the seats of the mighty were filled by some one else. He seemed a bitterly disappointed man at the time I met him, and when he died, years after, he was still a minor official. Even the Pacific, that huge grave of buried hopes, can never have seen a more striking example of a wrecked career.

Twenty years after, like another Musketeer, I returned to the Solomons. Tulagi had given up violent drinking, now, and there were a good many more white people. I decided to stay for a while, taking shelter in the local hotel.

A little earlier, I had been travelling in Queensland, and for a few days had put up at a large provincial hotel. It possessed a talkative housemaid, who cheerfully related to me the details of the war that had been carried out by the

proprietors against a species of vermin that she called ‘permanents’—meaning by that, travellers who made prolonged stays.

‘We’ve about got rid of them now,’ she said, in a tone that rather suggested cockroaches or fleas. ‘We put it up on them, and put it up on them, one way and another, till we had the last of them hunted out, and now’ (triumphantly) ‘it’s nearly all one-nighters or weekers, and almost none of them’ (still more triumphantly) ‘is wowsers.’

She was a decent creature, and I think she had forgotten that I was myself a ‘wowser’—that is to say, a non-drinker. She even said that I was ‘almost as good as a gentleman’ in the house, and, knowing how little use, as a rule, the outback Australian hotel has for women travellers, I was (I hope) sufficiently grateful for her kindness.

The Queensland hotel, I found, was not the only one that could ‘put it up on you,’ in various ways not connected with money. A blank must be left here. It ends with the Government’s offer of a furnished house for the period of my stay in Tulagi, and with my very grateful acceptance. If I had known—but I should have accepted, in any case. Are not strange experiences the very soul of travel?

The house stood on the highest point of New Florida, looking down over leagues and leagues of blue empty ocean, with green islands lying everywhere afloat, and glittering palm-fronds weaving their bright nets across the view. I liked the view, liked the place, and took it.

If I had known why it was unoccupied—but nobody mentioned that.

It stood by itself on the high crest of the island; there were two other houses fairly near, but none actually within call. One cannot shut up a tropical house at night; I slept with all windows and doors open. The boys, instead of camping on the verandah or in the kitchen, as native servants commonly do, protested their unwillingness to sleep there at all, and went down every night to the police barracks on the beach. They said they were afraid of the bushmen—but as New Florida is a small island, fully under Government control, this sounded rather like nonsense to me.

It was quiet up there at night—very quiet, with only the sound of the sleepy breeze among the palms, or the sudden rattle of rain falling on an iron roof, to break the stillness. Once or twice, during the fortnight that I spent there, I woke up suddenly, disturbed by something I could not define; and more than once or twice I was violently aroused by strange noises occurring during the late, or early small hours. Half-asleep still, I used to hear loud thumps on the roof, and tell myself, vaguely, that it was the big birds coming down from the mountains (although, in waking hours, I remembered perfectly well that I was

not in Papua, and that there were no big birds and no high mountains near). On one or two nights, such a crash of sound erupted apparently from nowhere that I was moved to get up, take my torch, and go looking for possible causes. I never found any, and never saw any trace of human beings, black, white, or coloured, about the grounds.

It was not until after I had left the house, and gone to stay on another island, that I heard an amazing story.

The house belonged, by rights, to a certain prominent official, who preferred not to use it. He had lived in it for a little while, and during the time of his stay, had constantly been disturbed by violent and inexplicable noises. On one night, when he had risen, like myself, to try and find the source of the trouble, he heard a crash of sound that seemed to come from the kitchen. Hurrying there, he was just in time to see his cat fall violently down from the sky, outside the kitchen door. The cat was dead, and further, it was split like a kippered herring, from one end to the other. There was not a soul about, and there was no apparent cause for the noise, or for the mysterious descent of the cat.

The official made no comments; he simply went somewhere else.

There are people in the Solomons who say that some of the native sorcerers know more about the occurrence than they choose to tell; others maintain that the whole thing could be easily explained, if anybody looked into it. It is certain that the official who owned the house was unpopular with the natives. But I was not unpopular, so far as I knew, and the noises disturbed me quite as much as they disturbed my predecessor—although I never saw cats, or anything else, descending from heaven. I leave the problem where it is, remarking only that the sorcerers of Papua have been known, from time immemorial, to perform feats of materialization that rival anything done, or claimed to be done, by famous mediums; and that they seem to specialize in the business of producing ‘apports’—occasionally live ones. The natives of the Solomons and of New Guinea have much in common; certainly, they seem to share similar tastes in sorcery.

I did not see nearly as much as I should have liked of the outer Solomon Islands, chiefly on account of a curious disease that appeared to be prevalent at that time among the engines of the steamers and launches running to Malaita. It seemed to affect them very suddenly, and always came on just after arrangements had been made to convey me to that unquiet island. After three vessels had fallen victim, one after the other, I began to feel like the sensitive person in Barry Pain’s book, who ‘quite understood, when you drew long sighs, and said there were times when one preferred to be alone, that she was really not being pressed to stay to tea.’ . . .

The Government, hospitable to a degree in every other way, was not (so it appeared) pressing me to stay to tea—in Malaita. I thought I could have managed the trip, nevertheless, if I had been very much in earnest, but—

I had seen something of Malaita, twenty years earlier, and knew it to be little changed. Also, in the interval, I had seen many previously unknown and unvisited fighting towns of Papua, that for general interest, and particular viciousness, certainly ‘laid over’ anything Malaita could show in a month of Sundays. It did not seem worth while to trouble. . . .

And after all, when I went to stay on a plantation in Rubiana Lagoon, I saw plenty of the Malaita man.

Malaita, a hundred miles long, is by far the most densely populated island in the Solomons, and at present almost the only reliable source of plantation labour. It is also the most notoriously lawless and defiant island in the Western Pacific, and in that particular has not advanced one iota since 1909. There have been many murders of white people; the most notorious occurred in 1928, when two white Government officials, and a number of natives, were murdered by the Malaita folk, close to the island beach. The printed reports do not tell all the truth of what was done by way of revenge—punishment one cannot call it—and perhaps the ugly facts are best left untold.

Certainly, wild islanders cannot be permitted to slaughter official tax collectors (much though a taxed community may feel inclined to sympathize with the act), and certainly, savage nations should be civilized; that is the white man’s burden, of which we hear so much.

But they cannot be civilized, and murders cannot be punished, by sheer neglect on the one hand, and the adoption of purely savage methods on the other. What has been done in Papua, in much less than twenty years, could and should have been done in the Solomons. It is almost incredible, but true, that the interior of this comparatively small island is still practically unknown, while the enormous extent of country formerly known as British New Guinea, in spite of colossal difficulties and dangers, has been almost all mapped out and explored. Towns that were very hells of cannibalism and murder, have been so far reformed, without violence, and without destroying their natural primitive life, that they can furnish excellent labour, including even cooks and chauffeurs, for the white settlements. Places where no man dared to land without an armed party, in 1909, are now peaceful plantations, with white women and children living on them. Punitive expeditions have become unknown; if a murder (usually of natives) does occur, the man or men responsible are discovered, arrested, and punished, and the tribe is not made to suffer. All this, and more, in Papua.

Malaita, on the contrary, has been left alone as far as exploration goes, and so bedevilled and banged about when a white man was killed (a matter of fairly frequent occurrence) that the seed of future murders must have been freely sown, and will inevitably come up in due time.

These methods are forty years out of date, and the sooner that fact is realized, the sooner the Malaita man—a really fine and intelligent fellow—will quiet down and consent to work without, every now and then, attacking or murdering his employers.

That this is a very real danger, I understood, after staying for a while in Rubiana Lagoon. It is, by the way, the most beautiful and devilish place in the whole Western Pacific. Beautiful, because its forty miles of length, mostly shallow, is covered with innumerable exquisite islands, bouquets of green loveliness, and the colours of its shoal waters, green and blue and opal, are beyond all description. Devilish, because murder lurks everywhere unseen, because the climate is fearful, and the mosquitoes maddening; also (as a natural consequence) fever is the common lot. If one goes to visit another plantation, it is long odds that the manager appears with a blanket round his shoulders, his face yellow and drawn, and his limbs shaking, or else, his boy tells you that ‘Master lie down, too much sick,’ and you must go away.

But the beauty of it! The plane of chrysoprase and opal, set with pale bright islands; brown little houses looking out from woods of palm; a long way off, soaring above palms and islands and sea, the pale-blue peaks that are Kulimbangra and Choiseul. . . . If one could wipe out malaria, as it has been wiped out in other places; if one could see justice done to the unlucky Malaita man, see him tamed and civilized and made safe as an employee—what a paradise for planter, or traveller, the place would be!

A little dinghy with an outboard motor takes one across to one of the small, privately owned islands that are a feature of Rubiana. This island is the property of a well-known half-caste family, one of whom was world-famous as a swimmer in his younger days. It is not the swimmer, but a brother of his who comes down to meet us at the wharf. He is dark brown in colour; very well-dressed and well-mannered. The little place that he owns is simply the typical island of every one’s dreams, small (one may walk round it in a few minutes), bright green coloured, with very bright green palms drooping over a beach of sand as white as flour. There are several houses on it, all built of the beautiful brown native materials that blend so pleasantly with a tropic landscape, and all artistically and gracefully designed. The whole island, with its jade and sapphire surrounding seas, its sands and its palms and its flowering shrubs, its general appearance of a bright toy set afloat upon a painted ocean, seems to be, of all others, the very refuge for tired hearts and broken lives. Here, surely,

sorrow never comes. . . .

Well, one cannot, and may not, tell the tale of the people who live there. But the brightness of the island finds no echo in their souls.

'I shall never have my children educated,' says, sorrowfully, the brown-skinned gentleman who meets us on the wharf. He points to two or three little unclad creatures playing in the sand below. 'The less they know,' he says, 'the happier they will be.'

There lies a curse upon beautiful, devilish Rubiana. One can see no good reason why the place should not be happy. But it never has been, for any one living there. Across the bay stands a pretentious house, part native, part European. The owner, a white man now growing old, has known many vicissitudes, among them the loss of more than one fortune, made in the days when copra sold for high prices. He might still have been wealthy, the only very rich man of the Solomons, if he had known how to keep what he made. But he flung it away with both hands, day and night (the tales told on this subject are so incredible that one hesitates to repeat them), and to-day he is poor, with only natives—and those not the best—for companions.

There are plantations here and there, in bays and inlets of the great lagoon. Not one of the managers but suffers almost constantly from fever, from poor feeding, and from the attacks of fierce mosquitoes; not one of them but goes more or less in fear of his life because of his labour—the Malaita men. Inevitably, one returns to the Malaita man, for he seems, in one way or another, to dominate the Solomon Islands.

On the place where I was staying, there were about thirty of these people. They were curious-looking creatures, dark, with immense gorilla arms, and little fiery eyes—of all eyes I have ever seen, the most savage, the most untameable. Their faces were intelligent; most of them spoke English rather well, and quite a few had some education. But they were savage to the core.

They do not want, they resent, they hate, the white man. They have always done so. They will work on his plantations, because they require civilized goods—lanterns and kerosene, tinned meat, flour, calico, and axes. But they hate their employers, do as little work as possible for them, and are always ready to resent the slightest reproof. If a man 'gets the wrong side of' his labour, he may as well take his ticket back to Sydney at once, or, alternatively, order his tombstone. The Malaita men are quite likely to 'get him.' They have 'got' a good many managers and overseers in the past.

'Suppose me want something, me wantum!' declared one of these people (not knowing, one supposes, how extremely modern was his demand for self-expression). 'Suppose me wantum kill one Master, all right, me killem. Me

savvy white man hang me. No matter. All a same, me killem, cause me wantum.'

On the plantation it was very hot; it always is in the Sorrowful Islands. Every one slept on the verandahs, at different sides. And thereby hangs a tale —of something that did not happen.

One evening a neighbouring planter came to spend the night. He looked even paler and thinner than his repeated attacks of fever could account for. It appeared, by and by, that he was suffering badly for want of sleep. His boys, some days earlier, had tried to 'get him' with plantation knives, and had very nearly succeeded. Now he had to keep watch all night, and every night, since he was quite alone on the plantation, and he had come over to us for a little rest, feeling it impossible to 'carry on' longer. In a few days, he told us, he could get a boat up to Gize, and would there charge the natives with attempted murder. Meantime, a night's rest was what he wanted, and must have.

They put him on the far side of the verandah. 'He generally has your bed,' my hostess explained. 'But you keep it, it's the best. . . . I wouldn't worry if you hear any noise in the night; it's really not at all likely that they'll come after him.'

Years ago, I should certainly have worried, because one knows that natives bent on murder will take quite a lot of trouble to carry out their plans. Also, they are not in the habit of looking very closely under mosquito-nets in the dark, before striking, and mistakes have been made.

But twenty years of the Western Pacific harden your nerves, or kill you. I did not worry. And in the morning, every one had slept well, and nobody was minus a head.

My own kindly host had managed to keep on terms with his labour, but every plantation carries within itself the seeds of trouble, and every manager is obliged, by the nature of his task, to steer continually between the Scylla of high expenses and the Charybdis of a murderous attack from his men. In the more isolated places (there are some where the unlucky manager lives alone, and is not visited oftener than twice a year by calling boats), the solitude is maddening, and the constant risk such as to destroy the strongest nerves. Of late, the Government has intervened in some of these cases, insisting that two white men, instead of one, shall be stationed on the far-out plantations.

Nevertheless, terrible things have been known to happen, and it is not always the native who is responsible.

Years ago (many years, or one would not venture to tell the story) there lived a bridal couple on an island. It was a beautiful place and not unhealthy, but it was very far removed from all lanes of traffic and the Company's boat

called not more than twice a year.

This little boy and girl couple, deeply in love, and only a few days wedded, were left on the beach by the steamer, with the promise of another call about Christmas (it was then mid-June). For a time everything went well; the young pair were very ignorant and very happy, and it seemed as if, for once, the world was indeed well lost.

One afternoon, as the two were walking on the beach together, the little girl was suddenly taken ill. She fell down where she was, and died, of hemorrhage, in half an hour.

Nobody came to the island. Weeks passed. At last, by chance, a boat went by, and noticing the signals made by the native labourers, called in to see what had happened. They found the wild Malaita men guarding, with tenderest care, a white man who had gone mad. There was no little girl.

CHAPTER XI

BORO BUDUR

THIS is not about travel in Java.

Those who need information concerning Java can get it, in plenty, from the nearest steamship office. As for figures about population, exports and imports, taxes, acreage under cultivation, etc., the Dutch Government will give any inquirer as much as it thinks suitable, on application. I have only to tell about one or two good times I had in Java, for the benefit of others wanting good times on their own account.

The best time of all was that wet and stormy afternoon when my hired motor, driven by a more or less mad Malay, swept suddenly round a corner of the country road, and gave to view, for one moment, through drifts of spumy rain, a marvel. A mountain of grey, carved stone. A dream of spires and cupolas and sitting statues, misty, indistinct, and wonderful. Then the Malay, whooping alternately on his two fearful sirens, drove flying past, and one was left amazed, not quite certain that one had rightly seen.

There was a small, quiet inn to follow, and a night of shouting rains. Next morning, in the enchanted brilliance of a tropic wet-season day, brilliance certain to be paid for later on, but none the less lovely for that, I left the little inn, and at the distance of a few hundred yards, found that world's marvel, Boro Budur.

To see Boro Budur, you must have time to spend; it cannot be reached, like that other world's wonder, the Pyramids, in a few hours from salt water. Trains in Java do not run at night. You therefore spend a night at a princely hotel in Batavia (there are no hotels not princely, or so it would seem), and leave next afternoon for Bandoeng. All afternoon you look out of window, and suppress your tendency to say 'Oh!' at five-minute intervals. There is scenery, and scenery, almost more scenic than anything else you have ever witnessed in a very wonderful world. There are coolies, and Chinese, and Javanese, fancy-dressed. There is growing rice, in thousands of acres, verdigris green; there are volcanoes, sharp and conical, patchworked with agriculture right up to the top. At the end of the day comes swift dark, and a station, and a drive in the warm, windy wet through streets imperfectly seen, to a careless, magnificent hotel, where they give you a kingly suite that you do not want, and, carelessly and magnificently, a banquet dinner that only a deputation large and hungry could possibly eat. Not being a deputation, you can only sample.

Long before day next morning, they start you off again, with a cup of coffee and a sandwich, and a careless, magnificent, unitemized bill, and the train, which has slept peacefully in the station all night, gets away, still in the wet and warm and windy dark. And that is all you know of Bandoeng, a town on a tableland, about which the official pamphlets fairly spout statistics.

More scenery after day breaks, a feast of marvels. In the latter part of the day comes Djokjakarta, a junction where you alight for Boro Budur. Nobody else is alighting for Boro Budur, because you have been wise enough to come in the ‘off’ season—being heat-proof and fever-proof, and fond of selfishly enjoying famous sights all alone.

There are some hundreds, or it may be thousands, of Javanese, seething about the station. Java has the record population of the globe, more to the square mile than even India. There are a good many half-castes, no whites. These you have left behind in the first-class carriages of the train, where Dutch officials and their wives stared at you relentlessly for hours on end, allowed their children to persecute you, and feigned deafness when you got into difficulties over inquiries in Malay about stations (every Dutch official being at least trilingual, by order).

Among the Javanese and half-castes, there are some who speak French or English, and from these you obtain information worth money, and more than money. They shepherd you into a delightful little steam tram that runs across country, to a point only four miles from Boro Budur, taking the place of the piratical motor cars in the station, who are only too anxious to convey you all the way for five pounds.

In the steam tram, which costs three shillings, there are charmingly mannered, exquisitely clean Javanese, also a Chinese princess or duchess, or maybe only millionairess. She is travelling with her maid; she is very pretty, very quiet and reserved in manner, and wears Nile-green taffeta with Paris shoes, and a great deal of jewellery.

The heat is amazing. The Chinese princess never alters her stiff upright pose by a quarter-inch, mile after mile of the slow journey, but by and by she unbends, morally, so far as to order a glass of pink ice liquid poison from a seller of iced drinks. It is given to her, with an immense lump of ice cream, probably charged with cholera, in the middle. The Chinese princess, being cholera-proof, no doubt, is determined to get the utmost value for her money. The train only stops half a minute or so, but she sets herself to drink all the pink ice water, and eat all the ice cream, before starting again. It seems impossible. The whole railway carriage turns round, watches excitedly, and hounds her on with cries of encouragement. You can hear them telling each other in strange tongues, that she’ll do it—that she won’t—that they’ll bet a

cent—two cents—she will. . . . The backers encourage her, the bookies (represented by a couple of sharp-eyed Armenians, and a fat fellow countryman of the princess herself) remonstrate with her, tenderly begging her not to choke herself for the sake of a glassful of ice. The princess, like a princess, heeds nobody. She merely concentrates on the wad of ice cream.

The steam tram's whistle sounds. She has lost! No, she hasn't! Tilting her exquisitely dressed gold-pinned head far backwards, she slides the last of that icy avalanche right down her throat, in a mass. Speechless, choking, but triumphant, she hands the glass to her maid, who leans far out of window, and tosses it to the running iceman, as the tram gathers way.

Nobody claps, but there is a sound of murmured applause all over the carriage. Even those who lost seem to think that the princess has done well, and like a princess. As for me, I reflect that the Chinese haven't overrun the globe for nothing. . . . One would have missed all that, in a private motor car.

But at Magelang one gets out, and takes the motor at last, and four miles farther, one arrives at Boro Budur.

And the next morning comes that unusual delight—the sole possession, unguided, unaccompanied, untouristed, and generally unbedevilled, of a great and famous place.

Boro Budur, a monument to defunct Buddhism and Hindu days in Java, has stood in this wide and beautiful plain, dominating the landscape, for just on a thousand years. It was never completed. The central and uppermost shrine, towards which all the terraces gradually aspire, was found unfinished when the Dutch, early last century, came upon a mass of ruins choked with forest, and started some very half-hearted investigations. Later on, spurred by British visits and discoveries, and by the influence of Stamford Raffles, they set to work systematically, cleared the forest away, and restored with care and restraint where restoration was absolutely essential. The topmost shrine, wisely, they left broken, incomplete. No one knows what treasure was destined for that Holy of Holies, but whatever it may have been, it never found its place on the summit of Boro Budur.

The monument is said to be of 'stupa' form. A stupa is comparatively rare, only one other, an unimportant example, existing in the Dutch East Indies. In British India it is commoner; but not even in that land of marvellous architecture has the beauty and the wonder of Boro Budur been surpassed.

To quote from a Dutch publication: 'A stupa is in its simplest form a hemisphere, standing on a four-sided base and surmounted by a sunshade. In the course of time this form has been modified. The hemisphere has been flattened and the sunshades increased in number. The base has given way to a

series of terraces. In Boro Budur there appears a succession of four many-cornered galleries closed in by balustrades. Above these are three round terraces ornamented by cupolas, from the centre of which rises a bell-shaped stupa, the essential part of the monument. When the whole structure is looked at from a distance, the outline appears to be circular.'

This is correct, if cold. It is also correct that 'the whole structure, viewed from a distance,' makes a picture of surpassing majesty and surpassing beauty. This city of silent Buddhas, each in his own quiet niche; of imprisoned Buddhas, each looking forth from the stone lattice of his 'stupa' prison; of a mile and a half of carved friezes, beautiful in their own way as Greek marbles; of noble gateways, terraces, pinnacles, all aspiring towards the last upward leap of the broken shrine, is a thing to catch the breath with its wonder.

You cannot enter it, since it is only a casing of solid stone upon a core represented by a natural hill. It is not a temple, but a memorial—of what? No one knows. Some incident in the life of Buddha may be commemorated here; that is all that can be guessed at.

There is an official handbook, but, although it includes a good deal of superfluous stuff, it has somehow or other forgotten to give any measurements. The innkeeper says that each side of the monument is over five hundred feet long, and that (he thinks) the whole structure is from one hundred and eighty to two hundred feet high. It appears to be a good deal more.

The lowest gallery, carved with representations of flowers and fruit and other pleasant things, is said to represent the life of man as ordinarily lived. The galleries above it are all richly carved. Farther up, each of the circular terraces becomes plainer and plainer, until the last and smallest is almost entirely unadorned. This is supposed to suggest an allegory of man's spiritual progress, ending in extreme asceticism and Nirvana.

Seldom, indeed, is it possible to visit one of the world's famous sights alone. I did not grudge the various inconveniences brought about by heavy heat, by wet and thundery weather, by the constant risk from malaria, cholera, typhus, and plague, all of which are to be found in Java, flourishing especially during the wet season. Boro Budur, all to one's self, was worth it.

Three days I spent there, wandering unchecked about the terraces and galleries, high up in blue air, sometimes walking along a double-walled lane of sculptured friezes, with the world shut out, sometimes seeing, far-spread between stone pinnacles, the beauty of silver-flashing palm forests and rice-fields, green as aquamarine, and sugar-cane, green as jade, and at the end of all, the sinister, blue smoking cone of Merapi. Once or twice, from the summit, I saw Dutch tourists, fat and cheerful, coming along in cars, walking lazily

about the base of the first gallery, looking up to the towering terraces above, and hurrying back, with a shake of the head, to drink beer in the inn until it was time to go. Once (but that was no interruption) I came upon a party of white-robed men, tall, dark-faced, bowing and making gestures upon one of the terraces, reviving, piously, the lost worship of the place.

But for the most part, I possessed Boro Budur.

It is a place of daylight ghosts. I do not know what it may be like at night, for the nights, just then, were so stormy and wet that I did not care to try to find out. But in the daytime, if you are there long, you will feel the weight of all those past centuries of devotion pressing down like heavy incense.

Even in daytime, however, there is a strange atmosphere about Boro Budur, not to be felt by any one hurrying through in a party, but very perceptible to those who wander alone and at leisure. The consciousness of all those past centuries of devotion is always with you; it flows like a river of warm feeling through the blue, empty air of the terraces; it lies like a benediction on the bowed heads of hundreds of quiet Buddhas. However the faith of these dead people may have differed from yours, it was faith. Here, men have believed passionately in their God, worshipped with all that was in them, flung themselves, in desperation or in thanksgiving, at the feet of the unknown powers. Who knows that their prayers may not have found the right road after all, that, doing as best they could, they may not have done far better than they knew?

But there are other influences about this silent, solitary memorial, set alone in the midst of the plain, with the blue and black volcano cone watching evilly beyond. It is said, by many nations, that when a place once sacred is left desert and empty, there wicked things swarm in and make their home. Any one may believe as much, or as little, as he likes of this; may laugh at the idea of evil spirits, or may accept it as readily as he accepts the idea of centipedes. Perhaps a mean between the two is best. I have no hesitation in saying that I, for one, do believe in the existence of evil spirits, and that, if I am wrong, I find the Bible good company wherein to err.

Certainly, one would need to be a cabbage in matters psychical, not to feel the influences of Boro Budur. Quite apart from the gentle wave of long-past sanctity that seems to bathe the monument from grass below to broken shrine above, there is another and a sinister influence. It lies in wait, just over the edge of consciousness. It almost breaks through. If you spend half a day alone among these grey-walled slopes and terraces, the world shut off below, you will find yourself, at the end, hurrying round corners to catch up with something that is always just ahead of you, stopping and listening for a sound that is always just about to begin. . . . And you are sure, without reason given,

that the influence, the sight, the sound, are evil.

Nerves? If one has the nerves of a working bullock in most ordinary matters; if one sleeps and eats like a ploughman, given no cause to do otherwise; if one enjoys life down to the last minute of every day, the smallest blade of grass on every road—can one confess to ‘nerves’ in the usual sense?

Even if one could, there is the testimony of other people. Quite a good many travellers who go to Boro Budur are conscious of its curious spiritual atmosphere. As for the Javanese, he is calmly certain that the spot is possessed by devils.

I should like to return to Boro Budur—but one never does return. I should like to climb the monument on some night when it was not thundering and lightning, raining lakes and seas. On a still midnight, under moon or stars, I should like to wait, and look, and listen. I would take no arms with me, no companion, but I would not, for all the world, go without my little crucifix, ‘which keeps a man from harm.’ For harm there is, among those stone peaks of Boro Budur, and a world that believes in palmistry and paid spiritual mediums, and angels that come back to tell you where the pea will be found under the thimble, and how happy they are smoking heavenly cigars, is in no position to laugh at those who believe that good and ill may still be carrying on their old conflict in Java’s sacred place.

CHAPTER XII

NEW CALEDONIA, LAND OF THE LOST

IN the afternoon, four days out from Sydney, one came upon cloudy mountain summits springing from the sea. Green slopes, all scarred with mining works shone out as the ship stood nearer in; strange fir trees, stiff and tall, like the pines in a box of German toys; little gay buildings, pink and white, with gardens full of flowers and palms.

It was the brightest scene conceivable, even in the Pacific world, that home of all things happy and bright. Yet thousands had cursed it, seeing it rise up out of the sea; for thousands it had been the scene of agony and misery not to be told. Even now, twenty-eight years after the curtain had been rung down on the awful drama of transportation, many hundreds of the actors still lingered on the stage, unhappy, hopeless as ever. There was, and is, no hope for the New Caledonian convict.

All the town had come down to see the steamer in. The people were somewhat like an ordinary French provincial crowd, with this difference, that they were hardly as cheerful. One need not raise the spectre of transportation days to account for that. Life is somewhat hard in France's Pacific colony, and money is scant, which does not make for gaiety. But, nevertheless, the arrival of the Sydney steamer as a free, cheap entertainment, appeals to every one.

Kanakas formed a small part of the crowd. They were clothed, civilized, and stupid. Fifty years ago, their fathers had determinedly fought the colonists and massacred hundreds of whites, in the forlorn hope of keeping New Caledonia for the New Caledonians. Now, the remains of these warlike tribes, when not segregated in the native reserves, wander dully about the white man's towns, doing just as much work here and there as may suffice to keep soul and body together. Brisk Annamese, rough savages from the French New Hebrides, Chinese, take their place as labourers for the most part. The natives bulk so little in the life of the island that one has to remind one's self of their existence.

Baggage is secured and passed through the customs; motor car engaged; hotel reached. One settles down to enjoy a very beautiful town and bay, an exquisite climate. But . . .

The place is cheap, which pleases all travellers. The food is good, which pleases many. French residents are courteous, pleasant, as French people always are. Officials pour forth information. One is assured on every hand that

New Caledonia has put behind her her terrible past, reformed, been born anew; that it is an excellent place for the settler; that nothing remains of convict days; even the old prisons have been torn down, where they could not be rebuilt and used as offices or barracks. It is all perfectly delightful, and the serpent has been chased effectually out of this Pacific paradise. But . . .

Away in the harbour there is a low green island, with long buildings on it. Ask any one what it is. Quite probably no answer will be forthcoming. If any is vouchsafed, it will be two words only—‘Île Nou’—followed by a change of subject. That is the famous prison, and it is not empty yet.

There are queer ghosts creeping about the town in broad daylight, or rather there is one queer ghost, a hundred times repeated. He is old, but you cannot guess his age; he seems to have been old always. He has a long grey beard and long grey hair. He is dressed in ragged clothes, and often goes barefoot. Plainly he is undernourished; certainly he is unhappy. It is probable that he drinks, whenever the rare chance presents itself. So would you, so would I—if we had his past to remember, to try to forget.

Ask any of the civil, bright French shopkeepers, officials, about him. They will not understand you at first. They won’t know what you are talking about. When, with difficulty, they have grasped so much, they will tell you these folk are *libérés*, and change the subject, with a bang.

The *libéré*, or ticket-of-leave man, it seems, is one of the ‘hush-hush’ subjects (there are many) of New Caledonia. We shall return to him later.

For a week or two after arriving, I spent my time tourist fashion, which means that I saw nothing worth seeing. There was a hotel, a very pretty one, with fountains and little palms, and civil people, and pleasant fellow guests. One hired motor cars and went for drives. One saw exquisite scenery, in clear warm blue weather (though it was midwinter now in Australia), visited famous views, saw public buildings. One did the right things, met the right people, bought silk stockings and eau-de-Cologne, and was perfectly correct.

Then—one revolted. This was not the South Seas. It was the tropic port of all-over-the-world, like every other. But there was a back door; there always is, for him who knows. And through it one went, and was happy.

The first thing was to drop the hired motor, forced upon travellers as the correct thing, and accepted—as so many unwanted things are accepted—for fear some unimportant person should think one too poor, or too mean, to pay for the best of everything. I wanted to see Bourail, a hundred miles up the coast. Authorities told me I must have a car; cost about eight pounds—the only way to travel . . .

A French friend laughed at this. ‘Take the service bus,’ she said. ‘It’s ten

shillings, and you'll get a real insight into the country.' And it was so. And I spent the seven pounds ten, and other pounds with it, on real fun, later on.

The service motor left at half-past six in the morning, and arrived at half-past three, after covering one hundred and twenty leisurely miles. It was chill at starting; heavy coats were needed, but the sun came up soon, and we were all very warm, most of us very sociable, and some of us (being French) quite gay. Some of us were silent all day through, looked not to right nor left, never got out for a meal, sat grey and motionless like stone statues in the back of the bus, and for all we added to the life of the party, might have been dead. That was because we (of the grey, silent faces) had been half-dead so long that we could not come alive again. We were *libérés*, of the better sort. We had little farms, that kept us in food and plain clothing, but gave no luxuries. We were free—more or less, as the *libéré* is free; but we had abandoned hope when we entered that blue harbour, half a century ago, and Hope, offended, had never turned her face towards us again.

As for the rest, they were very bourgeois and very jolly. A little shy of the foreigner at first, they brightened when I shared my thermos of coffee, and accepted some of their bread. There were two parents, travelling with three small children; the children, fed by every one with fruit and sweets, made the only possible amends to outraged Nature, and spoiled the Sunday socks and boots of a young man totally unrelated. He, more patient than an Englishman would have been, consoled the small sufferer, stoically endured the very Gallic jokes hurled at him by the father of the family, and quietly vanished at the first stop, with his suitcase, for necessary change. Back again, he nursed the children as before, and the father made more jokes, delighting every one, especially Porthos, who happened to be on board the car, having just stepped out of the pages of Dumas for a short rest and change. Porthos, black-moustached, gay, debonair, and extremely military, kept a sharp lookout, through all his laughter, for anything female passing along the road, and never neglected to hurl a compliment or so after it, if it proved worthy of that attention. Porthos had his arm round the waist of the serving-maid at the first stop, before the coffee was on the table. Porthos was good-looking and gloriously aware of it; no absurd modesty for the Musketeer, any more than for his prototype; he kept the bus waiting while he curled his moustaches at the shadowed window of a post-office; he called after a pretty girl who was walking, clad in a short silk frock, barefoot and bare-legged, up a long hill, and asked her if her lover was as fine a man as he. . . . She answered him with perfect ability; and the car rocked with laughter, directed against Porthos this time.

So we went on, with an illusion of great speed, the Annamese driver

sending the great bus roaring down the hills, and rocking over the empty levels, as fast as it would go. And here I saw, for the first time in my life, a true motorist's paradise. The roads were super-perfect, smoothed and shaped like the roads of France herself, splendidly bridged and drained, and well engineered. There was no dust, there was no tar. There was bright sun, magnificent scenery, and of rival traffic just seven vehicles in the one hundred and twenty miles.

Mountains, wildly shaped, strangely coloured with cobalt, hyacinth, and Indian red, came to meet us, passed, and turned small and pale in the distance. Lemons and guavas grew wild beside the road, spilling their golden balls into the gutter. There was a wide, lovely river by and by, and we crossed it on a ferry. It was ten now, and the motor bus stopped for refreshments at a little country inn with pretty kiosks in its garden. The place is celebrated for its cooking, which includes wonderful river-fish and shellfish dinners; but that sort of thing has nothing to do with small folk travelling by bus. Playing for the day at being poor, it was only amusing to be served with black coffee, chunks of stale bread, and lumps of ill-cooked meat, and the price—something like sixpence—was a revelation in itself; but if one had been a *libéré*, cut off from all the pleasant things of life forever, the joke might have seemed to lack flavour. . . . A traveller complained bitterly of the meat; it was nothing but venison, he said. They pretended to give you mutton, but he knew deer when he saw it. . . .

Recollections of a certain celebrated venison pasty, that turned out to be 'palpable mutton, which was not handsome,' came back to one's mind, oddly reversed. It seems, in New Caledonia, that you cannot treat your guest worse than by giving him venison in any form. Deer overrun the country; the Government will furnish you, free, with cartridges for shooting them. They are considered vermin. And nobody wants to eat vermin, no matter how good it may be.

Refreshed, the company proceeded. There was no hurry; nobody expected the car at any particular time, so long as it got into Bourail before night. For all the engine and the bouncing tyres, there was a curious flavour of coaching about this trip. Even the Annamese driver resembled something in Dickens, as he passed along in a sort of never-ending triumphal procession, everywhere welcomed, everywhere distributing, unerringly, letters, papers, parcels, meat, compliments, gossip and news. French women, barefoot, but always neatly dressed and perfectly shingled, came out of little houses in little coffee plantations, and had a short gossip with the people in the bus. There was plenty of time; Madame could lean her elbows on the side and chat till she was tired. Friends in wayside inns beckoned mysteriously to friends in the bus, and the

driver found that he had to stop there, and the friends dismounted and came back by and by, cheerful, wiping their mouths, accompanied by the driver, who had had to go in and see the time. . . .

Porthos got out, with a parting joke, and one of the silent grey old men got out too; he looked ninety-seven, but he leaped over the wheel like a two-year-old. . . .

‘Ah, these people, they cannot die,’ said a passenger, warmed into communicativeness by recent stops to see the time with the driver. One did not ask what people; one knew. They were *libérés*—those who had succeeded, as New Caledonia counts success. They had homes and farms, poor, but their own. They had the strength of those who have toiled inhumanly for years, won through everything and lived, where hundreds die. Indeed, to judge by the number of *libérés* still at large in the colony, after a break of twenty-eight years since the last transportation, one cannot but realize that the habit of dying seems to have been lost among those who had the bad taste not to die while they had every possible chance of doing so.

About every three quarters of a mile upon this long, long road, one sees the *cantonnier*, or road-repairer. There is but one, and we meet him a hundred times during the day. He is thinnish, stooped, barefoot. He is somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age. He wears blue cotton, he has a white moustache. He is always scraping busily with a hoe, or piling up stones, when the car comes along. One hopes he settles down in a snug, shady corner, with his pipe of colonial tobacco, when there is no roaming autobus in sight. Has he not earned a little rest, he who has been through the hell of convict days, who came out young, and gave his youth to the fearful labour of the *bagné*?

Among *libérés*, the lowest is the grey ghost of Noumea; the next, this *cantonnier*; above him comes the numerous farmer and trader; above him yet again, the ex-convict who is a hotel-keeper, a tradesman in a large way, even a professional man. But all alike are chained, morally, if not physically. They are ticket-of-leave, but their leave extends no farther than the shore. They must never go home again, never live in any country where they are not marked with the convict brand, never be free of Government control. ‘For life,’ in New Caledonia, means exactly what it says.

You can tell, without much trouble, that the people still left in the bus are free settlers. Whatever the *libéré* may be, he is never gay. One might suppose that nothing could destroy the typical light-heartedness of the Frenchman; war does not kill it, misfortune it survives, poverty it greets with a smile. But the convict days burned it out in each and every convict. Not more clear on the shoulders of the ancient galley-slave was the brutal ‘T.F.’ (*travaux forcés*) than to-day the brand of convict gloom on the faces of the *libérés*, poor or

prosperous, hiding in the bush, or conducting big business in the towns.

One thinks the free settler cultivates almost consciously an opposite demeanour. Or perhaps our fellow travellers are unusually happy, enjoying the rare treat of a whole day's pleasuring. Cheerfuller folk one could not wish to see; nothing like them, assuredly, could be seen among the better classes, where reserve and caution are the parents of so much well-bred dullness.

The travelling tradesman with his wife and children share a table with me at lunch, under a vine-covered arbour, at some indefinite hour of afternoon. He buys a bottle of wine, and discourses on the abstract virtues of the grape like Omar Khayyam himself. He is not drunk, but merry as Pepys, and quite as keen on enjoying every bit of his day. He and his wife give me some of the children to hold, and we tell each other (at least, he and she tell) all about our lives, and the time passes quickly till the Annamese Weller Senior gets the coach, and the passengers, going again.

So, in the later afternoon, through valleys painted with the marvellous green of sugar-cane, and the sober hues of coffee, flagged with bananas, lit with the thousand lamps of growing oranges, we come at last to Bourail. There never was a lovelier mountain town, a more beautiful valley lying below blue hills. There never were statelier pines, standing sentinel on heights above, never richer riot of roses and lilies in little gardens. The streets are shaded by old, peaceful trees; teams of oxen, silky-coated, slow, pace through the sun and shadow, drawing carts piled up with country produce. Girls, in the universal short, smart frock, with the universal bare feet and legs, stroll out of houses to look at the incoming mail. There seem to be many girls, many young men, few elders. The brightness of youth fills the place, as the scent of flowers. Peaceful, bright, remote, and happy—that is Bourail. But . . .

There are some long pale buildings on a neighbouring hill. There are ruins of great buildings destroyed, in the town itself. There is, above the main street, a sort of castellated fort, with picturesque palms surrounding it. That is the gendarmerie. Early in the present century, it was a military barracks, commanding the prisons and the town. At the same date, the long pale building, the ruins, were enormous gaols, housing many hundreds of criminals, male and female. Here at Bourail was the scene of the famous mass marriages of the convicts. Criminal women were brought out by shiploads from France, to serve the remainder of their days in exile. It was understood that they would marry convict men, and settle down with them on Government-assigned farms, round about Bourail.

A sort of informal selection used to take place in the village church, where all went to Mass on Sundays. Across the aisles, convicts, whose sense of



OLD GAOLS, BOURAIL

religion had long atrophied, passed the time of prayer looking at and signalling to the women on the other side. Matches were hastily made up, after an interview, under official supervision; marriages, if they deserved the name, were carried out wholesale. In this very church, as an old resident told me, hundreds of convicts used to be married all together, at stated intervals. The weddings were followed by feasting and rioting, before the happy (?) couples went their way, two and two, to the assigned farms; and it was said that change of partners often enough took place, before the teams of oxen drew out from the township, taking brides and bridegrooms home.

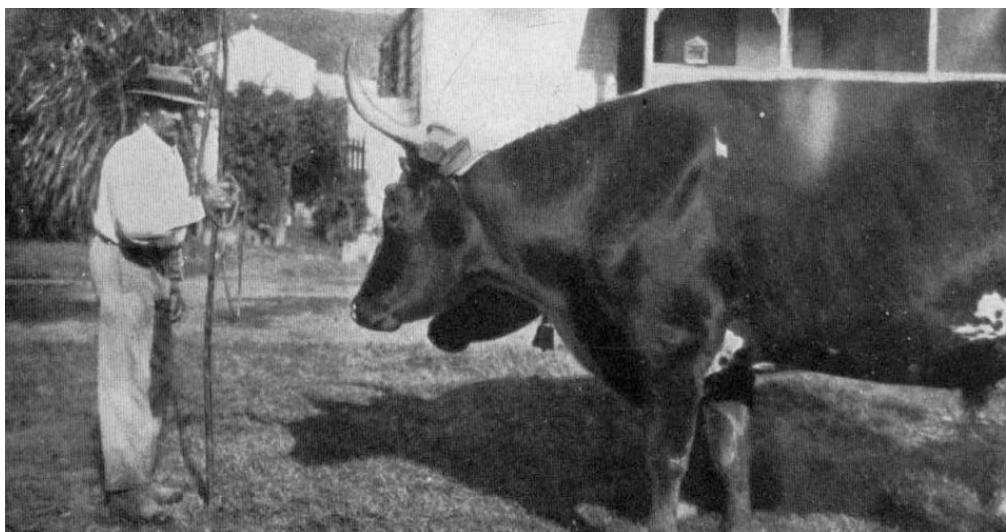
The women were, in many instances, young and good-looking, and from this resulted scandals among the officials of Bourail, one or two of whom (by their own confession in subsequent memoirs) claimed and took the *droit du seigneur* as they chose. 'We had good times in Bourail,' naïvely says one of them.

The young folk of Bourail, to-day, are children and grandchildren of these marriages. They have the reputation of being much like other young folk in other places. Their bad heredity does not seem to have had any marked effect on their development or character. This, by the way, is not astonishing to any one who knows Australia from the inside, and is acquainted with the private history of certain prosperous and well-known families of New South Wales.

The families of these people are enormous. I was told of a small village farther out, whose residents applied to the Government for a school, as they were too far away to send in to Bourail. The Government replied that the

petition was absurd, since the village comprised only three households in all. ‘Yes,’ came the answer, ‘but among us we have fifty children!’ It is interesting to know that the request was immediately granted.

There is an inn at Bourail, known as the Bresseler. It is welcome to any advertisement it can get from this book, for several reasons. One is the excellence of its Chinese cook. Another is the cheapness of the price charged the passing stranger, who may be supposed to pay more than most—six shillings a day. A third reason, not mentioned by anybody about the hotel, is the astonishing circumstance that its best bedrooms are convict cells. Out beyond the back yard, up a little hill with flowery hedges, is a long, low stone building. Six bedrooms are contained in this; clean, cool, and comfortable, though very plain. They have each the frowning, barred top window that suggests a gaol; have each been newly fitted with ordinary windows, admitting free light. Walls and floor are solid stone, somewhat chilly in the misty hill evenings, but pleasant during the heat of day. No one who has seen any of the converted prison buildings could fail to recognize this for what it is.



OLD LIBÉRÉ WITH BULLOCK-TEAM

I was escorted here by one of the innumerable pretty daughters of the house, and settled down very comfortably to my second night in gaol. The first was ‘way back’ in 1908, when I and a friend or two travelling through Papua, put up at the Laloki native gaol for a night, on our way to the mountains. There was a coloured warder in charge; he gave us a cell apiece in a new, clean building, built of peeled sticks. It pleased us well enough; it had to, since there were no other houses for eleven miles, and February rain, in Papua, is not to be

treated lightly. But I preferred the Bourail gaol, on the whole; it was so neat, so weatherproof and strong. I have seen prison cells elsewhere, and confess I find them all, in a certain way, attractive. They are extraordinarily restful in appearance, owing to the absence of all tiresome and time-wasting frippery, they have the austere beauty of a convent cell, and cleanliness is their perfect gem. If I dared, I should have a bedroom exactly like one; if I were a millionaire, I should have one whether or no. But all ordinary folk must conform to ordinary furnishing ideas, or else spend their time in weariful and unbelieved explanations. It is simpler to spend good money on 'suites,' and time in driving servants to do unnecessary work.

Clothes, for one half of the world, have been reduced and simplified beyond the most sanguine hopes of reformers. The other half some day may follow suit, and give up heavy cloth garments for something lighter, cheaper, and cooler. After that revolution has taken place, it will be time to raise the red flag against suites of furniture. The suite is a Minotaur, fed constantly, not on the flesh of youths and maidens, but on their hopes and happiness. How many youthful couples are now pining apart, simply because the Neighbour and the County demand that the monster shall be nourished at all costs! Yet married folk starting in Kenya or Rhodesia, 'outback' from towns, find that they can love each other, eat their dinners, and entertain their friends, with an outfit consisting of a bed or so, two tables (kitchen breed), six chairs of the Windsor family, a row of clothes-pegs, two saucepans, a frying-pan, a kettle, six cups and saucers, twelve plates, twelve knives, forks, and spoons, two tablecloths, six napkins, six sheets, four pillow-slips, two blankets, two large washtubs, usable as baths, a couple of kerosene lamps, twenty yards of cretonne, some paint—and nothing else whatever. Hundreds of thousands of well-bred and well-mannered married and to-be-married couples would be satisfied to start on that, in the outback districts of Kensington, the wilder parts of Edinburgh, Belfast, or Canterbury—if other people allowed. They do not allow. The Minotaur of the Suite must be fed, or who knows what would happen to Canterbury, Belfast, and Kensington? Beauty, mere beauty, is cheap, but who wants anything cheap? There comes, therefore, the crushing cost of matched and finished stuff, mounting in price like matched pearls—it is indecent to sit at a table that is not a perfect pendant and completion to your chairs, or to sleep on a bed that does not reflect the pattern of the not-really-wanted wardrobe. . . .

We seem to have strayed some distance from the cells at Bourail. In reality, we are still there. They have furnished the text and the moral, with a prophecy thrown in—that the next generation, wiser than this, will certainly learn to appreciate for its own sake, the beauty of clean, empty spaces, the repose that

comes from the absence of all things not wanted. Part of this lesson Japan has tried, unsuccessfully, to teach our Western world. Some day the lesson may be learned, and a glorious bonfire made of all the suites. For the present, you must go to gaol, as amateur or professional, to find the perfect room.

Next morning I set out to see something of Bourail's historic buildings. In this I was a good deal hampered by various white-and-gold officials who, under the guise of taking great care of me and showing me everything possible, made it their business to see that I came in contact with nothing that suggested the penal days. In Bourail, however, where every tree whispers of convict times, and every stone tells tales, this was happily impossible. Other things besides stones told tales, too. . . . But that must be passed over.

A gendarme, smart, young, and bright, was detailed to leave his job, whatever it may have been, and go about with me everywhere, until the chief of the local gendarmerie should return from patrol and take me about himself. One does not want to get any smart young gendarme into trouble. Therefore, nothing, or almost nothing, shall be said about a certain pretty little girl for whom I developed a liking at this time, asking her to accompany me (and the gendarme) everywhere, or what her presence effected.

We went to many places in an elderly but efficient motor car, considered about Bourail to represent the height of riches and distinction. At the Roche Percée, a typical 'sight,' consisting of a rock with a hole in it that was plainly pining for the attentions and admiration of non-existent Cook's tourists, we wasted some hours. Here the father of a family and his brood turned up again unexpectedly, and, seeing me thus caparisoned and attended, were smitten with visible fear lest they had been too familiar on the previous day. A person who went about in an American car only a few years old, shepherded by real gendarmes in gold-and-white! . . . and one had given her babies to hold, and offered her wine out of the neck of a bottle. . . .

It was no use trying to revive our friendship. New Caledonia regards the gendarme, and is regarded by him, as cats and mice regard each other. Even if the motor car had not been there, the coolly contemptuous official, who could change his demeanour as easily back and forward as the car could shift gears (more easily, in fact), was enough to chill my bright friends. They melted away. And I missed them. For it is not among the officials, not in the trail of letters of introduction, that you shall find out the real truth about any country, touch its heart.

On the way back from the Roche Percée, we passed over a stretch of road about which the inhabitants had nothing at all to say. The books in the Noumea Library, however, had had so much to say about it that I wanted to see this particular road more than anything else in Bourail. During the heyday of the

transportation system, it was, according to Henri Rivière, a place of torture so inhuman that the reader of to-day fairly gasps, looking over, in the light of days more humane, this tale of convict *Via Dolorosa*.

Within the lifetime of middle-aged folk who do not yet count themselves old, men convicted of crimes that nowadays would mean short and easy imprisonment were set to drag an enormous waggon over twelve miles of road, downhill towards the sea; to haul it back again, fully loaded, up the slope; to do this in one day, on food so poor that it did not include meat more than twice a week, and that only as a favour; to do it, not now and then, but regularly, several times in one week. Sixteen men were harnessed to this car of Juggernaut. Their sufferings were awful; some of them died under the torture, or as a direct result of it. But the Administration had no mercy. Convict stations must be fed; food came from Noumea by ship, and had to be transported from the beach to the storehouses in Bourail. Bullocks were valuable, horses both valuable and scarce. Convicts were neither. So the torment went on. Twenty-four miles' walk, unloaded, in a cool climate, is heavy work for young fit men at any time. These men were many of them old or middle-aged; they were half-starved; they toiled beneath a tropic sun, and they dragged a weight that would have taxed the powers of a team of horses.

Small wonder that young Henri Rivière, a French officer of good family, stationed with his regiment in Bourail, was shocked, and tried to alleviate the lot of the wretched convicts who were condemned to the waggon team. He succeeded. . . . In stopping the iniquitous traffic? By no means. He obtained this much from the authorities: power to have ships sent up the river to the town with about half the goods from the beach, leaving two or three trips a week for the waggon; an allowance of meat two or three times a week for the men engaged in the work. Apparently he was satisfied with that; he seemed to think that nothing more could be expected. Naïvely he explains in his memoirs that it would have been inconvenient to bring everything up by boat, since the natives, not yet completely tamed, might have attacked and cut off the vessel on her way up the river. . . . And there the curtain drops on this frightful glimpse of past horrors; and there is nothing to say when the system—at full blast in the later seventies—came to its end.

Rivière was extraordinarily humane, for an officer in that service. He comments, cautiously but with suppressed feeling, on another sight that was at that time to be seen in the neighbourhood of convict stations. Passing a river, he saw a team of convicts engaged in the killing work of handling and dragging ashore huge logs that had been rafted down from the mountains above. These men were not young or powerful; they were for the most part political prisoners, some of whom had spent their lives in educational work or

other sedentary pursuits; who, middle-aged, had been catapulted mercilessly into the life of a navvy and day-labourer. It was wretched and pitiful to see these unfortunates, standing naked in midstream, their heads and shoulders scorched by tropic suns, their bodies chilled by the icy mountain water, so that they suffered from all kinds of painful swellings and colics, which never excused them from work. Their thin, pithless arms, projecting stomachs, bald heads, and dim eyes peering through spectacles made a sad picture to Rivière, riding past. But he forgot them very soon, and turned to what really interested him—what he has described through hundreds of pages—the long fight against the natives of New Caledonia.

With all this brutality, there were times when the convict population, under some new Governor possessed with almost romantically humanitarian ideas, enjoyed amazing liberty and consideration. Convict assigned servants were at all times common, and, needless to say, these posts were eagerly looked for. There were among these ticket-of-leave men some of the wildest and strangest characters imaginable; men whose ambition and courage ought surely to have won them something better in this world than a convict's cell. The history of one, told by Savoie, would be incredible if it were not known to be true. Briefly put, it runs thus:

In September, 1883, a smart-looking young man appeared at the Pacific Hotel in Noumea, and asked for rooms. He introduced himself as Count de Mérac, just arrived by the mail-boat from another French colony, Senegal. Mr. D., the manager, gave him good rooms, and asked him to honour himself by accepting a seat at his table, which the Count obligingly did. Everybody was delighted with this fascinating and well-mannered Count; the servants would have done anything for him, the guests fought for his notice; the manager, when he went away for a holiday, left the whole place in de Mérac's charge.

It was noticed that de Mérac, as became his station in life, was rather exclusive. He frequented the Government House as much as possible, and when some one asked him if there were many escapees in Noumea, he seemed offended at the bare mention of such gentry. 'Really, I don't know anything about them,' he said, and changed the subject.

Among his 'smart' friends was one who was about to be married. He thought himself lucky to secure de Mérac for best man, and, having a considerable sum of money for wedding expenses in his possession, was seized by the happy thought of handing it all over to the best man for safe-keeping. . . . No, you are wrong, he gave every sou of it back again. . . .

The Count created an immense impression at the wedding. One of the bridesmaids, a girl of good position, fell in love with him, and a marriage was arranged between the pair.

One would have thought that this was enough for the ‘Count’s’ ambition; but no, he wanted something else. It had been his dream to go to a Government House ball and dance with the Governor’s wife. Invitations were not difficult to get; he obtained one, and—feeling, one knows not why, a little nervous—added to his smart dress clothes the disguise of a false black moustache. Thus protected, he started for the Town Hall, paused, just as he reached it, to look at a torchlight procession, and was arrested on the spot, charged (correctly) with being Frolet, a notorious criminal, who had more than once escaped before. This time, his surprising audacity had almost carried him through.

There are no more details, except that he had several years added to his sentence, and that is all one hears about Frolet. But he had ruffled it in Noumea with the Government House set for nearly a year before he was caught.

Of all these things I was told, or read, in Bourail, sleeping by night in my convict cell, and wandering by day (as far as the white-and-gold gendarmes would let me) over the strange sad relics of Bourail’s past. The women’s prison, still standing, is surrounded by a glass-topped wall, with a locked gate in the middle. I could only see, from above, that there were a number of small, separate whitewashed buildings in it. These had been occupied in time past by the heroic Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny, to whose charge the Government of early days committed the convict women.

What these noble Sisters went through, on the long, terrible voyage out from France, in convict ships, herded with the scum of gutters and gaols, can never be told; nor what they suffered afterwards, in their efforts to reform and help their charges. That surely is written elsewhere, in letters of gold. There are a few of them still in the convent above the town, where they hold a school for the benefit of white and half-white children. But these are young new Sisters, who have never experienced the horrors of old days.

One must say plainly here that the nation which was responsible for the cruelties of Norfolk Island and Tasmania has no right to throw stones at the French convict system. We have this boast only to make—that we gave it all up a generation earlier than France did, and that the world has had time to forget our ancient sins. Marcus Clarke revived the memory of them for a while; but there is, in Australia, no living and suffering monument to the inhumanity of past ages, as there is, unfortunately, in France’s colony. The French know well that, as long as one of the *libérés* survives, the tale will not be ended.

Bourail’s grey ghosts include a good many women. One of them I photographed. To another, not unlike her, bent and lame with age, I gave the price of a bottle of wine. Her son, a tall, sulky, handsome half-caste, suppressed himself shyly behind a hedge while she went to fetch the treat, with

which, immorally, I hoped they would have a good time that evening, with the bottle of wine between them, while the night mists came down upon Bourail, veiling and hiding, charitably, all that the night itself could not hide.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ISLAND OF PINES

AT dead of night (about one-thirty, to be precise) I rose from my bed in the hotel at Noumea, and went down to the beach. I had chartered a good-sized launch for the Isle of Pines trip, and the launch-owner assured me that one-thirty was the only possible sailing hour.

With me went a cheerful young Frenchman who had begged for a passage, on the quite sufficient grounds that he hadn't seen the Île des Pins, wanted to do so, and couldn't afford to go otherwise. Such common-sense and candour certainly deserved their reward. The launch-owner, a Victor Hugo-ish young fisherman with a remarkable history, said the passenger would be useful anyhow; it was seventy miles to the island, and another white man might be wanted if we struck bad weather.

The passenger left his wife behind, but the owner brought his, and so we were a very complete and cheerful party.

It was nearly noon before we got to the Isle of Pines, passing many strange and beautiful islands with curious names—Brush Island, Pincushion Island, and so forth. They were well named; 'Brush' Island, with its pine-crowded hill and long, treeless tail, was precisely like a giant clothesbrush left afloat, and the round, plump 'Pincushion,' full of eighty-foot-high 'pins,' could not have been anything but what it was called. The beaches of all these islands were of that dazzling white that one despairs of naming or describing; only those who have seen it can realize it. A thousand times I had seen such exquisite beaches, shining in the midst of seas like the seas over which we ran—shallows of verdigris and jade and kingfisher-blue, shoals white as tumbled cloud—but I had never as yet seen the strange effect of tropical black pines standing stark and motionless in funeral groups, above green and white and blue, where, instinctively, the eye had looked for lightly waving palms. A new South Seas, a strange and a sad. Never had one dreamed that landscape could so express the human spirit of a place. For over all these islands, lovely as they were, seemed almost visibly to brood regret and melancholy.

The Isle of Pines itself, a long green land, well wooded, was sadder, stranger than any. Coming up to it from the sea, it looked like a beach resort in the making; white villas here and there looked out of the trees; there was a magnificent sea-wall, built of cut stone; there was a long jetty to match it. One looked for people to come down and



SEA-WALL, ISLE OF PINES

welcome the boat . . .

In the glare of noon, that is so much more melancholy than romantic sundown, we came to the jetty and nosed in.

L., the launch-owner, leaped on to a flight of stone steps and made fast his craft to a mooring-ring. I got out, Madame got out, Monsieur P. got out. L. himself followed. We stood together, looking at the empty roadway and the grey sea-wall, listening to the silence. Where were the people? The place reminded one of some country village on a Saturday afternoon, when ‘every one’ has gone away to the local races. Would not somebody come back by and by, light fires in those half-seen houses, set the columns of blue smoke spiring up, and wake the afternoon with sounds of creaking gates and closing doors?

No, never. The people who lived here, twenty, thirty, forty years ago, were for the most part dead; some

few still dragged on existence about the gutters of Noumea, or on the terrible Île Nou; two or three, of a different class—survivors of those who had owned the pretty villas—were ending their days in France. Miles away, there was a little mission, almost expiring for want of funds. There were stray natives; there were a couple of whites somewhere on the other side. But here—nothing, no one.

It had been one of the most celebrated penal stations in former days; all the fine stonework, of which we had yet seen little, was done by convicts, among them many political prisoners; the villas were officers’ quarters and homes of married officials. Women prisoners were sent here as well as politicals. . . .

The gay youth of Noumea, so one has heard, found the Isle of Pines a pleasant place for picnicking and week-ending. Innocent, peaceful as the island looked to our eyes, it had been very far from either—thirty years past.



RUINED GARDENS, ISLE OF PINES

Henri Rochefort was one of the most famous convicts sent to the Isle of Pines; especially famous in that he managed to escape and, being political, could not be extradited from Australia, where—not altogether to the delight of the Australians—he took refuge.

Memories, in the Isle of Pines, are not quite so sinister as those about Bourail. Nevertheless, it was with feelings somewhat subdued that we disembarked and made our lonely way towards the villa—now owned by a Noumea merchant—that had been kindly lent to me for a few days' stay.

It was the ghostliest place, perched on the rim of the sea-wall, with the tides slapping under its balcony, and a great stretch of water filling all the weathered, dusty window-panes, through which, long ago, the officers and their wives and children had seen ship after ship sail in, bringing yet more prisoners to fill

the already crowded barracoons below. There were rooms and rooms, with floors breaking down, and furniture all but absent. In one long room that had a refectory table and benches, we messed together for the few days of my stay, pooling our provisions. It was an odd experience, for the one boy in charge couldn't cook anything but water, and the little Frenchwoman, who had been a *midinette* in Paris, couldn't cook as much as a potato, and the party would have starved had not the organizer of it taken the post of chef, working at a high bench of brickwork in the kitchen, which was the only cooking-place, and well enough pleased to do so. L. and Monsieur P. went out and shot a pigeon or so; and somebody killed a bullock, and brought us fragments of it, and L. reverted to his proper profession long enough to get some fish; all of which I dealt with as best I could. Being French, the others accepted the situation with perfect common-sense, and made no silly apologies; if they couldn't cook, they couldn't, and that was that.

I have always thought the glory one obtains from a good pie, or a succulent stew, far more gratifying than any mere literary success. The reviewer, however kind he may be, does not visibly devour your book and pass his plate for more, with sighs of happy repletion. The reader doesn't smell your book in your study, and beg you to hurry up with it. Making of books has left me much less time than I could have desired to study that far more important art, the making of pies, pot roasts, pancakes and fritters, and all the rest of the family. But if French-fried potatoes, jam roll, and 'spotted dog' (which last is a vulgar dish secretly loved by many) were paid for as liberally as long fiction and short stories, there would be one more good plain cook in the world, and one moderately good writer the less.

There was fine talk about that refectory table in the evenings, when L. and Monsieur P. had brought out their bottles of wine and the coffee was finished, and the boy, who could wash up, or at least did wash up, had carried everything away. Fishermen, ever since the days of Saint Peter, have been thoughtful men, little given to conversation, but worth hearing when they do talk. L. had spent his life on the seas about New Caledonia, and knew that dangerous region, its reefs, shoals, and horseheads, as a man knows his own back garden. He read at times, and remembered what he did read—a habit that once brought him an amazing stroke of luck.

Most of the French free population of New Caledonia are poor; life there is hard, as they all tell you; the long distance from Europe and the protective tariffs of Australia narrowing down markets almost to vanishing point. L. was no exception. He did not own a boat, he had never seen France, and had little hope of ever doing so. He had no wife, not much of a home . . .

Then one day, when he was out fishing with his two partners, he saw a mass of something dusky and greasy lying on a reef. 'I want to look at that; I'll take it into the boat,' he said. The partners objected. 'We don't like to have our clean boat made a mess of,' they said. 'Let the dirty thing alone. Who wants it?'

L. persisted that he wanted it, and as he is six feet five and very powerful, they let him have his way. Somebody must have helped him to haul the thing into the boat, for it turned out to weigh as much as two hundred pounds; a yellowish-grey, oily mass that smelt faintly unpleasant.

'Now you *have* made a mess of things,' said one of the partners.

'I don't think so,' answered L. 'When we get to Noumea, we shall see.'

They 'saw' in truth, when the stuff was pronounced to be ambergris, worth eight pounds an ounce. L. honestly shared with his partners, since everything taken in a fishing boat is counted common property. There must have been

something like eight thousand pounds for each of them—all from the ‘lump of dirt’ that had been rejected by two out of the three.

L. went to Paris with his share, saw *la patrie*, as every Colonial Frenchman longs to do, and brought back a pretty little Parisian girl as wife. He also acquired the big launch that is the pride of his heart, a sturdy, seaworthy boat, that could run to Fiji if he liked to take her there. L. built most of her himself, so he knows.

L. and his mates know many things hidden from landsmen. When you live on the sea, it gives up its secrets. They know, for example, what no man of science could tell you—the rare places where the great, formidable cachalot or sperm whale still survives, the roads it uses when passing through the sea. For some reason as yet unexplained the great whale has a liking for New Caledonia waters, and haunts the reefs and islets of the coast.

No whaling is done there nowadays, but that hardly accounts for the favour shown to New Caledonia by the cachalot, with the whole Pacific to choose from. Some people—L. among them—think that there is a whales’ cemetery off the coast; one of the half-legendary places where these huge monsters are supposed to go when they feel their last hour approaching. If there is, no one has ever seen it. I recommend the quest to the next scientific party that includes New Caledonia in its journeyings.

It is odd that the mates of L. were not better informed on the subject of ambergris, since it is more frequently found in the neighbourhood of New Caledonia than in almost any other place. That says little, however. Ambergris, the rare, the precious, the not-to-be-dispensed-with in perfume manufacture, is growing rarer every year, as the cachalot, hunted to an end by steam whalers, gradually dies out. This valuable stuff is supposed to be a morbid product of the whale’s intestines. For the finding of ambergris, then, quite a number of unlikely circumstances must occur at once; there must be a sperm whale somewhere, it must be suffering from a special disease, there must be a succession of winds and tides that will cast up the products of the disease on land, or an accessible reef, or leave it floating somewhere in the lanes of traffic. There must also be some one about that place, at that time, who knows what ambergris is, and he must be on the lookout when the stuff is sighted. Given all these circumstances, a few pounds of ambergris will probably be added to the world’s small store. Little wonder that it is worth far more than its weight in gold; the only wonder is that any should ever be found at all. L.’s discovery was quite exceptional; much smaller pieces are the common rule.

When nobody was cooking or eating or talking or shooting or fishing, we wandered about the Isle of Pines, finding, on the whole, that the best of it was already at our elbows. Inland, there was lovely tropic forest—but one had seen

tropic forest. Outside, there were wonderful lagoons, through which the evil diamond fish, like a giant bat, flitted, darkly visible, the terror of the seas. But one had seen lagoons and even diamond fish before. Close at hand and far more interesting, there was the strange, dead, dreamlike settlement of old days. There were dry, carved basins of stone fountains, where lilies once had floated and jets of crystal water risen up. There were walled gardens—enormously, superfluously walled by prison labour—where nothing had grown for generations. There were graceful stone stairways, leading nowhere. Exploring the thickets, one came upon grey houses, roofless, with magenta-coloured lantana flowers rioting over the remains of heavy, convict-built walls. Pawpaws, most delicate of tropic trees, stood slim and tall in the midst of former bedrooms, shedding their scented melons on the spot where pretty wives and mistresses of officers had slept. Oranges hung through broken window-frames, giving on gardens long since gone to bush. And always there was nobody, no foot nor wheel upon the one long grass-covered road, no sound except the distant hushing of the sea.

I have seen, and loved, many places where solitude, that rarest of delights, can be savoured to the full. But not in the undiscovered lands, where one stands first of all; not in the little uninhabited islands at the ends of the earth; not on a mountain-top where one can see for hundreds of miles, and know that no human being is near; not in a plane flying gloriously over lands where no man lives, does one feel the heart and essence of all loneliness as one feels it in these places where crowded life has been, and is not. And the writer is not born, perhaps never will be, who can express the half of the sweet-bitter delight of it.

No matter. Almost everybody knows. Almost everybody has wished, in this age of shrieking radio and howling motor cars, to stand just for once upon an island of the South Sea world, where noise and hurry are not, and the last feathers of the dove of peace still float in quiet undisturbed.

‘Almost every one’ is right. That peace is not a dream—if the traveller knows where to find it. He will not find it in Papeete, which I knew a quarter of a century ago, in its happy days; nor in Apia nor Suva, nor anywhere on the big trade routes of the twentieth century; least of all in seven times cursed Honolulu, which I hope never while I live to see. . . . 1860 was the time for Honolulu, if one had been alive, and wandering, then!

Well, it is still 1860, or 1760, which you like, over a great part of the Pacific. And if you have some money and a very great deal of time, you may turn the clock back, if you wish. The ‘magic casements, opening on the foam,’ are still to be found. Some of these magic casements, certainly, exist on the Isle of Pines, and they are not unattainable; one may hire a partly ruined villa

(perhaps a kind friend may lend you one, as happened to myself), or one of the long barracoons where prisoners used to sleep, and make a camp of it. The neighbouring islands, fascinatingly lovely, are uninhabited if not unowned.

There are palms in the group, but the pine is the dominant feature, that strange, melancholy, lovely tropic pine, whose name I do not know, nor want to know. It gives the islands a beauty all their own, contrasting sharply as it does with the bright pale blue and green of the shoal waters surrounding, the sparkle of white beaches, and the light of the long reefs beyond. We spent an afternoon on Brush Island, and this was what it was, a sample of many:

Outside, green water and long white reefs; the unending song of the surf, exultant, scornfully gay. Beach of powdered coral, white as icing-sugar on a cake. Grass, satiny grey-green, streaming to the wind. Low casuarina trees, with foliage like mermaids' hair; behind them, the bright green shrub, with starry flowers, that one meets on almost every South Sea island. Pandanus, oddly contorted, with saw-edged leaves, and dry fruit that tantalizingly mocked the appearance of a juicy pineapple. Coco palms, a few. Above, behind, dominating all the rest, stark pines, black-foliaged, secret, seeming to meditate on deep matters, never to be told, as they stand on guard above the shore and the milky-jade lagoon. Among the pines, green secret little glades, shut out from the noise and tumble of the reefy sea; glades that wake an aching desire to close one's self into them, see only pines and sky, and keep, for a long time, company with the best of friends—one's self.

Black, blue-and-white, and green, and black again—an austere beauty, wanting the sensuous appeal of islands farther northward. But the whole of the New Caledonian group, just within the tropics, has a charm of its own that comes, one thinks, from an almost imperceptible hint of chill Antarctic regions, far away, just as the charm of an English August is heightened by the thought, barely suggested, of autumn days not far distant.

I think the outer islands of the Isle of Pines group could be rented, if any one wished to do so. Better camping and fishing grounds no one could desire, and the climate is one of the most perfect in the world. Noumea, on the mainland, is four days from Sydney by monthly steamer. There is something in these piny, half-tropic islets that suggests, above all things, health—as the gloriously painted splendours of my own loved home in Papua, unhappily, do not. Fever, at times, is none too high a price to pay if you love the 'wild west' of the Pacific enough to live there. But there is no such toll exacted for living in, or about, New Caledonia—always provided that one keeps clear of insanitary Noumea, where the water and the drains are the worst in the civilized world.

I have written little or nothing about the New Caledonian native, because

there is almost nothing to write, nothing, at any rate, appropriate to a collection of light impressions of island travel. He is almost swamped, in these times, by the influx of foreign labour. In his own place, among the mountains of the interior, he leads a peaceful existence, protected by the Government from ill-treatment of any kind. But his numbers diminish steadily; he has lost the wish to live.

Forty or fifty years ago, he and his kind were warlike, determined savages, cannibals, head-hunters, and furiously opposed to all white settlement, for which, perhaps, one cannot justly blame them. The wars of the seventies and eighties have furnished material for many books which are but dull reading nowadays. One lights upon a gem of human interest, now and then, in the midst of tiresome accounts of attacks and punitive expeditions, written in the heavy style of the typical Government report. One such is too good to lose.

Ataï, the most famous and powerful of the inland chiefs, was inclined to be friendly with the whites; he used to visit their settlements (when not engaged in head-hunting), and accept hospitality from them. Madame A., the widow of an official, not very young, but good-looking and romantic, struck up a patronizing friendship with the savage chief. She used to ask him often to her house, drink coffee with him, and discuss social questions. The natural result followed; Ataï fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. She, having industriously thrown matches into gunpowder, was of course surprised by the consequent explosion; not only surprised, but indignant. She rejected her dark lover with more scorn than perhaps was necessary, and he went away, his heart burning with rage against the whole white race. In the revolt that followed not long after—whether as a direct consequence or not, one cannot say—Ataï took a prominent part, and, until his violent death, was the moving spirit of the war against the whites. It was put down at last, but not until many French settlers had been cruelly massacred. The writer of the book from which I quote says that he remonstrated with Madame A. on her conduct, and told her that she should have been prepared to sacrifice herself and become the bride of the cannibal king, as by doing so she might have saved much slaughter. Madame A. acknowledged this with all humility, not even arguing the matter when R., the author, called her ‘*très égoiste*,’ but (she said) the idea of marrying Ataï revolted her; she would have been prepared to see every white person in New Caledonia die rather than carry her friendship to such an extreme. R.’s point of view, frankly put, appeared to be that Madame, having raised the row, was bound to pay for it. It is a nice point, and one that would certainly be decided in different ways, according to the nationality of the decider. For my part, I cannot help sympathizing with the ‘*égoiste*’ Madame A.

All the strange stories, however, were not in books. A friend in Noumea,

who shall remain nameless, told me curious, sometimes ghastly tales of old convict days.

‘ . . . We used to have a convict church organist, a fellow on ticket-of-leave. He was quite an artist in his way, kept a bric-à-brac shop, with uncommonly nice things in it; had a fine taste in music, too—you should have seen the tears come into his eyes sometimes when he was playing. He came here during the interval when the guillotine was abolished in France; I forget exactly when that was. Anyhow, he would never have got to New Caledonia if capital punishment had been in force at the time of his conviction, since he was jailed for killing *and roasting* four wives!

‘ . . . I remember a time when we youngsters went out for a picnic. We had to call on the way at a farm owned by a convict man and wife. The man had died not long before, so had a previous husband of the same woman, but she seemed to take both deaths rather lightly. Husband Number Two had disappeared not long before the day of our picnic, and was supposed to have met his end by some accident. At any rate, the widow did not bother; she was hard at work cutting up a recently killed pig when we arrived, and looked quite cheerful. She apologized for not attending to us at once; finished her job first, washed her hands, and came into the house, leaving the cut-up meat in the outhouse where we had found her at work. She took our message and measured out the milk we wanted. I don’t know that we’d have enjoyed it much, or the picnic either, if we had known what every one on the island knew a few days later—that it wasn’t a pig the woman was cutting up, it was the salted corpse of her husband. What did she do with it? I don’t know, but I do know, because it came out in the trial, that she kept the heart, cooked, and ate it. They didn’t execute her; they gave her a long term of jail instead. The first husband? Oh, he had been mysteriously drowned. No, she never got a third.’

CHAPTER XIV

‘NIGHTMARE ISLAND’ AND ‘ISLAND OF MY OWN’

To Île Nou, which might fairly be called a nightmare island, if the others were isles of dreams, I went one stormy, showery day.

Travellers, in former times, were freely allowed upon this island, and then convicts there imprisoned used to make a little money, no doubt very welcome to them, by carving and selling souvenirs. But now for a long time access to Île Nou has been stopped, and all approach in boats or taking of photographs strictly forbidden. I was fortunate enough to obtain permission to land, by special favour, which circumstance, of course, obliged me to go only where I was taken, and see nothing that was not actually pointed out. The Colonel Commandant took me over by launch from Noumea. During the quarter of an hour’s run, he occupied himself explaining to me the theory of convict systems in general and those of New Caledonia in particular. It was an intellectual treat to listen to him; he used his words like coins, each carrying due value, none superfluous, and once again I had occasion to remember, and wonder at, the difference between French and English talk—not all accounted for by the superior accuracy and flexibility of the former language. No Frenchman is ashamed of thinking clearly and speaking well; he would be ashamed of the opposite, were the opposite possible to him. An Englishman of the same class would have spoken in fragments and ellipses, punctuated his remarks with ‘you know,’ and with scraps of current slang, all meant to show that he made no claim to be what he was—an intelligent man talking of serious matters.

The Colonel Commandant, on the contrary, gave me as fine an exhibition of restrained eloquence as any one could wish to hear. It may be that he thought a professional writer, even if not ‘serious,’ was better fitted to appreciate his abilities than the average traveller. I enjoyed the treat so much that we were at Île Nou before I realized the fact. Then . . .

Well, then the wisdom, the philosophy, the philanthropy began to wear a little thin.

Île Nou, in early days, was the place to which all the worst characters among the convicts were consigned. Escape, though not unknown, was very rare. Not only were the prisoners guarded by walls and bars, and by warders always armed and ready to shoot—the very sea itself helped the gaolers in their task. Many fierce sharks haunt the waters about the island, and the authorities, it is said, used to encourage them to keep in the neighbourhood by

feeding them with meat, so that there were always a number of them close at hand, ready to seize on any unlucky convict who tried to swim away. Whether this tale is true or not, it is at least possible. There is an island in the Fijis, used as a cattle station, which is absolutely infested by sharks; no one dares to bathe from any of the beaches, because these tigers of the sea, encouraged by the offal that is constantly thrown away, have become so bold that they will actually chase people into shallow water.

It is astonishing, therefore, that any one ever got away uneaten from Île Nou. But in time past, a few desperate prisoners did so escape.

On Île Nou, at the date of my visit, there were forty *condamnés* (men whose time as convicts had long been up, but who were sentenced to terms of fresh imprisonment because of offences afterwards committed), and two hundred and forty *libérés*. We saw the *condamnés* first. They were nearly all within stone-walled enclosures, men of the indefinite age that seems commonest among the convicts, a vague fifty to sixty. Most of them wore shirts of grey-green prison flannel, and dark trousers; some few were conspicuously dressed in white canvas with black blotches, Dalmatian-dog pattern. These were desperate characters, ‘the enemies of the human race,’ as my escort put it. All of the *condamnés* had committed murder, many of them more than once. Some of them by their record were fiends in human form. And—they looked like gardeners, dustmen, night watchmen, anything you choose but criminals. A number of tired, elderly creatures, so like one another as to have almost no identity left; prisoners, not men. They hardly noticed us as we passed through; there was no hope or interest in their eyes.

You must not make presents to *condamnés*, so the visit meant nothing to them.

‘These are all going to be pardoned some time next year,’ confided my escort.

‘What will happen to them then? Will they go out?’

‘Ah, no! We will put them with the others. We are going to suppress these *libérés*—they are a scandal and a trouble.’

‘How are you going to do that?’

‘Assemble them all on Île Nou, where there are now two hundred and forty: all those who cannot work. It is better they should not circulate about the town. We shall oblige them to come in.’

I thought of the ‘scandals’ I had seen in Noumea, poor old creatures, long past work, wandering, always hungry, often chilly, about the streets of the capital, grey ghosts of a terrible past. It is true that they are given relief of some kind, but what they get seems all but inadequate to keep life in their

worn-out frames; they exist chiefly on the charity of the kindly townsfolk. I remember one sturdy vagabond, proud of his eighty years, who stood up boldly to be photographed, while another, whom I would rather have taken, begged with piteous eyes to be let off. . . . His picture will not be found in any book of mine. . . . He was small and weak, seventy-five or more, just able to crawl along in the sunlight. While the sturdy rogue was ragged and dirty, this other luckless one had managed, somehow, to keep up a vague simulacrum of tidiness. His pathetic pale blue eyes had a certain refinement, his thin white beard was trimmed, Heaven knows how. After all the years of agony and hell, of constant association with the lowest of the low, he still remained, dimly but certainly, what he once had been—a French gentleman. I do not know how long he had been in New Caledonia, but it cannot have been less than thirty years, and may well have been fifty. Half a century of—that! Left behind, forever, the good days, the parents, the children, the loves and wives, the delightful safe French homes, adored by all who own them. What had this poor great-grandpapa, who should have been ending his days by a fireside in France, with kindly people round—what had he done to deserve half a century of hell? What could any one do to deserve so much? If he had killed half a dozen people (though one knew instinctively that his crime had been nothing so terrible), those thirty, forty, fifty years were enough to purge it all. Yet here he was, who should have been loved and cherished, as old great-grandpas are loved, scraping a bare livelihood in the gutter, alone.

I gave the sturdy vagabond some coins, and he hurried away to spend them. To the old great-grandpapa I gave food and money. He took it with quiet dignity, saying, ‘Mademoiselle, I am only a poor *libéré*, and cannot make any return, but every time I see you I will give you my good-day, which is all I have.’

He tottered away, and one tried to picture him as he had been half a century ago—young, full of fire and spirit, looking forward to life. Then, perhaps, money difficulties, temptation, the signing of a name not his own, or perhaps one red moment of surprise and jealousy, a blow swiftly given—and the world, his world, fallen in ruins about him, for all the rest of his life.

I thought of him, and of the sturdy vagabond, when the Commandant showed me into a great ward that held a large number of the ‘suppressed’ *libérés*, the day being too wet for work outdoors.

They were all old, many sick, and every one unspeakably miserable. The *condamnés* were not half so heart-breaking a sight as these ticket-of-leave men, who, after all, had earned their discharge and, within the limits of the country, were free. They represented the failures of the *libéré* system, the men who had not been able to hold on to their farms or businesses, or who had

never got as far as owning one or the other. They were past work, past hope, all but past life. Nobody wanted them, every one wished them dead, and they knew it.

The French system of convict discipline may be—is—excellent in theory; may work well as a general rule. I can only speak of what I saw there, and only of one thing, since the kindness that gave me permission to visit the island must be respected. This thing is too terrible to pass over. The *libérés* were all but starving.

I do not know whether any of them actually die of starvation, though I have little doubt that many sink sooner than they might have done through weakness brought about by insufficient nourishment. However that may be, the faces that I saw bore one unmistakable stamp, one look that followed me for days after. It was the look of men constantly and desperately hungry, half-frantic for food. The faces of all these men were of the same fish-white, their eyes all protruded in the dreadful constant stare that means one thing only—famine.

‘What do they get to eat?’ I asked the Commandant.

‘Excellent bread,’ he told me. ‘Excellent soup. If they choose to do ever so little work, or, if they are really too old and weak for work, they get luxuries. They get tobacco! coffee!! sugar!!! wine!!!!’ His voice rose higher with the enumeration of each luxurious item.

The *libérés*, those of them who could stand, stood silent, anxious, by their beds, which, as the officer pointed out, really were beds, not canvas stretchers such as the *condamnés* had to put up with. There was no other difference in the lodging of the two classes that I could see, and the sanitation of both quarters was something that cannot be described. I had read of such things, in books written about the prisons of Siberia; I hardly realized they could actually exist in Noumea, in 1928.

One was conscious of all those eyes, literally devouring the stranger. Here there was no indifference. Presents could be made to the *libérés*. . . . Presents meant something to eat.

I turned out my pockets, but it was not half enough. I left the room feeling sick. The sickness followed me all that day, at the hotel on the mainland, where food was liberally served, where no one ever wanted. It comes back when I think of those famished faces, and of the well-fed official and my well-fed self walking through the wards, a mockery to the eyes of the starving souls about us.

I was shown the bread in the bakery. They hadn’t been lucky with that day’s batch. Perhaps they were luckier with others. The soup I did not see, nor the ‘luxuries.’

I am quite sure that the Commandant (now returned to France) was a gentleman and an honourable man. I believe he was telling me truth, so far as he knew it. But—there are figures missing in that sum. For the wretches were practically starving. Some of the townspeople whispered things to me that they dared not openly say. There is much hidden sympathy in Noumea for the freedmen who are not free.

Afterwards, when I met the Governor, who had been absent at the time of my arrival, I understood that he pitied the condition of the ex-convicts, and was doing his best to help them. A large old building, formerly officers' quarters, on the Île Nou, was being fitted up to receive all the unemployed *libérés*. There, I heard, they would be properly looked after, and not allowed to wander about the town.

It may be best for them—but one imagines that they cling to their scrap of liberty, they who have had so little, that they feel the grim Île Nou to be only prison over again. In the town one sees a little life; one may watch the steamers in and out, hear the news; one can go where one wishes, sleep and wake at will. One can—sometimes—get, by hook or by crook, enough red wine to warm old blood, set cracked old voices singing ghosts of songs, or even enough, by great good luck, to win for an hour the blessed gift of oblivion. Immoral and wrong, all this, for poor little old grandfathers who 'did something' in the seventies, and have been paying for it ever, ever since! There will be no such conduct allowed on Île Nou.

Many of the *libérés* are insane, more or less. These are herded together on Île Nou, in charge of warders. The Little Sisters of the Poor, who conduct an excellent home for old and helpless people in the town, have asked to be allowed to take charge of the insane *libérés*; they are willing to send sisters and priests to the island. But the French Government of to-day is opposed to all religious orders, and the kindly offer has been refused.

On the island there are 'black holes' notorious in New Caledonian history, and other sights not less ugly. I did not see them; the circumstances of my visit forbade.

I came away from the low green island, with its squat prison buildings, sadder than I went. Beautiful speeches about the regeneration of the convict are all very well, but how is a man to be regenerated, to regain even the smallest shred of self-respect, if he is looked on forever as a criminal, as one divorced from life and from the hopes and freedoms of other men?

In New Caledonia there is only one way of regeneration for the convict, and that way is paved with gold. Let a *libéré* succeed in making money, and every one forgets. The good coat on his back, his balance at the bank, wipe out

all that is never wiped out or forgotten in the case of those less lucky. He can marry well, conduct businesses in the town, feel himself a hundred miles above the sad grey ghosts who wander, not begging, only hoping, hungry-eyed, through the town.

But if others forget, he does not, altogether. You have only to look at his face in moments of quiet. You have only to see him secretly handing out food from a back door to one of the poor little shuffling grandpas. You will realize, then, that he has not forgotten. He sees himself in every one of them.

When all the wandering *libérés* have been rounded up and ‘suppressed,’ New Caledonia will have freed herself of an ugly reminder of past days. And, in a very few years after, Time, that ‘covers all with violets and snow,’ will have covered away from every eye the last relics of the poor little grandpas.

Undoubtedly, the French Government, with a humane and kindly Governor at its head, is grappling vigorously with a difficult problem in the matter of these ex-convicts. The Government desires to make New Caledonia a colony for free men, a place where it will be possible to live without consequent stigma. They wish to see the country rise from the ashes of a terrible past and take its place among free and happy colonies. The presence of a thousand or two wandering ‘scandals’ is, naturally, a serious obstacle in the way of this happy consummation. Nevertheless, the common attitude towards the unsuccessful *libérés* is not unkind or brutal; even the warders on the Île Nou speak of them more as impatient nurses might do than as actual gaolers.

But—for the love of humanity, messieurs, give the poor wretches a bellyful while they are still here, and see they get it. Such is the prayer of the visitor whom you treated, perhaps, too kindly.

Regarding the terrible history of Bourail and other old convict centres, this much must be said—said more than once, if necessary—the nation that was responsible for the horrors of Port Arthur and Norfolk Island cannot justly take up a Pharisaical attitude towards New Caledonia. We did as badly, even worse, in our time, which fortunately came to an end sooner. Deportation to New South Wales and Tasmania ended in 1846; the last shipments of convicts reached New Caledonia in 1898. There were still a very few very old ‘lags’ finishing out their time in Sydney gaols when I first saw that city, in 1905. There are certainly none now. In 1950 (probably long before), whoever visits New Caledonia will find no trace of the convict system left.

An island of one’s own.

This is the favourite vision of all those—and they are many—who hear the

call of the South Sea world. Nevertheless, the people who actually own islands are very few. The dream of finding a 'desert island' somewhere or other (full of beautiful fruit and flowers, owned by nobody) and of settling down upon it is as impracticable as it is delightful. Things are not so easy nowadays. Every rock in the Pacific is the property of some Government, and most are private property as well. Certainly, anything fertile enough to carry a patch of palm trees will have an owner, because palms are money in the Pacific world. If you want an island, you must be prepared to buy, or lease, one.

It is not a simple matter to buy, even to lease, an island anywhere, unless you have plenty of money. The price of small islands runs easily into thousands. They are much sought after by planters, being far better suited for commercial coconut-planting than mainland areas. If pests get into an island property, it can be safely and permanently cleared of them and further infection checked, before the palms are seriously damaged. This is a matter of great importance to the grower.

On that account, the cleared and planted island, fit for commercial use, rarely comes into the market, and if it does, it is priced too high for private buyers.

There remains the not so fertile island, less valuable commercially, in areas easily accessible, or the fertile and valuable island, situated in some part of the Pacific that for one reason or another is unpopular. The islands about New Caledonia come under the first classification; so do a good many off the Australian coast.

Under the latter head come a large number of islands in the Western Pacific; some about the Solomons and New Hebrides, some in the waters surrounding New Guinea. Fear of fever and cannibals has retarded settlement in these parts, and is likely to do so for a long time to come, even though there is little to be apprehended in either direction nowadays. That is not to say that fever and dangerous natives do not exist. They do, but it is largely the fault of the settler himself if he is troubled by either. Modern methods of treatment and prevention have minimized the risk from fever, which chiefly attacks those who are obliged by duty to visit and stay in unsettled areas. As for the cannibals, in all parts where there is regular communication, they are not in any way to be feared. Usually they act as house-servants, workmen, and chauffeurs to the white people, and nobody is the worse.

Any one, therefore, who is determined to own and settle on an island might do much worse than look up the Western Pacific groups. He will have to travel first of all to Sydney, for Sydney is the gate of the South Sea world. Once arrived there, however, the greater part of the expense—and much of the uncertainty—is over. Information of every kind about the different island

groups can be obtained from Sydney trading firms; passages can always be had, at prices varying (first-class) from ten to forty pounds. Second-class, by the way, is usually left to coloured people, or 'dead beats,' unless on the big liners that run to America. These call only at the large and well-known groups and are of little use to the adventurer looking for an island kingdom.

Capital is an essential factor if one intends to take up island life. One cannot live without keeping up communications, and a boat will be required for this, anything from a thirty-foot whaleboat to a big motor launch. The island settler will also have to provide himself and his family, if he has one, with groceries and clothing. He will probably manage to grow his own fruit and vegetables and supply himself with meat by keeping goats or pigs. It is likely that he will take up some culture, in order to supplement whatever means he may have. Some islands are suited to vanilla, some grow oranges or bananas (but this trade supposes the neighbourhood of calling steamers if any profit is to be made), and most will grow coconuts, which can be planted, if they do not already exist. Returns may be expected in about seven years.

One thing the would-be island dweller must remember and take to heart—the life is not for average people. To live contentedly away from the great world, finding your pleasures in unusual and primitive sources, doing without many of the things that most men value, you must be either above or below the average type. If you are below it, one of civilization's failures, the islands offer a refuge; standards are not so high as in great cities, public opinion is less powerful, a lazy-easy life is possible—at a cost. The man to whom all this appeals seldom or never keeps clear of natives, and therein usually lies his downfall. He does not starve, sometimes he prospers, but he loses touch with his own race, and thenceforward sinks. That he sinks contentedly is perhaps the worst feature of the case.

The well-educated settler of unusual and adventurous character, to whom a mechanized world offers little attraction, for whom the 'freedom of the seas' and of the forests means more than anything civilization can give—this man also can be happy, and after a more worthy fashion than the other. We hear much talk, in these days, about self-expression. There is no place where a man may express himself more fully than in the island world—if he has anything to express. He has a free field and all the elements to play with. He may begin life on new terms. By the time he has taken up land, cleared it, built his house and planted his coconuts, or possibly bought his ship and started trading, pearlting, harvesting bêche-de-mer or trochus, he will have found himself and learned himself down to the last rag and button of his character. Perhaps his findings may have small value; perhaps they will be worth more than any find he has ever made in his life. Even in the arts, supposed to be indissolubly linked with

civilization, he will discover, maybe, that the island world has something to teach. Gauguin knew that. Stevenson, Rupert Brooke knew it. And if no great sculptors or musicians have yet gone harvesting among the reefs and palms, that is their loss.

(If the world were not full of stupid people, it would not be necessary for the writer of this to make a certain disclaimer. But, since stupid people are as common, and twice as annoying, as flies, the disclaimer is hereby made.)

Not all the people of the island world are Mormons or supermen. In fact, very few are either. There remain a large number of ordinary people who inhabit the islands because they must. These are Government officials, steamship people, commercial folk of many kinds, and the wives and families of the same. We may leave out missionaries, who come under another classification, and need not here be discussed.

To the ordinary folk of the islands life is a long parenthesis. They live for holidays and trips down south; always before them hangs the star of ultimate retirement, of going 'home,' wherever home may be. It is these people, not the eccentrics, high or low, who are the real island folk, and who deserve the praise, for they are pluckily 'sticking out' a life that few of them like. Most of them would not accept the 'island-of-one's-own' if it were offered them. They know too much about islands. . . .

If you must have an island, do not look for it on the great steamer routes; as well look for dropped treasury notes on the pavement of the Strand. Get off the track, spend time and time, do nothing in a hurry. And remember, above all things (if I may quote from my own writings), that, in the islands, a day is as a year, and ten years are as a day, and ten years, in the islands, means forever. That, I know.

THE END

TRANScriber notes

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Isles of Adventure* by Beatrice Grimshaw]