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IN THE WRONG PARADISE, AND OTHER STORIES

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Содержание

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DEDICATION

DEAR RIDER HAGGARD,

I have asked you to let me put your name here, that I might have the opportunity of saying how much pleasure I owe to your romances. They make one a boy again while one is reading them; and the student of "The Witch's Head" and of "King Solomon's Mines" is as young, in heart, as when he hunted long ago with Chingachgook and Uncas. You, who know the noble barbarian in his African retreats, appear to retain more than most men of his fresh natural imagination. We are all savages under our white skins; but you alone recall to us the delights and terrors of the world's nonage. We are hunters again, trappers, adventurers bold, while we study you, and the blithe barbarian wakens even in the weary person of letters. He forgets proof-sheets and papers, and the "young lion" seeks his food from God, in the fearless ancient way, with bow or rifle. Of all modern heroes of romance, the dearest to me is your faithful Zulu, and I own I cried when he bade farewell to his English master, in "The Witch's Head."

In the following tales the natural man takes a hand, but he is seen through civilized spectacles, not, as in your delightful books, with the eyes of the sympathetic sportsman. If Why-Why and Mr. Gowles amuse you a little, let this be my Diomedean exchange of bronze for gold – of the new Phæacia for Kukuana land, or for that haunted city of Kôr, in which your fair Ayesha dwells undying, as yet unknown to the future lovers of *She*.

Very sincerely yours,

A. LANG.

CROMER, *August* 29, 1886.

PREFACE

The writer of these apologues hopes that the Rev. Mr. Gowles will not be regarded as his idea of a typical missionary. The countrymen of Codrington and Callaway, of Patteson and Livingstone, know better what missionaries may be, and often are. But the wrong sort as well as the right sort exists everywhere, and Mr. Gowles is not a very gross caricature of the ignorant teacher of heathendom. I am convinced that he would have seen nothing but a set of darkened savages in the ancient Greeks. The religious eccentricities of the Hellenes are not exaggerated in "The End of Phæacia;" nay, Mr. Gowles might have seen odder things in Attica than he discovered, or chose to record, in Boothland.

To avoid the charge of plagiarism, perhaps it should be mentioned that "The Romance of the First Radical" was written long before I read Tanner's "Narrative of a Captivity among the Indians." Tanner, like Why-Why, had trouble with the chief medicine-man of his community.

If my dear kinsman and companion of old days, J. J. A., reads "My Friend the Beach-comber," he will recognize many of his own yarns, but the portrait of the narrator is wholly fanciful.

"In Castle Perilous" and "A Cheap Nigger" are reprinted from the *Cornhill Magazine*; "My Friend the Beach-comber," from *Longman's*; "The Great Gladstone Myth," from *Macmillan's*; "In

the Wrong Paradise," from the *Fortnightly Review*; "A Duchess's Secret," from the *Overland Mail*; "The Romance of the First Radical," from *Fraser's Magazine*; and "The End of Phæacia," from *Time*, by the courteous permission of the editors and proprietors of those periodicals.

THE END OF PHÆACIA

I. INTRODUCTORY. [1]

The Rev. Thomas Gowles, well known in Colonial circles where the Truth is valued, as "the Boanerges of the Pacific," departed this life at Hackney Wick, on the 6th of March, 1885. The Laodiceans in our midst have ventured to affirm that the world at large has been a more restful place since Mr. Gowles was taken from his corner of the vineyard. The Boanerges of the Pacific was, indeed, one of those rarely-gifted souls, souls like a Luther or a Knox, who can tolerate no contradiction, and will palter with no compromise, where the Truth is concerned. Papists, Puseyites, Presbyterians, and Pagans alike, found in Mr. Gowles an opponent whose convictions were firm as a rock, and whose method of proclaiming the Truth was as the sound of a trumpet. Examples of his singular courage and daring in the work of the ministry abound in the following narrative. Born and brought up in the Bungletonian communion, himself collaterally connected, by a sister's marriage, with Jedediah Bungleton, the revered founder of the Very Particular People, Gowles was inaccessible to the scepticism of the age.

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[1] From *Wandering Sheep*, the Bungletonian Missionary Record.

His youth, it is true, had been stormy, like that of many a brand afterwards promoted to being a vessel. His worldly education was of the most elementary and indeed eleemosynary description, consequently he despised secular learning, and science "falsely so called." It is recorded of him that he had almost a distaste for those difficult chapters of the Epistles in which St. Paul mentions by name his Greek friends and converts. In a controversy with an Oxford scholar, conducted in the open air, under the Martyrs' Memorial in that centre of careless professors, Gowles had spoken of "Nicoděmus," "Eubŭlus," and "Stephānas." His unmannerly antagonist jeering at these slips of pronunciation, Gowles uttered his celebrated and crushing retort, "Did Paul know Greek?" The young man, his opponent, went away, silenced if not convinced.

Such a man was the Rev. Thomas Gowles in his home ministry. Circumstances called him to that wider field of usefulness, the Pacific, in which so many millions of our dusky brethren either worship owls, butterflies, sharks, and lizards, or are led away captive by the seductive pomps of the Scarlet Woman, or lapse languidly into the lap of a bloated and Erastian establishment, ignorant of the Truth as possessed by our community. Against all these forms of soul-destroying error the Rev. Thomas Gowles thundered nobly, "passing," as an admirer said, "like an evangelical cyclone, from the New Hebrides to the Aleutian Islands." It was during one of his missionary voyages, in a labour vessel, the *Blackbird*, that the following singular

events occurred, events which Mr. Gowles faithfully recorded, as will be seen, in his missionary narrative. We omit, as of purely secular interest, the description of the storm which wrecked the *Blackbird*, the account of the destruction of the steamer with all hands (not, let us try to hope, with all souls) on board, and everything that transpired till Mr. Gowles found himself alone, the sole survivor, and bestriding the mast in the midst of a tempestuous sea. What follows is from the record kept on pieces of skin, shards of pottery, plates of metal, papyrus leaves, and other strange substitutes for paper, used by Mr. Gowles during his captivity.

II. NARRATIVE OF MR. GOWLES. [2]

"I must now, though in sore straits for writing materials, and having entirely lost count of time, post up my diary, or rather commence my narrative. So far as I can learn from the jargon of the strange and lost people among whom Providence has cast me, this is, in their speech, the last of the month, *Thargeelyun*, as near as I can imitate the sound in English. Being in doubt as to the true time, I am resolved to regard to-morrow, and every seventh day in succession, as the Sabbath. The very natives, I have observed with great interest, keep one day at fixed intervals sacred to the Sun-god, whom they call Apollon, perhaps the same word as Apollyon. On this day they do no manner of work, but *that* is hardly an exception to their usual habits. A less industrious people (slaves and all) I never met, even in the Pacific. As to being more than common idle on one day out of seven, whether they have been taught so much of what is *essential* by some earlier missionary, or whether they may be the corrupted descendants of the Lost Tribes (whom they do not, however, at all resemble outwardly, being, I must admit, of prepossessing appearance), I can only conjecture. This Apollon of theirs, in his graven images (of which there are many), carries a bow and arrows, *fiery darts of the wicked*, another point in common between him and Apollyon, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. May I, like Christian, turn

[2] 1884. Date unknown. Month probably June.

aside and quench his artillery!

To return to my narrative. When I recovered consciousness, after the sinking of the *Blackbird*, I found myself alone, clinging to the mast. Now was I tossed on the crest of the wave, now the waters opened beneath me, and I sank down in the valleys of the sea. Cold, numbed, and all but lifeless, I had given up hope of earthly existence, and was nearly insensible, when I began to revive beneath the rays of the sun.

The sea, though still moved by a swell, was now much smoother, and, but for a strange vision, I might have believed that I was recovering my strength. I must, however, have been delirious or dreaming, for it appeared to me that a foreign female, of prepossessing exterior, though somewhat indelicately dressed, arose out of the waters close by my side, as lightly as if she had been a sea-gull on the wing. About her head there was wreathed a kind of muslin scarf, which she unwound and offered to me, indicating that I was to tie it about my waist, and it would preserve me from harm. So weak and exhausted was I that, without thinking, I did her bidding, and then lost sight of the female. Presently, as it seemed (but I was so drowsy that the time may have been longer than I fancied), I caught sight of land from the crest of a wave. Steep blue cliffs arose far away out of a white cloud of surf, and, though a strong swimmer, I had little hope of reaching the shore in safety.

Fortunately, or rather, I should say, providentially, the current and tide-rip carried me to the mouth of a river, and, with a great

effort, I got into the shoal-water, and finally staggered out on shore. There was a wood hard by, and thither I dragged myself. The sun was in mid heavens and very warm, and I managed to dry my clothes. I am always most particular to wear the dress of my calling, observing that it has a peculiar and gratifying effect on the minds of the natives. I soon dried my tall hat, which, during the storm, I had attached to my button-hole by a string, and, though it was a good deal battered, I was not without hopes of partially restoring its gloss and air of British respectability. As will be seen, this precaution was, curiously enough, the human means of preserving my life. My hat, my black clothes, my white neck-tie, and the hymn-book I carry would, I was convinced, secure for me a favourable reception among the natives (if of the gentle brown Polynesian type), whom I expected to find on the island.

Exhausted by my sufferings, I now fell asleep, but was soon wakened by loud cries of anguish uttered at no great distance. I started to my feet, and beheld an extraordinary spectacle, which at once assured me that I had fallen among natives of the worst and lowest type. The dark places of the earth are, indeed, full of horrid cruelty.

The first cries which had roused me must have been comparatively distant, though piercing, and even now they reached me confused in the notes of a melancholy chant or hymn. But the shrieks grew more shrill, and I thought I could distinguish the screams of a woman in pain or dread from the

groans drawn with more difficulty from a man. I leaped up, and, climbing a high part of the river bank, I beheld, within a couple of hundred yards, an extraordinary procession coming from the inner country towards the mouth of the stream.

At first I had only a confused view of bright stuffs – white, blue, and red – and the shining of metal objects, in the midst of a crowd partly concealed by the dust they raised on their way. Very much to my surprise I found that they were advancing along a wide road, paved in a peculiar manner, for I had never seen anything of this kind among the heathen tribes of the Pacific. Their dresses, too, though for the most part mere wraps, as it were, of coloured stuff, thrown round them, pinned with brooches, and often clinging in a very improper way to the figure, did not remind me of the costume (what there is of it) of Samoans, Fijians, or other natives among whom I have been privileged to labour.

But these observations give a more minute impression of what I saw than, for the moment, I had time to take in. The foremost part of the procession consisted of boys, many of them almost naked. Their hands were full of branches, wreathed in a curious manner with strips of white or coloured wools. They were all singing, and were led by a woman carrying in her arms a mis-shapen wooden idol, not much unlike those which are too frequent spectacles all over the Pacific. Behind the boys I could now distinctly behold a man and woman of the Polynesian type, naked to the waist, and staggering with bent backs beneath

showers of blows. The people behind them, who were almost as light in colour as ourselves, were cruelly flogging them with cutting branches of trees. Round the necks of the unfortunate victims – criminals I presumed – were hung chains of white and black figs, and in their hands they held certain herbs, figs, and cheese, for what purpose I was, and remain, unable to conjecture. Whenever their cries were still for a moment, the woman who carried the idol turned round, and lifted it in her arms with words which I was unable to understand, urging on the tormentors to ply their switches with more severity.

Naturally I was alarmed by the strangeness and ferocity of the natives, so I concealed myself hastily in some brushwood behind a large tree. Much to my horror I found that the screams, groans, and singing only drew nearer and nearer. The procession then passed me so close that I could see blood on the backs of the victims, and on their faces an awful dread and apprehension. Finally, the crowd reached the mouth of the river, at the very place where I had escaped from the sea. By aid of a small pocket-glass I could make out that the men were piling great faggots of green wood, which I had noticed that some of them carried, on a spot beneath the wash of high tide. When the pile had reached a considerable height, the two victims were placed in the middle. Then, by some means, which I was too far off to detect, fire was produced, and applied to the wild wood in which the unhappy man and woman were enveloped. Soon, fortunately, a thick turbid smoke, in which but little flame appeared, swept

all over the beach. I endeavoured to stop my ears, and turned my head away that I might neither see nor hear more of this spectacle, which I now perceived to be a human sacrifice more cruel than is customary even among the Fijians.

When I next ventured to look up, the last trails of smoke were vanishing away across the sea; the sun gazed down on the bright, many-coloured throng, who were now singing another of their hymns, while some of the number were gathering up ashes (human ashes!) from a blackened spot on the sand, and were throwing them into the salt water. The wind tossed back a soft grey dust in their faces, mixed with the surf and spray. It was dark before the crowd swept by me again, now chanting in what appeared to be a mirthful manner, and with faces so smiling and happy that I could scarcely believe they had just taken part in such abominable cruelty. On the other hand, a weight seemed to have been removed from their consciences. So deceitful are the wiles of Satan, who deludes the heathen most in their very religion! Tired and almost starved as I was, these reflections forced themselves upon me, even while I was pondering on the dreadful position in which I found myself. Way of escape from the island (obviously a very large one) there was none. But, if I remained all night in the wood, I must almost perish of cold and hunger. I had therefore no choice but to approach the barbarous people, though, from my acquaintance with natives, I knew well that they were likely either to kill and eat me, or to worship me as a god. Either event was too dreadful to bear reflection.

I was certain, however, that, owing to the dress of my sacred calling, I could not be mistaken for a mere beach-comber or labour-hunter, and I considered that I might easily destroy the impression (natural among savages on first seeing a European) that I was a god. I therefore followed the throng from a distance, taking advantage for concealment of turns in the way, and of trees and underwood beside the road. Some four miles' walking, for which I was very unfit, brought us across a neck of land, and from high ground in the middle I again beheld the sea. Very much to my surprise the cape on which I looked down, safe in the rear of the descending multitude, was occupied by a kind of city.

The houses were not the mere huts of South Sea Islanders, but, though built for the most part of carved and painted wood, had white stone foundations, and were of considerable height. On a rock in the centre of the bay were some stone edifices which I took to be temples or public buildings. The crowd gradually broke up, turning into their own dwellings on the shore, where, by the way, some large masted vessels were drawn up in little docks. But, while the general public, if I may say so, slowly withdrew, the woman with the idol in her arms, accompanied by some elderly men of serious aspect, climbed the road up to the central public buildings.

Moved by some impulse which I could hardly explain, I stealthily followed them, and at last found myself on a rocky platform, a kind of public square, open on one side to the sea, and shut in on either hand, and at the back, by large houses with

smooth round pillars, and decorated with odd coloured carvings. There was in the open centre of the square an object which I recognized as an altar, with a fire burning on it. Some men came out of the chief building, dragging a sheep, with chains of flowers round its neck. Another man threw something on the fire, which burned with a curious smell. At once I recognized the savour of incense, against which (as employed illegally by the Puseyites) I had often firmly protested in old days at home. The spirit of a soldier of the Truth entered into me; weary as I was, I rushed from the dusky corner where I had been hidden in the twilight, ran to the altar, and held up my hand with my hymn-book as I began to repeat an address that had often silenced the papistic mummers in England. Before I had uttered half a dozen words, the men who were dragging the sheep flew at me, and tried to seize me, while one of them offered a strange-looking knife at my throat. I thought my last hour had come, and the old Adam awakening in me, I delivered such a blow with my right on the eye of the man with the knife, that he reeled and fell heavily against the altar. Then assuming an attitude of self-defence (such as was, alas! too familiar to me in my unregenerate days), I awaited my assailants.

They were coming on in a body when the veil of the large edifice in front was lifted, and a flash of light streamed out on the dusky square, as an old man dressed in red hurried to the scene of struggle. He wore a long white beard, had green leaves twisted in his hair, and carried in his hand a gilded staff curiously wreathed

with wool. When they saw him approaching, my assailants fell back, each of them kissing his own hand and bowing slightly in the direction of the temple, as I rightly supposed it to be. The old man, who was followed by attendants carrying torches burning, was now close to us, and on beholding me, he exhibited unusual emotions.

My appearance, no doubt, was at that moment peculiar, and little creditable, as I have since thought, to a minister, however humble. My hat was thrust on the back of my head, my coat was torn, my shirt open, my neck-tie twisted round under my ear, and my whole attitude was not one generally associated with the peaceful delivery of the message. Still, I had never conceived that any spectacle, however strange and unbecoming, could have produced such an effect on the native mind, especially in a person who was manifestly a chief, or high-priest of some heathen god. Seeing him pause, and turn pale, I dropped my hands, and rearranged my dress as best I might. The old Tohunga, as my New Zealand flock used to call their priest, now lifted his eyes to heaven with an air of devotion, and remained for some moments like one absorbed in prayer or meditation. He then rapidly uttered some words, which, of course, I could not understand, whereon his attendants approached me gently, with signs of respect and friendship. Not to appear lacking in courtesy, or inferior in politeness to savages, I turned and raised my hat, which seemed still more to alarm the old priest. He spoke to one of his attendants, who instantly ran across the square, and

entered the courtyard of a large house, surrounded by a garden, of which the tall trees looked over the wall, and wooden palisade. The old man then withdrew into the temple, and I distinctly saw him scatter, with the leafy bough of a tree, some water round him as he entered, from a vessel beside the door. This convinced me that some of the emissaries of the Scarlet Woman had already been busy among the benighted people, a conjecture, however, which proved to be erroneous.

I was now left standing by the altar, the attendants observing me with respect which I feared might at any moment take the blasphemous form of worship. Nor could I see how I was to check their adoration, and turn it into the proper channel, if, as happened to Captain Cook, and has frequently occurred since, these darkened idolaters mistook me for one of their own deities. I might spurn them, indeed; but when Nicholson adopted that course, and beat the Fakirs who worshipped him during the Indian Mutiny, his conduct, as I have read, only redoubled their enthusiasm. However, as events proved, they never at any time were inclined to substitute me for their heathen divinities; very far from it indeed, though their peculiar conduct was calculated to foster in my breast this melancholy delusion.

I had not been left long to my own thoughts when I marked lights wandering in the garden or courtyard whither the messenger had been sent by the old priest. Presently there came forth from the court a man of remarkable stature, and with an air of seriousness and responsibility. In his hand he carried a short

staff, or baton, with gold knobs, and he wore a thin golden circlet in his hair. As he drew near, the veil of the temple was again lifted, and the aged priest came forward, bearing in his arms a singular casket of wood, ornamented with alternate bands of gold and ivory, carved with outlandish figures. The torch-bearers crowded about us in the darkness, and it was a strange spectacle to behold the smoky, fiery light shining on the men's faces and the rich coloured dresses, or lighting up the white idol of Apollon, which stood among the laurel trees at the entrance of the temple.

III. THE PROPHECY

The priest and the man with the gold circlet, whom I took to be a chief, now met, and, fixing their eyes on me, held a conversation of which, naturally, I understood nothing. I maintained an unmoved demeanour, and, by way of showing my indifference, and also of impressing the natives with the superiority of our civilization, I took out and wound up my watch, which, I was glad to find, had not been utterly ruined by the salt water. Meanwhile the priest was fumbling in his casket, whence he produced a bundle of very ragged and smoky old bits of parchment and scraps of potsherds. These he placed in the hands of his attendants, who received them kneeling. From the very bottom of the casket he extracted some thin plates of a greyish metal, lead, I believe, all mouldy, stained, and ragged. Over these he pored and puzzled for some time, trying, as I guessed, to make out something inscribed on this curious substitute for writing-paper. I had now recovered my presence of mind, and, thinking at once to astonish and propitiate, I drew from my pocket, wiped, and presented to him my spectacles, indicating, by example, the manner of their employment. No sooner did he behold these common articles of every-day use, than the priest's knees began to knock together, and his old hands trembled so that he could scarcely fix the spectacles on his nose. When he had managed this it was plain that he found much less difficulty with

his documents. He now turned them rapidly over, and presently discovered one thin sheet of lead, from which he began to read, or rather chant, in a slow measured tone, every now and then pausing and pointing to me, to my hat, and to the spectacles which he himself wore at the moment. The chief listened to him gravely, and with an expression of melancholy that grew deeper and sadder till the end. It was a strange scene.

I afterwards heard the matter of the prophecy, as it proved to be, which was thus delivered. I have written it down in the language of the natives, spelling it as best I might, and I give the translation which I made when I became more or less acquainted with their very difficult dialect. [3] It will be seen that the prophecy, whatever its origin, was strangely fulfilled. Perhaps the gods of this people were not mere idols, but evil spirits, permitted, for some wise purpose, to delude their unhappy worshippers. [4] This, doubtless, they might best do by occasionally telling the truth, as in my instance. But this theory – namely, that the gods of the heathen are perhaps evil and wandering spirits – is, for reasons which will afterwards appear, very painful to me, personally reminding me that I may have sinned as few have done since the days of the early Christians. But I trust this will not be made

[3] The original text of this prophecy is printed at the close of Mr. Gowles's narrative.

[4] It has been suggested to me that some travelled priest or conjurer of this strange race may have met Europeans, seen hats, spectacles, steamers, and so forth, and may have written the prophecy as a warning of the dangers of our civilization. In that case the forgery was very cunningly managed, as the document had every appearance of great age, and the alarm of the priest was too natural to have been feigned.

a reproach to me in our Connection, especially as I have been the humble instrument of so blessed a change in the land of the heathen, there being no more of them left. But, to return to the prophecy, it is given roughly here in English. It ran thus: – "But when a man, having a chimney pot on his head, and four eyes, appears, and when a sail-less ship also comes, sailing without wind and breathing smoke, then will destruction fall upon the Scherian island." Perhaps, from this and other expressions to be offered in a later chapter, the learned will be able to determine whether the speech is of the Polynesian or the Papuan family, or whether, as I sometimes suspect, it is of neither, but of a character quite isolated and peculiar.

The effect produced on the mind of the chief by the prophecy amazed me, as he looked, for a native, quite a superior and intelligent person. None of them, however, as I found, escaped the influence of their baneful superstitions. Approaching me, he closely examined myself, my dress, and the spectacles which the old priest now held in his hands. The two men then had a hurried discussion, and I have afterwards seen reason to suppose that the chief was pointing out the absence of certain important elements in the fulfilment of the prophecy. Here was I, doubtless, "a man bearing a chimney on his head" (for in this light they regarded my hat), and having "four eyes," that is, including my spectacles, a convenience with which they had hitherto been unacquainted. It was undeniable that a prophecy written by a person not accustomed to the resources of civilization, could not

more accurately have described me and my appearance. But the "ship without sails" was still lacking to the completion of what had been foretold, as the chief seemed to indicate by waving his hand towards the sea. For the present, therefore, they might hope that the worst would not come to the worst. Probably this conclusion brought a ray of hope into the melancholy face of the chief, and the old priest himself left off trembling. They even smiled, and, in their conversation, which assumed a lighter tone, I caught and recorded in pencil on my shirt-cuff, for future explanation, words which sounded like *aiskistos aneer*, *farmakos*, *catharma*, and *Thargeelyah*. [5] Finally the aged priest hobbled back into his temple, and the chief, beckoning me to follow, passed within the courtyard of his house.

[5] How terribly these words were afterwards to be interpreted, the reader will learn in due time.

IV. AT THE CHIEF'S HOUSE

The chief leading the way, I followed through the open entrance of the courtyard. The yard was very spacious, and under the dark shade of the trees I could see a light here and there in the windows of small huts along the walls, where, as I found later, the slaves and the young men of the family slept. In the middle of the space there was another altar, I am sorry to say; indeed, there were altars everywhere. I never heard of a people so religious, in their own darkened way, as these islanders. At the further end of the court was a really large and even stately house, with no windows but a clerestory, indicated by the line of light from within, flickering between the top of the wall and the beginning of the high-pitched roof. Light was also streaming through the wide doorway, from which came the sound of many voices. The house was obviously full of people, and, just before we reached the deep verandah, a roofed space open to the air in front, they began to come out, some of them singing. They had flowers in their hair, and torches in their hands. The chief, giving me a sign to be silent, drew me apart within the shadow of a plane tree, and we waited there till the crowd dispersed, and went, I presume, to their own houses. There were no women among them, and the men carried no spears nor other weapons. When the court was empty, we walked up the broad stone steps and stood within the doorway. I was certainly much surprised at

what I saw. There was a rude magnificence about this house such as I had never expected to find in the South Sea Islands. Nay, though I am not unacquainted with the abodes of opulence at home, and have been a favoured guest of some of our merchant princes (including Messrs. Bunton, the eminent haberdashers, whose light is so generously bestowed on our Connection), I admit that I had never looked on a more spacious reception-room, furnished, of course, in a somewhat savage manner, but, obviously, regardless of expense. The very threshold between the court and the reception-room, to which you descended by steps, was made of some dark metal, inlaid curiously with figures of beasts and birds, also in metal (gold, as I afterwards learned), of various shades of colour and brightness.

At first I had some difficulty in making out the details of the vast apartment which lay beyond. I was almost dizzy with hunger and fatigue, and my view was further obscured by a fragrant blue smoke, which rose in soft clouds from an open fireplace in the middle of the room. Singular to say, there was no chimney, merely a hole in the lofty roof, through which most of the smoke escaped. The ceiling itself, which was supported by carved rafters, was in places quite black with the vapour of many years. The smoke, however, was thin, and as the fuel on the fire, and on the braziers, was of dry cedar and sandal-wood, the perfume, though heavy, was not unpleasant. The room was partly illuminated by the fire itself, partly by braziers full of blazing branches of trees; but, what was most remarkable, there were

rows of metal images of young men (naked, I am sorry to say), with burning torches in their hands, ranged all along the side walls.

A good deal of taste, in one sense, had been expended in making these images, and money had clearly been no object. I might have been somewhat dazzled by the general effect, had I not reflected that, in my own country, gas is within reach of the poorest purse, while the electric light itself may be enjoyed by the very beggar in the street. Here, on the contrary, the dripping of the wax from the torches, the black smoke on the roof, the noisy crackling of the sandal-wood in the braziers, all combined to prove that these natives, though ingenious enough in their way, were far indeed below the level of modern civilization. The abominable ceremony of the afternoon would have proved as much, and now the absence of true *comfort*, even in the dwelling of a chief, made me think once more of the hardships of a missionary's career.

But I must endeavour to complete the picture of domestic life in the island, which I now witnessed for the first time, and which will never be seen again by Europeans. The walls themselves were of some dark but glittering metal, on which designs in lighter metal were inlaid. There were views of the chief going to the chase, his bow in his hand; of the chief sacrificing to idols; of men and young women engaged in the soul-destroying practice of promiscuous dancing; there were wild beasts, lions among others; rivers, with fish in them; mountains, trees, the sun and

moon, and stars, all not by any means ill designed, for the work of natives. The pictures, indeed, reminded me a good deal of the ugly Assyrian curiosities in the British Museum, as I have seen them when conducting the children of the Bungletonian Band of Hope through the rooms devoted to the remains of Bible peoples, such as the Egyptians, Hittites, and others.

Red or blue curtains, strangely embroidered, hung over the doors, and trophies of swords, shields, and spears, not of steel, but of some darker metal, were fixed on the tall pillars that helped to prop the roof. At the top of the wall, just beneath the open unglazed spaces, which admitted light and air in the daytime, and wind and rain in bad weather, was a kind of frieze, or coping, of some deep blue material. [6] All along the sides of the hall ran carved seats, covered with pretty light embroidered cloths, not very different from modern Oriental fabrics. The carpets and rugs were precisely like those of India and Persia, and I supposed that they must have been obtained through commerce. But I afterwards learned that they were, beyond doubt, of native manufacture.

At the further end of the room was a kind of platform, or daïs, on which tables were set with fruit and wine. But much more curious than the furniture of the hall was the group of women sitting by the fire in the centre. There sat in two rows some twenty girls, all busily weaving, and throwing the shuttle from hand to hand, laughing and chattering in low voices. In the midst of them,

[6] I afterwards found it was blue smalt.

on a high chair of cedar-wood, decorated with ivory, and with an ivory footstool, sat a person whom, in a civilized country, one must have looked on with respect as a lady of high rank. She, like her husband the chief, had a golden circlet twisted in her hair, which was still brown and copious, and she wore an appearance of command.

At her feet, on a stool, reclined a girl who was, I must confess, of singular beauty. Doto had long fair hair, a feature most unusual among these natives. She had blue eyes, and an appearance of singular innocence and frankness. She was, at the moment, embroidering a piece of work intended, as I afterwards learned with deep pain, for the covering of one of their idols, to whose service the benighted young woman was devoted. Often in after days, I saw Doto stooping above her embroidery and deftly interweaving the green and golden threads into the patterns of beasts and flowers. Often my heart went out to this poor child of pagan tribe, and I even pleased myself with the hope that some day, a reclaimed and enlightened character, she might employ her skill in embroidering slippers and braces for a humble vessel. I seemed to see her, a helpmate meet for me, holding Mothers' Meetings, playing hymn-tunes on the lyre, or the double pipes, the native instruments, and, above all, winning the islanders from their cruel and abominable custom of exposing their infant children on the mountains. How differently have all things been arranged.

But I am wandering from my story. When we reached the

group by the fireside, who had at first been unaware of our entrance, the chief's wife gave a slight start, alarmed doubtless by my appearance. She could never have seen, nor even dreamed of, such a spectacle as I must have presented, haggard, ragged, faint with hunger, and worn with fatigue as I was. The chief motioned to me that I should kneel at his wife's feet, and kiss her hand, but I merely bowed, not considering this a fit moment to protest otherwise against such sacrilegious mummeries. But the woman – her name I learned later was Ocyale – did not take my attitude in bad part. The startled expression of her face changed to a look of pity, and, with a movement of her hand, she directed Doto to bring a large golden cup from the table at the upper end of the room. Into this cup she ladled some dark liquid from a bowl which was placed on a small three-legged stand, or dumb waiter, close to her side. Next she spilt a little of the wine on the polished floor, with an appearance of gravity which I did not understand. It appears that this spilling of wine is a drink offering to their idols. She then offered me the cup, which I was about to taste, when I perceived that the liquor was indubitably *alcoholic*!

A total abstainer, I had, I am thankful to say, strength enough to resist the temptation thus adroitly thrust upon me. Setting down the cup, I pointed to the badge of blue ribbon, which, though damp and colourless, remained faithful to my button-hole. I also made signs I was hungry, and would be glad of something to eat. My gestures, as far as the blue ribbon went, must have been thrown away, of course, but any one could

understand that I was fainting from hunger. The mistress of the house called to one of the spinning girls, who rose and went within the door opening from the platform at the upper end of the room. She presently returned with an old woman, a housekeeper, as we would say, and obviously a faithful and familiar servant. After some conversation, of which I was probably the topic, the old woman hobbled off, laughing. She soon came back, bringing, to my extreme delight, a basket with cakes and goat cheese, and some cold pork in a dish.

I ought, perhaps, to say here that, in spite of the luxury of their appointments, and their extraordinary habit of "eating and drinking all day to the going down of the sun" (as one of their own poets says), these islanders are by no means good cooks. I have tasted of more savoury meats, dressed in coverings of leaves on hot stones, in Maori *pahs*, or in New Caledonian villages, than among the comparatively civilized natives of the country where I now found myself. Among the common people, especially, there was no notion of hanging or keeping meat. Often have I seen a man kill a hog on the floor of his house, cut it up, toast it, as one may say, at the fire, and then offer the grilled and frequently under-done flesh to his guests. Invariably the guests are obliged to witness the slaughter of the animal which is to supply their dinner. This slaughter is performed as a kind of sacrifice; the legs of the beast are the portions of the gods, and are laid, with bits of fat, upon the altars. Then chops, or rather kabobs, of meat are hacked off, spitted, and grilled or roasted at the fire.

Consequently all the meat tasted in this island is actually "meat offered to idols."

When I made this discovery the shock was very great, and I feared I was repeating a sin denounced from the earliest ages. But what was I to do? Not the meat only, but the vegetables, the fruit, the grain, the very fish (which the natives never eat except under stress of great hunger), were sacred to one or other of their innumerable idols. I must eat, or starve myself to death – a form of suicide. I therefore made up my mind to eat without scruple, remembering that the gods of the nations are nothing at all, but the fancies of vain dreamers, and the invention of greedy and self-seeking priests.

These scruples were of later growth, after I had learned that their meals were invariably preceded by a sacrifice, partly to provide the food, partly as grace before meat. On the present occasion I made an excellent supper, though put to a good deal of inconvenience by the want of forks, which were entirely unknown on the island. Finding that I would not taste the alcoholic liquor, which the natives always mixed with a large proportion of water, Doto rose, went out, and returned with a great bowl of ivy-wood, curiously carved, and full of milk. In this permitted beverage, as my spirits were rising, I drank the young lady's health, indicating my gratitude as well as I could. She bowed gracefully, and returned to her task of embroidery. Meanwhile her father and mother were deep in conversation, and paid no attention to me, obviously understanding that my chief

need was food. I could not but see that the face of the chief's wife was overclouded, probably with anxiety caused by the prophecy of which I was, or was taken for, the subject.

When my hunger was satisfied, I fell, it seems, into a kind of doze, from which I was wakened by the noise of people rising, moving, and pushing back chairs. I collected my senses, and perceived that the room was almost dark, most of the inmates had gone, and the chief was lighting a torch at one of the braziers. This torch he placed in my hand, indicating, as I understood, that I was to put myself under the guidance of two of the young women who had been spinning. At this I was somewhat perplexed, but followed where they went before me, each of them holding a burning torch. The light flared and the smoke drifted among the corridors, till we came within sound of running water. In a lofty green chamber was a large bath of polished marble, carved with shapes of men armed with pitchforks, and employed in spearing fish. The bath was full of clear water, of somewhat higher than tepid heat, and the stream, welling up in one part, flowed out in another, not splashing or spilling. The young women now brought flasks of oil, large sponges, such as are common in these seas, and such articles of dress as are worn by the men among the natives. But, to my astonishment, the girls showed no intention of going away, and it soon became evident *that they meant to assist me in my toilet*! I had some difficulty in getting them to understand the indecorum of their conduct, or rather (for I doubt if they understood it after all) in prevailing

on them to leave me. I afterwards learned that this custom, shocking as it appears to Europeans, is regarded as entirely right and usual even by the better class of islanders; nor, to do them justice, have I ever heard any imputations on the morality of their women. Except among the shepherds and shepherdesses in the rural districts, whose conduct was very regardless, a high standard of modesty prevailed among the female natives. In this, I need not say, they were a notable exception among Polynesian races.

Left to my own devices by the retreat of the young women, I revelled in the pleasures of the bath, and then the question arose, How was I to be clothed?

I had, of course, but one shirt with me, and that somewhat frayed and worn. My boots, too, were almost useless from their prolonged immersion in salt water. Yet I could not bring myself to adopt the peculiar dress of the natives, though the young persons had left in the bath-room changes of raiment such as are worn by the men of rank. These garments were simple, and not uncomfortable, but, as they showed the legs from the knees downwards, like kilts, I felt that they would be unbecoming to one in my position.

Almost the chief distinction between civilized man and the savage, is the wearing of trousers. When a missionary in Tongo, and prime minister of King Haui Ha there, I made the absence of breeches in the males an offence punishable by imprisonment. Could I, on my very first appearance among the islanders to-

morrow, fly, as it were, in the face of my own rules, and prove false to my well-known and often expressed convictions? I felt that such backsliding was impossible. On mature consideration, therefore, I made the following arrangement.

The garments of the natives, when they condescended to wear any, were but two in number. First, there was a long linen or woollen shirt or smock, without sleeves, which fell from the neck to some distance below the knees. This shirt I put on. A belt is generally worn, into which the folds of the smock can be drawn up or "kilted," when the wearer wishes to have his limbs free for active exercise. The other garment is simply a large square piece of stuff, silken or woollen as it happens in accordance with the weather, and the rank of the wearer. In this a man swathes himself, somewhat as a Highlander does in his plaid, pinning it over the shoulder and leaving the arms free. When one is accustomed to it, this kind of dress is not uncomfortable, and many of the younger braves carried it with a good deal of grace, showing some fancy and originality in the dispositions of the folds. Though attired in this barbarous guise, I did not, of course, dispense with my trousers, which, being black, contrasted somewhat oddly with my primrose-coloured *ki ton*, as they call the smock, and the dark violet *clamis*, or plaid. When the natives do not go bareheaded, they usually wear a kind of light, soft wideawake, but this. I discarded in favour of my hat, which had already produced so remarkable an effect on their superstitious minds.

Now I was dressed, as fittingly as possible in the circumstances, but I felt that my chief need was a bed to lie down upon. I did not wish to sleep in the bath-room, so, taking my torch from the stand in which I had placed it, I sallied forth into the corridors, attired as I have described, and carrying my coat under my arm. A distant light, and the noise of females giggling, which increased most indecorously as I drew near, attracted my attention. Walking in the direction of the sounds, I soon discovered the two young women to whose charge I had been committed by the chief. They appeared to be in high spirits, and, seizing my arms before I could offer any resistance, they dragged me at a great pace down the passage and out into the verandah. Here the air was very fragrant and balmy, and a kind of comfortable "shakedown" of mattresses, covered with coloured blankets, had been laid for me in a corner. I lay down as soon as the sound of the young women's merriment died out in the distance, and after the extraordinary events of the night, I was soon sleeping as soundly as if I had been in my father's house at Hackney Wick.

V. A STRANGER ARRIVES

When I wakened next morning, wonderfully refreshed by sleep and the purity of the air, I had some difficulty in remembering where I was and how I came there in such a peculiar costume. But the voices of the servants in the house, and the general stir of people going to and fro, convinced me that I had better be up and ready to put my sickle into this harvest of heathen darkness. Little did I think how soon the heathen darkness would be trying to put the sickle into me! I made my way with little difficulty, being guided by the sound of the running water, to the bath-room, and thence into the gardens. These were large and remarkably well arranged in beds and plots of flowers and fruit-trees. I particularly admired a fountain in the middle, which watered the garden, and supplied both the chief's house and the town. Returning by way of the hall, I met the chief, who, saluting me gravely, motioned me to one of many small tables on which was set a bowl of milk, some cakes, and some roasted kid's flesh.

After I had done justice to this breakfast, he directed me to follow him, and, walking before me with his gold-knobbed staff in his hand, passed out of the shady court into the public square. Here we found a number of aged men seated on unpleasantly smooth and cold polished stones in a curious circle of masonry. They were surrounded by a crowd of younger men,

shouting, laughing, and behaving with all the thoughtless levity and merriment of a Polynesian mob. They became silent as the chief approached, and the old men rose from their places till he had taken a kind of rude throne in the circle.

For my part, I was obliged to stand alone in their midst, and it seemed that they were debating about myself and my future treatment. First the old priest, whom I had seen on the night before, got up, and, as I fancied, his harangue was very unfavourable to me. He pointed at the inevitable flower-crowned altar which, of course, was in the centre of the market-place, and from the way he shook a sickle he held in his hand I believe that he was proposing to sacrifice me on the spot. In the midst of his oration two vultures, black with white breasts, flew high over our heads, chasing a dove, which they caught and killed right above the market-place, so that the feathers fell down on the altar. The islanders, as I afterwards discovered, are full of childish superstitions about the flight of birds, from which they derive omens as to future events. The old priest manifestly attempted to make political capital against me out of the interesting occurrence in natural history which we had just observed. He hurried to the altar, caught up a handful of the bleeding feathers, and, with sickle in hand, was rushing towards me, when he tripped over the head of a bullock that had lately been sacrificed, and fell flat on his face, while the sickle flew far out of his hand.

On this the young men, who were very frivolous, like most

of the islanders, laughed aloud, and even the elders smiled. The chief now rose with his staff in his grasp, and, pointing first to me and then to the sky, was, I imagined, propounding a different interpretation of the omen from that advanced by the old priest. Meantime the latter, with a sulky expression of indifference, sat nursing his knees, which had been a good deal damaged by his unseemly sprawl on the ground. When the chief sat down, a very quiet, absent-minded old gentleman arose. Elatreus was his name, as I learned later; his family had a curious history, and he himself afterwards came to an unhappy and terrible end, as will be shown in a subsequent part of my narrative.

I felt quite at home, as if I had been at some vestry-meeting, or some committee in the old country, when Elatreus got up. He was stout, very bald, and had a way of thrusting his arm behind him, and of humming and hawing, which vividly brought back to mind the oratory of my native land. He had also, plainly enough, the trick of forgetting what he intended to say, and of running off after new ideas, a trick very uncommon among these natives, who are born public speakers. I flattered myself that this orator was in favour of leniency towards me, but nobody was paying much attention to him, when a shout was heard from the bottom of the hill on which the square is built. Everybody turned round, the elders jumped up with some alacrity for the sake of a better view on the polished stones where they had been sitting, and so much was the business before the meeting forgotten in the new excitement, that I might have run away unnoticed, had there been

anywhere to run to. But flight was out of the question, unless I could get a boat and some provisions, and I had neither. I was pleased, however, to see that I was so lightly and laxly guarded.

The cause of the disturbance was soon apparent. A number of brown, half-naked, sturdy sailors, with red caps, not unlike fezzes, on their heads, appeared, bawling and making for the centre of the square. They were apparently carrying or dragging some person with them, some person who offered a good deal of resistance. Among the foreign and unintelligible cries and howls which rang through the market-place, my heart leaped up, in natural though unsanctified pleasure, as I heard the too well-known but unexpected accents of British profanity.

"Where the (somewhere) are you blooming sons of beach-combers dragging a Bri'sh shailor? Shtand off, you ragged set of whitewashed Christy Minstrels, you! Where's the Bri'sh Conshul's? Take me, you longshore sons of sharks, to the Bri'sh Conshul's! If there's one white man among you let him stand out and hit a chap his own weight."

"Hullo!" suddenly cried the speaker, whom I had recognized as William Bludger, one of the most depraved and regardless of the whole wicked crew of the *Blackbird*, – "hullo, if here isn't old Captain Hymn-book!" – a foolish nickname the sailors had given me.

He was obviously more than half-drunk, and carried in his hand a black rum-bottle, probably (from all I knew of him) not nearly full. His shirt and trousers were torn and dripping;

apparently he had been washed ashore, like myself, after the storm, and had been found and brought into the town by some of the fishing population.

What a blow to all my hopes was the wholly unlooked-for arrival of this tipsy, irreclaimable seaman, this unawakened Bill Bludger! I had framed an ideal of what my own behaviour, in my trying circumstances, ought to be. Often had I read how these islanders possess a tradition that a wonderful white man, a being all sweetness and lucidity, landed in their midst, taught them the knowledge of the arts, converted them to peace and good manners, and at last mysteriously departed, promising that he would return again. I had hopes – such things have happened – that the islanders might take me for this wonderful white man of their traditions, come back according to his promise. If this delusion should occur, I would not at once undeceive them, but take advantage of the situation, and so bring them all into the Bungletonian fold. I knew there was no time to waste. Lutheran, French, or Church of England schemers, in schooners, might even now be approaching the island, with their erroneous and deplorable tenets. Again, I had reckoned, if my hopes proved false, on attaining, not without dignity, the crown of the proto-martyr of my Connection. Beyond occasional confinement in police cells, consequent on the strategic manœuvres of the Salvation Army, none of us had ever known what it was to suffer in the cause. If I were to be the first to testify with my blood, on this unknown soil, at least I could meet my doom with dignity. In

any case, I should be remembered, I had reckoned, in the island traditions, either as an isolated and mysterious benefactor, the child of an otherwise unknown race, or as a solitary martyr from afar.

All these vain hopes of spiritual pride were now blown to the wind by Bill Bludger's unexpected appearance and characteristic conduct. No delusions about a divine white stranger from afar could survive the appearance and behaviour of so compromising an acquaintance as William. He was one white stranger too many. There he was, still struggling, shouting, swearing, smelling of rum, and making frantic attempts to reach me and shake hands with me.

"Let bygones be bygones, Captain Hymn-book, your Reverence," he screamed; "here's your jolly good health and song," and he put his horrible black bottle to his unchastened lips. "Here we are, Captain, two Englishmen agin a lot o' blooming Kanekas; let's clear out their whole blessed town, and steer for Sydney."

But, perceiving that I did not intend to recognize or carouse with him, William Bludger now changed his tone; "Yah, you lily-livered Bible-reader," he exclaimed, "what are you going about in *that* toggery for: copying Mr. Toole in *Paw Claudian*? *You* call yourself a missionary? Jove, you're more like a blooming play hactor in a penny gaff! Easy, then, my hearties," he added, seeing that the fishermen were approaching him again, with ropes in their hands. "Avast! stow your handcuffs."

In spite of his oaths and struggles, the inebriated mariner was firmly bound, hand and foot, and placed in the centre of the assembly. I only wished that the natives had also gagged him, for his language, though, of course, unintelligible to them, was profane, and highly painful to me.

Before returning to business, the chiefs carefully inspected the black bottle, of which they had dispossessed William Bludger. A golden vase was produced – they had always plenty of *them* handy – and the dark fluid was poured into this princely receptacle, diffusing a strong odour of rum. Each chief carefully tasted the stuff, and I was pained, on gathering, from the expression of their countenances, that they obviously relished the "fire-water" which has been the ruin of so many peoples in these beautiful but benighted seas. However, there was not enough left to go round, and it was manifestly unlikely that William Bludger had succeeded in conveying larger supplies from the wreck.

The meeting now assumed its former air of earnestness, and it was not hard to see that the arrival of my unhappy and degraded fellow-countryman had introduced a new element into the debate. Man after man spoke, and finally the chief rose, as I had little doubt, to sum up the discussion. He pointed to myself, and to William Bludger alternately, and the words which I had already noted, *Thargeelyah*, and *farmakoi*, frequently recurred in his speech. His ideas seemed to meet with general approval; even the old priest laid aside his sickle, and beat applause with his hands. He next rose, and, taking two garlands of beautiful

flowers from the horns of the altar, placed one wreath on the head of the drunken sailor, who had fallen asleep by this time. He then drew near me, and I had little doubt that he meant to make me also wear a garland, like some woman of rank and fashion at a giddy secular entertainment. Whatever his motive might be I was determined to wear nothing of the kind. But here some attendants grappled and held me, my hat was lifted from my brows, and the circlet of blossoms was carefully entwined all round my hat. The head-covering was then replaced, the whole assembly, forming a circle, danced around me and the unconscious Bludger, and, finally, the old priest, turning his face alternately to me and to the sun, intoned a hymn, the audience joining in at intervals.

My worst fears were, apparently, being realized. In spite of the compromising appearance and conduct of Bludger, it seemed beyond doubt that we were both regarded as, in some degree, divine and sacred. Resistance on my part was, it will be seen, impossible. I could not escape from the hands of my tormentors, and I was so wholly ignorant, at that time, of their tongue, that I knew not how to disclaim the honours thus blasphemously thrust upon me. I did my best, shouting, in English, "I am no *Thargeelyah*. I am no *farmakos*" supposing those words to be the native terms for one or other of their gods. On this the whole assembly, even the gravest, burst out laughing, each man poking his neighbour in the ribs, and uttering what I took to be jests at my expense. Their behaviour in this juncture, and frequently

afterwards, when I attempted to make them tell me the meaning of the unknown words, and of *catharma* (another expression the chief had used), greatly perplexed me. I had afterwards too good reason to estimate their dreadful lack of the ordinary feelings of humanity at its true value.

However, nothing but laughter (most unfitting the occasion) could be got out of the assembled natives. They now began to return to their homes, and Bludger, crowned with flowers that became him but ill, was carried off, not, as it seemed to me, without even a reverential demeanour on the part of his escort. Those who surrounded me, a kind of body-guard of six young men, had entirely recovered their composure, and behaved to me with a deference that was astonishing, but reassuring. From this time, I ought to say, though permitted to go where I would, and allowed to observe even their most secret rites, enjoying opportunities such as will never fall to another European, I was never, but once, entirely alone. My worshippers, as they might almost be called, so humble was their demeanour, still kept watchful eyes upon me, as if I were a being so precious that they were jealous of my every movement. It was now made plain to me, by signs, that I must wait for some little space before being conveyed to my appointed residence.

VI. A BACKSLIDER. A WARNING

We had not remained long by ourselves in the square, when the most extraordinary procession which I had ever beheld began to climb into the open space from the town beneath. I do not know if I have made it sufficiently clear that the square, on the crest of the isolated hill above the sea, was occupied only by public buildings, such as the temple, the house of the chief, and a large edifice used as a kind of town hall, so to speak. The natives in general lived in much smaller houses, many of them little better than huts, and divided by extremely narrow and filthy streets, on the slopes, and along the shores of the bay.

It was from these houses and from all the country round that the procession, with persons who fell into its ranks as they came, was now making its way. Almost all the parties concerned were young, boys and girls, or very young men and women, and though their dress was much scantier and less decent than what our ideas of delicacy require, it must be admitted that the general aspect of the procession was far from unpleasing. The clothes and wraps which the men and women wore were of various gay colours, and were, in most cases, embroidered quite skilfully with representations of flowers, fruits, wild beasts, and individuals of grotesque appearance. Every one was crowned with either flowers or feathers.

But, most remarkable of all, there was scarcely a person in this

large gathering who did not bring or lead some wild bird or beast. The girls carried young wild doves, young rooks, or the nestlings of such small fowls as sparrows and finches. It was a pretty sight to see these poor uninstructed young women, flushed with the exertion of climbing, and merry, flocking into the square, each with her pet (as I supposed, but the tender mercies of the heathen are cruel) half hidden in the folds of her gown. Of the young men, some carried hawks, some chained eagles, some young vultures. Many were struggling, too, with wild stags and wild goats, which they compelled with the utmost difficulty to march in the ranks of the procession. A number of young persons merely bore in their hands such fruits as were in season, obviously fine specimens, of which they had reason to be proud.

Others, again, were carrying little young bears, all woolly, comfortable-looking creatures, while the parent bears, adult bears at any rate, were brought along, chained, in the rear. My guards, or adorers, or whatever the young men who looked after me really were, led me forward, and made signs to me that I was to bring up the rear of the procession – behind the bears, which made no attempt (as in the case of the prophet) to take the part of a Minister of the Bungletonian Connection. What a position for one who would fain have been opening the eyes of this darkened people to better things! But, till I had acquired some knowledge of their language, I felt my only chance was to acquiesce in everything not positively sinful. The entrance of a menagerie and horticultural exhibition into the town – for thus I

explained to myself what was going on before my eyes – could not be severely censured by the harshest critic, and I prepared to show my affability by joining in an innocent diversion and popular entertainment.

Soon I found that, after all, I was not to be absolutely last in the advance of this miscellaneous exhibition, nor were the intentions of the people so harmless as I had imagined. This was no affair of cottage window gardens, and a distribution of prizes.

The crowd which had collected in front of the chief's house opened suddenly, and, in the throng of people, I detected a movement of excitement and alarm. Next I saw the horns of animals mixed with the heads and shoulders of the multitude, and then an extraordinary spectacle burst, at full speed, upon my gaze. Four great wild stags, plunging, rearing, and kicking, rushed by, dragging a small vehicle of unusual shape, in which stood, to my horror, the chief's beautiful daughter, Doto. The vehicle passed me like a flash of horns, in spite of the attempts of four resolute men, who clung at the stags' heads to restrain the impetuosity of these coursers. The car, I should explain – though I can hardly expect to be believed – was not unlike the floor of a hansom cab, from which the seat, the roof, the driver's perch, and everything else should have been removed, except the basis, the wheels, and the splashboard, the part on which we generally find the advertisements of Messrs. Mappin and Webb. On this floor, then, Doto stood erect, holding the reins; her yellow hair had become unbound, and was floating like a flag

behind her, and her beautiful face, far from displaying any alarm, was flushed with pleasure and pride. She was dressed in splendid and glittering attire, over which was fastened – so strange were the manners of these islanders – the newly-stripped skin of a great black bear. Thus dragged by the wild deer, Doto passed like a flash through the midst of the men and women, her stags being maddened to fresh excitement by the sight and smell of the bears, and other wild animals. But, eager as were the brutes that dragged the precarious carriage, they were somewhat tamed by the great steepness of the ascent, up which they bounded, to the heights at the back of the town. Up this path, often narrow and excessively dangerous, we all took our way, and finally, after passing through various perilous defiles and skirting many cliffs, we arrived at a level space in front of an ancient temple of one of their heathen gods. It was built like the others in the settlement below, but the white stone had become brown and yellow with time and weather, and the colours, chiefly red and blue, with which the graven images, in contempt of the second commandment, were painted, had faded, and grown very dim.

On the broad platform in front of this home of evil spirits had been piled a great mound of turf, sloping very gradually and smoothly, like the terrace of a well-kept lawn, to the summit, which itself was, perhaps, a hundred feet in circumference. On this was erected a kind of breastwork of trunks of trees, each tree some fifteen feet in length, and in the centre of the circular breastwork was an altar, as usual, under which blazed a fire of

great fierceness. From the temple came a very aged woman, dressed in bear skins, who carried a torch. This torch she lit at the blaze under the altar, and a number of the young men, lighting their torches at hers, set fire to the outer breastwork, in which certain open spaces or entrances had been purposely left. No sooner had the trees begun to catch fire, which they did slowly, being of green wood, than the multitude outside, with the most horrible and piercing outcries, began to drive the animals which they had brought with them into the midst of the flames.

The spectacle was one of the most terrible I ever beheld, even among this cruel and outlandish people, whose abominable inventions contrasted so strangely with the mildness of their demeanour where their religion was not concerned. It was pitiful to see the young birds, many of them not yet able to fly, flutter into the flames and the stifling smoke, and then fall, scorched, and twittering miserably. The young lambs and other domesticated animals were forced in without much resistance, but the great difficulty was to urge the wolves, antelopes, and other wild creatures, into the blaze. The cries of the multitude, who bounded about like maniacs, armed with clubs and torches, rose madly over the strange unusual screams and howls uttered by the wild beasts in their pain and terror. Ever and anon some animal would burst through the crowd, perhaps half burned, and with its fur on fire, and would be pursued to a certain distance, after which it was allowed to escape by the sacrificers. As I was watching, with all my hopes enlisted on its side, the efforts of an

antelope to escape, I heard a roar which was horrible even in that babel of abominable sights and sounds.

A great black bear, its pelt one sheet of flame, its whole appearance (if I may be permitted to say so) like that of a fiend from the pit, forced its way through the throng, and, bounding madly to the spot where Doto's car stood at a little distance, rose erect on its hind feet, and fixed its claws in the flank of one of the stags, the off-leader. Instantly the team of stags, escaping from the hands of the strong men who stood at their heads, plunged violently down the narrow and dangerous path which led to the city. I shouted to Doto to leap out, but she did not hear or did not understand me.

With a fixed look of horror on her white face, she dropped the useless reins, and the vehicle passed out of sight round a corner of the cliff.

I had but a moment in which to reflect on what might be done to rescue her. In that moment I providentially spied a double-edged axe which lay beside me on the grass, having fallen from the hands of one of the natives. Snatching up this weapon, I rushed to the edge of the cliff, and looked down. It was almost a sheer precipice, broken only by narrow shelves and clefts, on some of which grass grew, while on others a slight mountain-ash or a young birch just managed to find foothold.

Far, far beneath, hundreds of feet below, I could trace the windings of the path up which we had climbed.

Instantly my plan was conceived. I would descend the cliff,

risking my life, of course, but that was now of small value in this hopelessly heathen land, and endeavour to save the benighted Doto from the destruction to which she was hastening. Her car must pass along that portion of the path which lay, like a ribbon, in the depth below me, unless, as seemed too probable, it chanced to be upset before reaching the spot. To pursue it from behind was manifestly hopeless.

These thoughts flashed through my brain more rapidly than even the flight of the maddened red deer; and scarcely less swiftly, I began scrambling down the face of the cliff. It was really a series of almost hopeless leaps to which I was committed, and the axe, to which I clung, rather impeded than aided me as I let myself drop from one rocky shelf to another, catching at the boughs and roots of trees to break my fall. At last I reached the last ledge before the sheer wall of rock, which hung above the path. As I let myself down, feeling with my feet for any shelf or crack in the wall, I heard the blare of the stags, and the rattle of the wheels. Half intentionally, half against my will, I left my hold of a tree-root, and slid, bumping and scratching myself terribly, down the slippery and slatey face of the rocky wall, till I fell in a mass on the narrow road. In a moment I was on my feet, the axe I had thrown in front of me, and I grasped it instinctively as I rose. It was not too soon. The deer were almost on me. Stepping to the side of the way, where a rock gave some shelter, I dealt a blow at the nearest stag, under which he reeled and fell to the ground, his companion stumbling over him. In the mad group of

rearing beasts I smote right and left at the harness, which gave way beneath my strokes, and the unhurt stags sped down the glen, and then rushed into separate corries of the hills. The car was upset, and Doto lay pale and bleeding among the hoofs of the stricken deer.

I dragged her out of the danger to the side of the path. I felt her pulse, which still fluttered. I brought her, in my hat, water from the stream; and, finally, had the pleasure of seeing her return to life before the first of her friends came, wailing and lamenting, and tearing their hair, down the path.

When they found the girl unwounded, though still weak and faint, their joy knew no bounds, though I too plainly perceived that they were returning thanks to the heathen goddess whose priestess Doto was. As for me, they once more crowned me in the most elaborate, and, I think, unbecoming manner, with purple pandanus flowers. Then, having laid Doto on a litter, they returned in procession to the town, where the girl was taken into the chiefs house. As we parted, she held out her hand to me, but instantly withdrew it with a deep sigh. I closely watched her. She was weeping. I had noticed before that all the natives, as much as possible, avoided personal contact with me. This fact, coupled with the reverence which they displayed towards me, confirmed my impression that they regarded me as something supernatural, not of this world, and divine.

To remove this belief was most certainly my duty, but how was it to be done? Alas! I must now admit that I yielded to

a subtle temptation, and was led into conduct unworthy of a vessel. Sad to say, as I search the rewards of my own heart, I am compelled to confess that my real desire was not so much to undeceive the people – for in their bewildering myriads of foolish beliefs one more or less was of small importance – as to recommend myself to Doto. This young woman, though not a member of our Connection, and wholly ignorant of saving Truths, had begun to find favour in my eyes, and I hoped to lead her to the altar; altars, for that matter, being plentiful enough in this darkened land. I should have remembered the words once spoken by a very gracious young woman, the daughter of a pious farmer. "Mother," said she, "I have made up my mind never to let loose my affections upon any man as is not pious, and in good circumstances." Doto was, for an islander, in good circumstances, but who, ah! who, could call her pious?

I endeavoured, it is true, to convert her, but, ah! did I go to work in the right way? Did I draw, in awful colours, the certain consequences of ignorance of the Truth? Did I endeavour to strike a salutary terror into her heathen heart?

No; such would have been a proper course of conduct, but such was not mine! I weakly adopted the opposite plan – that used by the Jesuits in their dealings with the Chinese and other darkened peoples. I attempted, meanly attempted (but, as may be guessed, with but limited success), to give an orthodox Nonconformist character to the observances of Doto's religion. For example, instead of thundering, as was my duty, at her

worldly diversions of promiscuous dancing, and ball play, I took a part in these secular pursuits, fondly persuading myself that my presence discouraged levity, and was a check upon unseemly mirth.

Thus, among the young native men and maidens, in the windings of the mazy dance, might have been seen disporting himself, a person of stalwart form, whose attire still somewhat faintly indicated his European origin and sacred functions. A hymn-book in my hand instead of a rattle (used by the natives), I capered gaily through their midst. Often and often I led the music, instructing my festive flock in English hymns, which, however, I adapted to gay and artless melodies, such as "There's some one in de house wid Dinah!" or "Old Joe kicking up behind and afore!"

This kind of entertainment was entirely new to the natives, who heartily preferred it to their own dull music, resembling what are called, I believe, "Gregorians," by a bloated and Erastian establishment.

So far, then, I may perchance trust that my efforts were not altogether vain, and the seed thus sown may, in one or two cases, have fallen on ground not absolutely stony. But, alas! I have little room for hope.

I pursued my career of unblushing "economy" – as the Jesuits say, meaning, alas! economy of plain truth speaking – and of heathen dissipation. Few were the dances in which I did not take a part, sinking so low as occasionally to oblige with a hornpipe.

My blue ribbon had long ago worn out, and with it my strict views on Temperance. I acquired a liking for the strange drink of the islanders – a thick wine and water, sometimes mixed with cheese and honey. In fact, I was sliding back – like the unfortunate Fanti missionary, John Greedy, M.A., whose case, as reported by precious Mr. Grant Allen, so painfully moved serious circles – I was sliding back to the level of the savagery around me. May these confessions be accepted in the same spirit as they are offered; may it partly palliate my guilt that I had apparently no chance of escape from the island, and no hope beyond that of converting the natives and marrying Doto. I trusted to do it, not (as of old) by open and fearless denunciation, but by slowly winning hearts, in a secular and sportive capacity, before gaining souls.

Even so have I seen young priests of the prelatical Establishment aim at popularity by playing cricket with liberal coal-miners of sectarian persuasions. They told me they were "in the mission field," and one observed that his favourite post in the field was third man. I know not what he meant. But to return to the island.

My career of soul-destroying "amusement" (ah, how hollow!) was not uninterrupted by warnings. Every now and again the mask was raised, and I saw clearly the unspeakable horrors of heathen existence.

For example, in an earlier part of this narrative, I have mentioned an old heathen called Elatreus, a good-natured, dull,

absent-minded man, who reminded me of a respectable British citizen. How awful was *his* end, how trebly awful when I reflect how nearly I – but let me not anticipate. Elatreus was the head, and eldest surviving member of a family which had a singular history. I never could make out what the story was, but, in consequence of some ancient crime, the chief of the family was never allowed to enter the town hall. The penalty, if he infringed the law, was terrible. Now it chanced one day that I was wandering down the street, my hands full of rare flowers which I had gathered for Doto, and with four young doves in my hat. It was spring, and at that season the young persons of the island expected to receive such gifts from their admirers. I was also followed by eleven little fawns, which I had tamed for her, and four young whelps of the bear. At the same time, in the lightness of my foolish heart, I was singing a native song, all about one Lityerses, to the tune of "Barbara Allen."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.