BECKE LOUIS

BY ROCK AND POOL ON AN AUSTRAL SHORE, AND OTHER STORIES

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By Rock and Pool on an Austral Shore

The quaint, old-fashioned little town faces eastward to the blue Pacific, whose billows, when the wind blows from any point between north and east, come tumbling in across the shallow bar in ceaseless lines of foaming white, to meet, when the tide is on the ebb, the swift current of a tidal river as broad as the Thames at Westminster Bridge. On the south side of the bar, from the sleepy town itself to the pilot station on the Signal Hill, there rises a series of smooth grassy bluffs, whose seaward bases touch the fringe of many small beaches, or start sheer upward from the water when the tide is high, and the noisy swish and swirl of the eager river current has ceased.

As you stand on the Signal Hill, and look along the coast, you see a long, long monotonous line of beach, trending northward ten miles from end to end, forming a great curve from the sandspit on the north side of the treacherous bar to the blue loom

of a headland in shape like the figure of a couchant lion. Back from the shore-line, a narrow littoral of dense scrub, impervious to the rays of the sun, and unbroken in its solitude except by the cries of birds, or the heavy footfall of wild cattle upon the thick carpet of fallen leaves; and then, far to the west, the dimmed, shadowy outline of the main coastal range.

It is a keen, frosty morning in June—the midwinter of Australia—and as the red sun bursts through the sea-rim, a gentle land breeze creeps softly down from the mountain forest of gums and iron-barks, and blows away the mists that, all through a night of cloudless calm, have laid heavily upon the surface of the sleeping ocean. One by one the doors of the five little white-painted, weather-boarded houses which form the quarters of the pilot-boat's crew open, and five brown, hairy-faced men, each smoking a pipe, issue forth, and, hands in pockets, scan the surface of the sea from north to south, for perchance a schooner, trying to make the port, may have been carried along by the current from the southward, and is within signalling distance to tell her whether the bar is passable or not. For the bar of the Port is as changeable in its moods as the heart of a giddy maid to her lovers—to-day it may invite you to come in and take possession of its placid waters in the harbour beyond; to-morrow it may roar and snarl with boiling surf and savage, eddying currents, and whirlpools slapping fiercely against the grim, black rocks of the southern shore.

Look at the five men as they stand or saunter about on the

smooth, frosty grass. They are sailormen— one and all—as you can see by their walk and hear by their talk; rough, ready, and sturdy, though not so sturdy nor so square-built as your solid men of brave old Deal; but a long way better in appearance and character than the sponging, tip-seeking, loafing fraternity of slouching, lazy robbers who on the parades of Brighton, Hastings, and Eastbourne, and other fashionable seaside resorts in this country, lean against lamp-posts with "Licensed Boatman" writ on their hat-bands, and call themselves fishermen, though they seldom handle a herring or cod that does not come from a fishmonger's shop. These Australians of British blood are leaner in face, leaner in limb than the Kentish men, and drink whiskey instead of coffee or tea at early morn. But see them at work in the face of danger and death on that bar, when the surf is leaping high and a schooner lies broadside on and helpless to the sweeping rollers, and you will say that a more undaunted crew never gripped an oar to rescue a fellow-sailorman from the hungry sea.

One of them, a grey-haired, deeply-bronzed man of sixty, with his neck and hands tatooed in strange markings, imprinted thereon by the hands of the wild natives of Tucopia, in the South Seas, with whom he has lived forty years before as one of themselves, is mine own particular friend and crony, for his two sons have been playmates with my brothers and myself, who were all born in this quaint old-time seaport of the first colony in Australia; this forgotten remnant of the dread days

of the awful convict system, when the clank of horrible gyves sounded on the now deserted and grass-grown streets, and the swish of the hateful and ever active "cat" was heard within the walls of the huge red-brick prison on the bluff facing the sea. Oh, the old, old memories of those hideous times! How little they wounded or troubled our boyish minds, as we, bent on some fishing or hunting venture along the coast, walked along a road which had been first soddened by tears and then dried by the panting, anguished breathings of beings fashioned in the image of their Creator, as they toiled and died under the brutal hands of their savage task-masters—the civilian officials of that cruel "System" which, by the irony of fate, the far-seeing, gentle, and tender-hearted Arthur Phillip, the founder of Australia, was first appointed to administer.

But away with such memories for the moment. Over the lee side with them into the Sea of the Past, together with the clank of the fetters and the hum of the cat and the merciless laws of the time; sink them all together with the names of the military rum-selling traducers of the good Phillip, and of ill-tempered, passionate sailor Bligh of the *Bounty* —honest, brave, irascible, vindictive; destroyer of his ship's company on that fateful adventure to Tahiti, hero of the most famous boat-voyage the world has ever known; sea-bully and petty "hazer" of hapless Fletcher Christian and his comrades, gallant officer in battle and thanked by Nelson at Copenhagen; conscientious governor of a starveling colony gasping under the hands of

unscrupulous military money-makers, William Bligh deserves to be remembered by all men of English blood who are proud of the annals of the most glorious navy in the world.

But ere we descend to the beach to wander by rock and pool in this glowing Australian sun, the warm, loving rays of which are fast drying the frost-coated grass, let us look at these square, old-time monuments to the dead, placed on the Barrack Hill, and overlooking the sea. There are four in all, but around them are many low, sunken headstones of lichen-covered slabs, the inscriptions on which, like many of those on the stones in the cemetery by the reedy creek, have long since vanished.

There, indeed, if you care to brave the snake-haunted place you will discover a word, or the part of a word—"Talav–," "Torre–Vedras," "Vimiera," or "Badaj–," or "Fuentes de On–," and you know that underneath lies the dust of men who served their country well when the Iron Duke was rescuing Europe from the grip of the bloodstained Corsican. On one, which for seventy years has faced the rising sun and the salty breath of the ocean breeze, there remains but the one glorious word, "Aboukir!" every indented letter thickly filled with grey moss and lichen, though the name of he who fought there has disappeared, and being but that of some humble seaman, is unrecorded and unknown in the annals of his country. How strange it seems! but yet how fitting that this one word alone should be preserved by loving Nature from the decaying touch of Time. Perhaps the very hand of the convict mason who held the chisel to the stone

struck deeper as he carved the letters of the name of the glorious victory.

But let us away from here; for in the hot summer months amid these neglected and decaying memorials of the dead, creeping and crawling in and out of the crumbling masonry of the tombs, gliding among the long, reedy grass, or lying basking in the sun upon the fallen headstones, are deadly black and brown snakes. They have made this old, time-forgotten cemetery their own favourite haunting place; for the waters of the creek are near, and on its margin they find their prey. Once, so the shaky old wharfinger will tell you, a naval lieutenant, who had been badly wounded in the first Maori war, died in the commandant's house. He was buried here on the bank of the creek, and one day his young wife who had come from England to nurse him and found him dead, sat down on his grave and went to sleep. When she awoke, a great black snake was lying on her knees. She died that day from the shock.

The largest of these four monuments on the bluff stands nearest to the sea, and the inscription on the heavy flat slab of sandstone which covers it is fairly legible:—

> Sacred to the Memory of
> JAMES VAUGHAN,
> Who was a Private in Captain
> Fraser Allan's Company
> of the 40th Regiment,
> Who died on the 24th November, 1823,

of a Gunshot Wound Received
on the 20th Day of the Month,
when in Pursuit of a
Runaway Convict.
Aged 25 years.

The others record the names of the "infant son and daughters of Mr. G. Smith, Commissariat Storekeeper," and of "Edward Marvin, who died 4th July, 1821, aged 21 years."

Many other sunken headstones denote the last resting-places of soldiers and sailors, and civilian officials, who died between 1821 and 1830, when the little port was a thriving place, and when, as the old gossips will tell you, it made a "rare show, when the Governor came here, and Major Innes—him as brought that cussed lantana plant from the Peninsula—sent ninety mounted men to escort him to Lake Innes."

The tide is low, and the flat *congewoi* -covered ledges of reef on the southern side of the bar lie bare and exposed to the sun. Here and there in the crystal pools among the rocks, fish have been left by the tide, and as you step over the *congewoi* , whose teats spurt out jets of water to the pressure of your foot, large silvery bream and gaily-hued parrot-fish rush off and hide themselves from view. But tear off a piece of *congewoi,* open it, and throw the sanguinary-coloured delicacy into the water, and presently you will see the parrot-fish dart out eagerly, and begin to tear it asunder with their long, irregular, and needle-like teeth, whilst the more cautious and lordly bream, with wary eye

and gentle, undulating tail, watch from underneath a ledge for a favourable moment to dash out and secure a morsel.

In some of the wider and shallower ponds are countless thousands of small mullet, each about three or four inches in length, and swimming closely together in separated but compact battalions. Some, as the sound of a human footstep warns them of danger, rush for safety among the submerged clefts and crevices of their temporary retreat, only to be mercilessly and fatally enveloped by the snaky, viscous tentacles of the ever-lurking octopus, for every hole and pool among the rocks contains one or more of these hideously repulsive creatures.

Sometimes you will see one crawling over the *congewoi* , changing from one pool to another in search of prey; its greeny-grey eyes regard you with defiant malevolence. Strike it heavily with a stick, or thrust it through with a spear, and in an instant its colour, which a moment before was either a dark mottled brown or a mingled reddish-black, changes to a ghastly, horrible, marbled grey; the horrid tentacles writhe and cling to the weapon, or spread out and adhere to the surrounding points of rock, a black, inky fluid is ejected from the soft, pulpy, and slimy body; and then, after raining blow after blow upon it, it lies unable to crawl away, but still twisting and turning, and showing its red and white suckers—a thing of horror indeed, the embodiment of all that is hateful, wicked, and malignant in nature.

Some idea of the numbers of these crafty and savage denizens of the limpid pools may be obtained by dropping a baited fishing

line in one of the deeper spots. First you will see one, and then another, thin end of a tentacle come waveringly out from underneath a ledge of rock, and point towards the bait, then the rest of the ugly creature follows, and gathering itself together, darts upon the hook, for the possession of which half a dozen more of its fellows are already advancing, either swimming or by drawing themselves over the sandy bottom of the pool. Deep buried in the sand itself is another, a brute which may weigh ten or fifteen pounds, and which would take all the strength of a strong man to overcome were its loathsome tentacles clasped round his limbs in their horrid embrace. Only part of the head and the half-closed, tigerish eyes are visible, and even these portions are coated over with fine sand so as to render them almost undistinguishable from the bed in which it lies awaiting for some careless crab or fish to come within striking distance. How us boys delighted to destroy these big fellows when we came across one thus hidden in the sand or *débris* on the bottom! A quick thrust of the spear through the tough, elongated head, a vision of whirling, outspread, red and black snaky tentacles, and then the thing is dragged out by main strength and dashed down upon the rocks, to be struck with waddies or stones until the spear can be withdrawn. Everything, it is said, has its use in this world, and the octopus is eminently useful to the Australian line fisherman, for the bream, trevally, flathead, jew-fish, and the noble schnapper dearly love its tough, white flesh, especially after the creature has been held over a flame for a few minutes, so that

the mottled skin may be peeled off.

But treacherous and murderous Thug of the Sea as he is, the octopus has one dreaded foe before whom he flees in terror, and compresses his body into the narrowest and most inaccessible cleft or endeavours to bury himself in the loose, soft sand—and that foe is the orange-coloured or sage-green rock eel. Never do you see one of these eels in the open water; they lie deep under the stones or twine their lithe, slippery bodies among the waving kelp or seaweed. Always hungry, savage-eyed, and vicious, they know no fear of any living thing, and seizing an octopus and biting off tentacle after tentacle with their closely-set, needle-like teeth and swallowing it whole is a matter of no more moment to them than the bolting of a tender young mullet or bream. In vain does the Sea Thug endeavour to enwrap himself round and round the body of one of these sinuous, scaleless sea-snakes and fasten on to it with his terrible cupping apparatus of suckers—the eel slips in and out and "wolfs" and worries his enemy without the slightest harm to itself. Some of them are large—especially the orange-coloured variety—three or four feet in length, and often one will raise his snaky head apparently out of solid rock and regard you steadily for a moment. Then he disappears. You advance cautiously to the spot and find a hole no larger than the circumference of an afternoon tea cup, communicating with the water beneath. Lower a baited hook with a strong wire snooding, and "Yellowskin" will open wide his jaws and swallow it without your feeling the slightest movement of the line. But you must be

quick and strong of hand then, or you will never drag him forth, for slippery as he is he can coil his length around a projecting bit of rock and defy you for perhaps five or ten minutes; and then when you do succeed in tearing him away and pull him out with the hook buried deep in his loose, pendulous, wrinkled and corduroyed throat, he instantly resolves himself into a quivering Gordian knot, winding the line in and about his coils and knotting it into such knots that can never be unravelled.

Here and there you will see lying buried deep in the growing coral, or covered with black masses of *congewoi* such things as iron and copper bolts, or heavy pieces of squared timber, the relics of the many wrecks that have occurred on the bar—some recent, some in years long gone by. Out there, lying wedged in between the weed and kelp-covered boulders, only visible at low water, are two of the guns of the ill-fated *Wanderer* , a ship, like her owner, famous in the history of the colony. She was the property of a Mr. Benjamin Boyd, a man of flocks and herds and wealth, who founded a town and a great whaling station on the shores of Twofold Bay, where he employed some hundreds of men, bond and free. He was of an adventurous and restless disposition, and after making several voyages to the South Seas, was cruelly cut off and murdered by the cannibal natives of Guadalcanar in the Solomon Islands, in the "fifties." The captain, after beating off the savages, who, having killed poor Boyd on shore, made a determined attempt to capture the ship, set sail for Australia, and in endeavouring to cross in over the bar went

ashore and became a total wreck. Here is a description written by Judge McFarland of the *Wanderer* as she was in those days when Boyd dreamed a dream of founding a Republic in the South Sea Islands with his wild crew of Polynesians and a few white fellow adventurers:—

"She was of 240 tons burthen; very fleet, and had a flush deck; and her cabins were fitted up with every possible attention to convenience, and with great elegance; and had she been intended as a war craft, she could scarcely have been more powerfully armed, for she carried four brass deck-guns—two six-pounders and two four-pounders—mounted on carriages resembling dolphins, four two-pounder rail guns—two on each side—and one brass twelve-pounder traversing gun (which had seen service at Waterloo)—in all thirteen serviceable guns. Besides these, there were two small, highly-ornamented guns used for firing signals, which were said to have been obtained from the wreck of the *Royal George* at Spithead. There were also provided ample stores of round shot and grape for the guns, and a due proportion of small arms, boarding pikes, tomahawks, &c."

Half a mile further on, and we are under the Signal Hill, and standing on one side of a wide, flat rock, through which a boat passage has been cut by convict hands, when first the white tents of the soldiers were seen on the Barrack Hill. And here, at this same spot, more than a hundred years ago, and thirty before the sound of the axe was first heard amid the forest or tallow-woods and red gum, there once landed a strange party

of sea-worn, haggard-faced beings—six men, one woman, and two infant children. They were the unfortunate Bryant party—whose wonderful and daring voyage from Sydney to Timor in a wretched, ill-equipped boat, ranks second only to that of Bligh himself. For Will Bryant, an ex-smuggler who was leader, had heard of Bligh's voyage in the boat belonging to the *Bounty* ; and fired with the desire to escape with his wife and children from the famine-stricken community on the shores of Port Jackson, he and his companions in servitude stole a small fishing-boat and boldly put to sea to face a journey of more that three thousand miles over an unknown and dangerous ocean. A few weeks after leaving Sydney they had sighted this little nook when seeking refuge from a fierce north-easterly gale, and here they remained for many days, so that the woman and children might gain strength and the seams of the leaking boat be payed with tallow—their only substitute for oakum. Then onward they sailed or rowed, for long, long weary weeks, landing here and there on the coast to seek for water and shell-fish, harried and chased by cannibal savages, suffering all the agonies that could be suffered on such a wild venture, until they reached Timor, only by a strange and unhappy fate to fall into the hands of the brutal and infamous Edwards of the *Pandora* frigate, who with his wrecked ship's company, and the surviving and manacled mutineers of the *Bounty* , who had surrendered to him, soon afterwards appeared at the Dutch port. Bryant, the daring leader, was so fortunate as to die of fever, and so escaped the fate in store for his comrades.

'Tis a strange story indeed.

At the end of the point of brown, rugged rocks which form a natural breakwater to this tiny boat harbour, the water is deep, showing a pale transparent green at their base, and deep inpenetrable blue ten fathoms beyond. To-day, because it is mid-winter, and the wind blows from the west, the sea is clearer than ever, and far down below will be discerned lazily swimming to and fro great reddish-brown or bright blue groper, watching the dripping sides of the rock in hope that some of the active, gaily-hued crabs which scurry downwards as you approach may fall in—for the blue groper is a *gourmet* , disdaining to eat of his own tribe, and caring only for crabs or the larger and more luscious crayfish. Stand here when the tide is high and the surf is sweeping in creamy sheets over the lower ledges of rocks; and as the water pours off torrent-like from the surface and leaves them bare, you may oft behold a huge fish—aye, or two or three—lying kicking on its side with a young crayfish in its thick, fleshy jaws, calmly waiting for the next sea to set him afloat again. Brave fellows are these gropers—forty, fifty, up to seventy pounds sometimes, and dangerous fish to hook in such a place as this, where a false step may send a man headlong into the surf below with his line tangled round his feet or arms. But on such a morning as this one might fall overboard and come to no harm, for the sea is smooth, and the kelp sways but gently to the soft rise and fall of the water, and seldom in these cold days of June does Jack Shark cruise in under the lee of the rocks. It is in November,

hot, sweltering November, when the clinking sand of the shining beach is burning to the booted foot, and the countless myriads of terrified sea salmon come swarming in over the bar on their way to spawn in the river beyond, that he and his fellows and the bony-snouted saw-fish rush to and fro in the shallow waters, driving their prey before them, and gorging as they drive, till the clear waters of the bar are turned into a bloodied froth. At such a time as this it might be bad to fall overboard, though some of the local youths give but little more heed to the tigers of the sea than they do to the accompanying drove of harmless porpoises, which join in the onslaught on the hapless salmon.

A mile eastward from the shore there rises stark and clear a great dome-shaped rock, the haunt and resting- place of thousands of snow-white gulls and brown-plumaged boobies. The breeding-place of the former is within rifle-shot—over there on that long stretch of banked-up sand on the north side of the bar, where, amid the shelter of the coarse, tufted grass the delicate, graceful creatures will sit three months hence on their fragile white and purple-splashed eggs. The boobies are but visitors, for their breeding-places are on the bleak, savage islands far to the south, amid the snows and storms of black Antarctic seas. But here they dwell together, in unison with the gulls, and were the wind not westerly you could hear their shrill cries and hoarse croaking as they wheel and eddy and circle above the lonely rock, on the highest pinnacle of which a great fish-eagle, with neck thrown back upon his shoulders and eyes

fixed eastward to the sun, stands oblivious of their clamour, as creatures beneath his notice.

Once round the southern side of the Signal Hill the noise of the bar is lost. Between the hill and the next point—a wild, stern-looking precipice of black-trap rock—there lies a half a mile or more of shingly strand, just such as you would see at Pevensey Bay or Deal, but backed up at high-water mark with piles of drift timber—great dead trees that have floated from the far northern rivers, their mighty branches and netted roots bleached white by the sun and wind of many years, and smelling sweet of the salty sea air. Mingled with the lighter bits of driftwood and heaps of seaweed are the shells of hundreds of crayfish—some of the largest are newly cast up by the sea, and the carapace is yellow and blue; others are burnt red by exposure to the sun; while almost at every step you crush into the thin backs and armoured tails of young ones about a foot in length, the flesh of which, by some mysterious process of nature, has vanished, leaving the skin, muscles, and beautiful fan-like tail just as fresh as if the crustaceans were alive. Just here, out among those kelp-covered rocks, you may, on a moonlight night, catch as many crayfish as you wish—three of them will be as much as any one would care to carry a mile, for a large, full-grown "lobster," as they are called locally, will weigh a good ten pounds.

Once round the precipice we come to a new phase of coastal scenery. From the high land above us green scrub-covered spur after spur shoots downward to the shore, enclosing numerous

little beaches of coarse sand and many coloured spiral shells —"Reddies" we boys called them—with here and there a rare and beautiful cowrie of banded jet black and pearly white. The sea-wall of rock has here but few pools, being split up into long, deep, and narrow chasms, into which the gentle ocean swell comes with strange gurglings and hissings, and groan-like sounds, and tiny jets of spray spout up from hundreds of air-holes through the hollow crust of rock. Here for the first time since the town was left, are heard the cries of land birds; for in the wild apple and rugged honeysuckle trees which grow on the rich, red soil of the spurs they are there in plenty—crocketts, king parrots, leatherheads, "butcher" and "bell" birds, and the beautiful bronze-wing pigeon—while deep within the silent gullies you constantly hear the little black scrub wallabies leaping through the undergrowth and fallen leaves, to hide in still darker forest recesses above.

There are snakes here, too. Everywhere their sinuous tracks are visible on the sand, criss-crossing with the more defined scratchy markings of those of iguanas. The latter we know come down to carry off any dead fish cast ashore by the waves, or to seize any live ones which may be imprisoned in a shallow pool; but what brings the deadly brown and black snakes down to the edge of *salt* water at night time?

Point after point, tiny bay after bay, and then we come to a wider expanse of clear, stoneless beach, at the farther end of which a huge boulder of jagged, yellow rock, covered

on the summit with a thick mantle of a pale green, fleshly-leaved creeper, bearing a pink flower. It stands in a deep pool about a hundred yards in circumference, and as like as not we shall find the surface of the water covered by thousands of green-backed, red-billed garfish and silvery mullet, whose very numbers prevent them from escaping. Scores of them leap out upon the sand, and lie there with panting gill and flapping tail. It is a great place for us boys, for here at low tides in the winter we strip off, and with naked hands catch the mullet and gars and silvery-sided trumpeters, and throw them out on the beach, to be grilled later on over a fire of glowing honeysuckle cobs, and eaten without salt. What boy does care about such a thing as salt at such times, when his eye is bright and his skin glows with the flush of health, and the soft murmuring of the sea is mingling in his ears with the thrilling call of the birds, and the rustling hum of the bush; and the yellow sun shines down from a glorious sky of cloudless blue, and dries the sand upon his naked feet; and the very joy of being alive, and away from school, is happiness enough in itself!

For here, by rock and pool on this lonely Austral beach, it is good and sweet for man or boy to be, and, if but in utter idleness, to watch and listen—and think.

Solepa

The last strokes of the bell for evening service had scarce died away when I heard a footstep on the pebbly path, and old Pâkía, staff in hand and pipe dangling from his pendulous ear-lobe, walked quietly up the steps and sat down cross-legged on the verandah. All my own people had gone to church and the house was very quiet.

"Good evening, Pâkía," I said in English, "how are you, old man?"

A smile lit up the brown, old, wrinkled face as he heard my voice—for I was lying down in the sitting-room, smoking my after-supper pipe—as he answered in the island dialect that he was well, but that his house was in darkness and he, being lonely, had come over to sit with me awhile.

"That is well, Pâkía, for I too am lonely, and who so good as thee to talk with when the mind is heavy and the days are long, and no sail cometh up from the sea-rim? Come, sit here within the doorway, for the night wind is chill; and fill thy pipe."

He came inside as I rose and turned up the lamp so that its light shone full on his bald, bronzed head and deeply tatooed arms and shoulders. Laying down his polished staff of *temana* wood, he came over to me, placed his hand on my arm, patted it gently, and then his kindly old eyes sought mine.

"Be not dull of heart, *taka taina* .[1] A ship will soon come—it may be to-morrow; it must be soon; for twice have I heard the cocks crow at midnight since I was last here, three days ago. And when the cocks crow at night-time a ship is near."

"May it be so, Pâkía, for I am weary of waiting. Ten months have come and gone since I first put foot on this land of Nukufetau, and a ship was to have come here in four."

He filled his pipe, then drawing a small mat near my lounge, he squatted on the floor, and we smoked in silence, listening to the gentle lapping of the lagoon waters upon the inner beach and the beating, never-ceasing hum of the surf on the reef beyond. Overhead the branches of the palms swayed and rustled to the night-breeze.

Presently, as I turned to look seaward, I caught the old man's dark eyes fixed upon my face, and in them I read a sympathy that at that time and place was grateful to me.

"Six months is long for one who waits, Pâkía," I said. "I came here but to stay four months and trade for copra; then the ship was to call and take me to Ponapé, in the far north-west. And Ponapé is a great land to such a man as me."

" *Etonu! Etonu!* I know it. Thrice have I been there when I sailed in the whaleships. A great land truly, like the island called Juan Fernandez, of which I have told thee, with high mountains green to the summits with trees, and deep, dark valleys wherein the sound of the sea is never heard but when the surf beats hard

1 Literally, "clear crony."

upon the reef. Ah! a fine land—better than this poor *motu* , which is as but a ring of sand set in the midst of the deep sea. Would that I were young to go there with thee! Tell me, dost know the two small, high islands in the *ava* [2] which is called Jakoits? Hast seen the graves of two white men there?"

"I know the islands well; but I have never seen the graves of any white men there. Who were they, and when did they die?"

"Ah, I am a foolish old man. I forget how old I am. Perhaps, when thou wert a child in thy mother's arms, the graves stood up out of the greensward at the foot of the high cliff which faces to the south. Tell me, is there not a high wall of rock a little way back from the landing beach?… Aye!… that is the place … and the bones of the men are there, though now great trees may grow over the place. They were both good men—good to look at, tall and strong; and they fought and died there just under the cliff. I saw them die, for I was there with the captain of my ship. We, and others with us, saw it all."

"Who were they, Pâkía, and how came they to fight?"

" One was a trader, whose name was Preston; he lived on the mainland of Ponapé, where he had a great house and oil store and many servants. The name of the other man was Frank. They fought because of a woman."

"Tell me the story, Pâkía. Thou hast seen many lands and many strange things. And when ye come and sit and talk to me the dulness goeth away from me and I no longer think of the ship;

2 Port.

for of all the people on this *motu* , to thee and Temana my servant alone do I talk freely. And Temana is now at church."

The old man chuckled. "Aye, he is at church because Malepa, his wife, is so jealous of him that she fears to leave him alone. Better would it please him to be sitting here with us."

I drew the mat curtain across the sitting-room window so that we could not be seen by prying eyes, and put two cups, a gourd of water, and some brandy on the table. Except my own man, Temana, the rest of the natives were intensely jealous of the poor old ex-sailor and wanderer in many lands, and they very much resented his frequent visits to me—partly on account of the occasional glass of grog which I gave him, and partly because he was suspected of still being a *tagata po-uriuri, i.e.* , a heathen. This, however, he vigorously denied, and though Maréko, the Samoan teacher, was a kind-hearted and tolerant man for a native minister, the deacons delighted in persecuting and harassing the ancient upon every possible opportunity, and upon one pretext or another had succeeded in robbing him of his land and dividing it among his relatives; so that now in his extreme old age he was dependent upon one of his daughters, a woman who herself must have been past sixty.

I poured some brandy into the cups; we clicked them together and said, "May you be lucky" to each other. Then he told me of Solepa.

"There were many whaleships came to anchor in the three harbours of Ponapé in those days. They came there for wood

and water and fresh provisions, before they sailed to the cold, icy seas of the south. I was then a boat-steerer in an English ship—a good and lucky ship with a good captain. When we came to Ponapé we found there six other whaleships, all anchored close together under the shelter of the two islets. All the captains were friends, and the few white men who lived on shore were friends with them, and every night there was much singing and dancing on board the ships, for, as was the custom, every one on board had been given a Ponapé girl for wife as long as his ship stayed there; and sometimes a ship would be there a long time—a month perhaps.

"The trader who lived in the big house was one of the first to come on board our ship; for the captain and he were good friends. They talked together on the poop deck, and I heard the trader say that he had been away to Honolulu for nearly a year and had brought back with him a young wife.

" 'Good,' said my captain, 'to-night I shall come ashore and drink *manuia!* [3] to ye both.'

"The trader was pleased, and said that some of the other captains could come also, and that he had sent a letter to the other trader, Frank, who lived on the other side of the island, bidding him to come and greet the new wife. At these words the face of Stacey—that was my captain's name, became dark, and he said —

"'You are foolish. Such a man as he is, is better away from thy

3 Happiness.

house—and thy wife. He is a *manaia* , an *ulavale* [4] . Take heed of my words and have no dealings with him.'

"But the man Preston only laughed. He was a fool in this though he was so clever in many other things. He was a big man, broad in the shoulders with the bright eye and the merry laugh of a boy. He had been a sailor, but had wearied of the life, and so he bought land in Ponapé and became a trader. He was a fair-dealing man with the people there, and so in three or four years he became rich, and bought more land and built a schooner which he sent away to far distant islands to trade for pearl-shell and *loli* (beche-de-mer). Then it was that he went to Honolulu and came back with a wife.

"That day ere it became dark I went on shore with my captain; some of the other captains went with us. The white man met them on the beach, surrounded by many of his servants, male and female. Some were of Ponapé, some from Tahiti, some from Oahu, and some from the place which you call Savage Island and we call Niué. As soon as the captains had stepped out upon the beach and I had bidden the four sailors who were with me to push off to return to the ship, the trader, seeing the tatooing on my arms, gave a shout.

" 'Ho,' he cried, turning to my captain, 'whence comes that boat-steerer of thine? By the markings on his arms and chest he should be from the isles of the Tokelau.'

"My captain laughed. 'He comes from near there. He is of

4 A libertine, profligate.

Nukufetau.'

"Then let him stay on shore to-night, for there are here with me a man and a woman from Nanomaga; they can talk together. And my wife Solepa, too, will be well pleased to see him, for her mother was a Samoan, and this man can talk to her in her mother's tongue.'

"'So I too went up to the house with the white men, but would not enter with them, for I was stripped to the waist and could not go into the presence of the lady. Presently the man and woman from Nanomaga sought me out and embraced me and made much of me and took me into another part of the house, where I waited till one of my shipmates returned from the ship bringing my jumper and trousers of white duck and a new Panama hat. Tāpā! I was a fine-looking man in those days, and women looked at me from the corner of the eye. And now— look at me now! I am like a blind fish which is swept hither and thither by the current against the rocks and sandbanks. Give me some more grog, dear friend; when I talk of the days of my youth my belly yearns for it, and I am not ashamed to beg.

"Presently, after I had dressed myself, I was taken by the Nanomea man into the big room where Solepa, the white man's wife, was sitting with the white men. She came to me and took my hand, and said to me in Samoan *'Talofa, Pâkía, e mālolō ea oe?'* [5] and my heart was glad; for it was long since I heard any one speak in a tongue which is akin to mine own.... Was she

5 My love to you, Pâkía; are you well?

beautiful? you ask. Tāpā! All women are beautiful when they are young, and their eyes are full and clear and their voices are soft and their bosoms are round and smooth! All I can remember of her is that she was very young, with a white, fair skin, and dressed like the *papalagi* [6] women I have seen in Peretania and Itālia and in Chili and in Sydney.

"As I stood before her, hat in hand and with my eyes looking downward, which is proper and correct for a modest man to do when a high lady speaks to him before many people, a white man who had been sitting at the far end of the room came over to me and said some words of greeting to me. This was Franka [7] — he whom my captain said was a *manaia* . He was better clothed than any other of the white men, and was proud and overbearing in his manner. He had brought with him more than a score of young Ponapé men, all of whom carried rifles and had cutlasses strapped to their waists. This was done to show the people of Jakoits that he was as great a man as Preston, whom he hated, as you will see. But Preston had naught for him but good words, and when he saw the armed men he bade them welcome and set aside a house for them to sleep in, and his servants brought them many baskets of cooked food—taro and yams, and fish, turtle, and pork. All this I saw whilst I was in the big room.

"After I had spoken with the lady Solepa I returned to where the man from Nanomaga and his wife were awaiting me. They

6 White foreigners.

7 Frank.

pressed me to eat and drink, and by and by sent for a young girl to make kava. Tāpā! that kava of Ponapé! It is not made there as it is in Samoa—where the young men and women chew the dried root and mix it in a wooden *tanoa* (bowl); there the green root is crushed up in a hollowed stone and but little water is added, so that it is strong, very strong, and one is soon made drunk.

"The girl who made the kava for us was named Sipi. She had eyes like the stars when they are shining upon a deep mountain pool, and round her smooth forehead was bound a circlet of yellow pandanus leaf worked with beads of many colours and fringed with red parrakeet feathers; about her waist were two fine mats, and her bosom and hands were stained with turmeric. I sat and watched her beating the kava, and as her right arm rose and fell her short, black wavy hair danced about her cheeks and hid the red mouth and white teeth when she smiled at me. And she smiled at me very often, and the man and woman beside me laughed when they saw me regard her so intently, and asked me was it in my mind to have her for my wife.

"I did not answer at once, for I knew that if I ran away from the ship for the sake of this girl I would be doing a foolish thing, for I had money coming to me when the ship was *oti folau* (paid off). But, as I pondered, the girl bent forward and again her eyes smiled at me through her hair; and then it was I saw that on her head there was a narrow shaven strip from the crown backward. Now, in Tokelau, this fashion is called *tu tagita* , and showeth that a girl is in her virginity. When I saw this I was pleased, but

to make sure I said to my friends, 'Her hair is *tu tagita* . Is she a virgin?'

"The woman of Nanomaga laughed loudly at this and pinched my hand, then she translated my words to the girl who looked into my face and laughed too, shaking her head as she put one hand over her eyes—

"'Nay, nay, O stranger,' she said, 'I am no virgin; neither am I a harlot. I am respectable, and my father and mother have land. I do not go to the ships.' Then she tossed her hair back from her face and began to beat the kava again.

"Now, this girl pleased me greatly, for there were no twists in her tongue; so, when the kava-drinking was finished I made her sit beside me, and the Nanomaga woman told her I would run away from the ship if she would be my wife. She put her face to my shoulder, and then took the circlet from her forehead and bound it round my bared arm, and I gave her a silver ring which I wore on my little finger. Then, together with the Nanomaga man and his wife, we made our plans.... Ah! she was a fine girl. For nearly a year was she wife to me until she sickened and died of the *meisake elo* [8] which was brought to Ponapé by the missionary ship from Honolulu.

"So the girl and I made our plans, and my friends promised to hide me when the time came for me to run away. We sat long into the night, and I heard much of the man called Franka and of the jealousy he bore to Preston. He was jealous of him because of

8 Small-pox.

two reasons; one was that he possessed such a fine house and so much land and a schooner, and the other was that the people of Jakoits paid him the same respect as they paid one of their high chiefs. So that was why Franka hated him. His heart was full of hatred, and sometimes when he was drunk in his own house at Rōan Kiti he would boast to the natives that he would one day show them that he was a better man than Preston. Sometimes his drunken boastings were brought to the ears of Preston, who only laughed and took no heed, and always gave him the good word when they met, which was but seldom, for Jakoits and Kiti are far apart, and there was bad blood between the people of the two places. And then—so the girl Sipi afterwards told me—Franka was a lover of grog and a stealer of women, and kept a noisy house and made much trouble, and so Preston went not near him, for he was a quiet man and no drinker, and hated dissension. And, besides this, Franka took part in the wars of the Kiti people, and went about with a following of armed men, and such money as he made in trading he spent in muskets and powder and ball; for all this Preston had no liking, and one day he said to Franka, 'Be warned, this fighting and slaying is wrong; it is not correct for a white man to enter into these wars; you are doing wrong, and some day you will be killed.' Now these were good words, but of what use are good words to an evil heart?

"So we pair sat talking and smoking, and the girl Sipi made us more kava, and then again sat by my side and leant her face against my shoulder, and presently we heard the sounds of music

and singing from the big house. We went outside to see and listen, and saw that Preston was playing on a *pese laakau* [9] and Solepa and the captain of my ship were dancing together—like as white people dance—and two of the other captains were also dancing in the same fashion. All round the room were seated many of the high chiefs of Ponapé with their wives, dressed very finely, and at one end of the room stood a long table covered with a white cloth, on which was laid food of all kinds and wine and grog to drink—just as you would see in your own country when a rich man gives a feast. Presently as we looked, we saw Franka walk into the room from a side door and look about. His face was flushed, and he staggered slightly in his steps. He went over to the table and poured out some grog, and then beckoned to Preston to come and drink with him, but Preston smiled and shook his head. How could he go when he was making the music? Then Franka struck his clenched fist on the table in anger, and went over to Preston, just as the dancers had stopped.

"'Why will ye not drink with me?' he said in a loud voice so that all heard him. 'Art thou too great a man to drink with me again?'

"'Nay,' answered the other jestingly and taking no heed of Franka's rude voice and angry eyes, 'not so great that I cannot drink with all my friends tonight, be they white or brown,' and so saying he bade every one in the room come to the great table with him and drink *manuia* to him and his young wife.

9 An accordion.

"So the nine white men—Preston, and Franka, and the seven whaleship captains, and Nanakin, the head chief of Ponapé, and many other lesser chiefs, all gathered together around the table and filled their glasses and drank *manuia* to the bride, who sat on a chair in the centre of the room surrounded by the chiefs' wives, and smiled and bowed when my captain called her name and raised his glass towards her. Then after this he again took up the *pese laakau* and began to play, and my captain and Solepa danced again. Suddenly Franka pushed his way through the others and rudely placed his hand on her arm.

" 'Come,' he said, 'leave this fellow and dance with me.'

"She cried out in terror, and then silence fell upon all as my captain withdrew his right arm from her waist and struck Franka on the mouth; it was a strong blow, and Franka staggered backwards and then fell near to the open door. As he rose to his feet again my captain came up to him and bade him leave quickly. 'We want no drunken bullies here,' he said, and at that moment Franka drew a pistol and pointed it at his chest. I leapt upon him and as we struggled together the pistol went off, but the bullet hurt no one.

"Then there was a great commotion, and my captain and Preston ran to my aid and seized Franka. They dragged him out of the room, and with words of scorn and contempt threw him out amongst his own people who were gathered together outside the house, with their muskets in their hands. But already Nanakin and his chiefs had summoned their fighting men; they

came running towards us from all directions, and surrounding Franka and his men, drove them away and bade them beware of ever returning to Jakoits.

"When they had gone, my captain called me to him, and, turning to the other white men, said, 'This man hath saved my life. He hath a brave heart. I shall do much for him in the time to come.' Then he and the others all shook my hand and praised me, and I was silent and said nothing, for I was ashamed to think I was about to run away from such a good captain.

" In the morning we went back to the ship, and the boats were then sent away to fill and bring off casks of water. Every time my boat went I took something with me; tobacco and clothing and other things which I had in my sea chest. Sipi and some other girls met us at the watering place, and they took these from me and put them in a place of safety. That afternoon as the boats were about to leave the shore for the last time, towing the casks, I slipped into the forest which grew very densely on both sides of the little river, and ran till I came to the spot where Sipi was awaiting me. Then together we went inland towards the mountains and kept on walking till nightfall. That night we slept in the forest; we were afraid to make a fire lest it should be seen by some of Nanakin's people and betray us, for I knew that my captain would cause a great search to be made for me. When dawn came we again set out and went on steadily till we came to the summit of the range of mountains which divides the island. There was a clear space on the side of the mountain; a great village had once stood there,

so Sipi told me, but all those who had dwelt there had long since died, and their ghosts could be heard flitting to and fro at night time. Far below us we could see the blue sea, and the long waving line of reef with the surf beating upon it, and within, anchored in the green water, were the seven ships and Preston's schooner.

"All that day and the next the girl and I worked at building a little house for us to live in until the ships had gone. We had no fear of any one seeking us out in that place, for it had a bad name and none but travelling parties from Rōan Kiti ever passed there. Sipi had brought with her a basket of cooked food; in the deserted plantations we found plenty of bananas and yams, and in the stream at the foot of the valley we caught many small fish. Four days went by, and then one morning we saw the ships set their sails and go to sea. We watched them till they touched the sky rim and disappeared; then we went back to Jakoits.

"The white man and Solepa were sitting under the shade of a tree in front of their house. I went boldly up to him and asked him to give me work to do. At first he was angry, for he and my captain were great friends, and said he would have naught to do with me. Why did I run away from such a good man and such a good ship? There were too many men like me, he said, in Ponapé, who had run away so that they might do naught but wander from village to village and eat and drink and sleep. Then again he asked why I had run away.

"'Because of her,' I said, pointing to the girl Sipi, who was sitting at the gate with her face covered with the corner of her

mat. 'But I am no *tafao vale* .[10] I am a true man. Give me work on thy ship.'

"He thought a little while, then he and Solepa talked together, and Solepa bade Sipi come near so that she might talk to her. Presently he said to me that I had done a foolish thing to run away for the sake of the girl when I had money coming to me and when the captain's heart was filled with friendship towards me for turning aside Franka's pistol.

"I bent my head, for I was ashamed. Then I said, 'I care not for the money I have lost, but I am eaten up with shame for running away, for my captain was a good captain to me.'

"This pleased him, for he smiled and said, 'I will try thee. I will make thee boatswain of the schooner, and this girl here shall be servant to my wife.'

"So Sipi became servant to Solepa, and I was sent on board the schooner to help prepare her for sea. My new captain gave us a house to live in, and every night I came on shore. Ah, those were brave times, and Preston made much of me when he found that I was a true man and did my work well, and would stand no saucy words nor black looks from those of the schooner's crew who thought that the boatswain should be a white man.

"Ten days after the whaleships had sailed, the schooner was ready for sea. We were to sail to the westward isles to trade for oil and tortoiseshell, and then go to China, where Preston thought to sell his cargo. On the eve of the day on which we were to leave,

10 Idler, gad about—a Samoan expression.

the mate, who was an old and stupid Siamani, [11] went ashore to my master's house, and I was left in charge of the schooner. Sipi, my wife, was with me, and we sat together in the stern of the ship, smoking our *sului* (cigarettes) and talking of the time when I should return and buy a piece of land from her father's people, on which I should build a new house. There were six native sailors on board, and these, as the night drew on, spread their mats on the fore deck and went to sleep. Then Sipi and I went into the cabin, which was on deck, and we too slept.

"How long we had slumbered I cannot tell, but suddenly we were aroused by the sound of a great clamour on deck and the groans and cries of dying men, and then ere we were well awakened the cabin door was opened and Solepa was thrust inside. Then the door was quickly closed and fastened on the outside, and I heard Franka's voice calling out orders to hoist sails and slip the cable.

"There was a lamp burning dimly in the cabin, and Sipi and I ran to the aid of Solepa, who lay prone upon the floor as if dead. Her dress was torn, and her hands and arms were scratched and bleeding, so that Sipi wept as she leant over her and put water to her lips. In a little while she opened her eyes, and when she saw us a great sob broke from her bosom and she caught my hand in hers and tried to speak.

"Now, grog is a good thing. It is good for a weak, panting woman when her strength is gone and her soul is terrified, and it

11 German.

is good for an old man who is despised by his relations because he is bitten with poverty. There was grog in a wicker jar in the cabin. I gave her some in a glass, and then as the dog Franka, whose soul and body are now in hell, was getting the schooner under way, she told me that while she and Preston were asleep the house was surrounded by a hundred or more of men from Rōan Kiti, led by Franka. They burst in suddenly, and Franka and some others rushed into their sleeping-room and she was torn away from her husband and carried down to the beach.

"'Is thy husband dead?' I asked.

"'I cannot tell,' she said in a weak voice. 'I heard some shots fired and saw him struggling with Franka's men. That is all I know. If he is dead then shall I die too. Give me a knife, so that I may die.'

"As she spoke the schooner began to move, and again we heard Franka's voice calling out in English to some one to go forward and con the ship whilst he steered, for the night was dark and he, clever stealer of women as he was, did not know the passage out through the reef, and trusted to those with him who knew but little more. Then something came into my mind, and I took Solepa's hand in mine.

"'I will save thee from this pig Franka,' I said quickly, 'he shall never take thee away. Sit ye here with Sipi, and when ye hear the schooner strike, spring ye both into the sea and swim towards the two islands which are near.'

"In the centre of the deck cabin was a hatch which led into

the hold. There was no deck between, for the vessel was but small. I took my knife from the sheath and then lifted the hatch, descended, and crawled forward in the darkness to the fore hatch, up which I crept very carefully, for I had much in my mind. I saw a man standing up, holding on to the fore stay. He was calling out to Franka every now and then, telling him how to steer. I sprang up behind him, and as I drove my knife into his back with my left hand, I struck him with my right on his neck and he fell overboard. He was a white man, I think for when my knife went into his back he called out 'Oh Christ!' But then many native men who have mixed with white people call out 'Oh, Christ,' just like white men when they are drunk. Anyway, it does not matter now.

"But as I struck my knife into him, I called out in English to put the helm hard down, for I saw that the schooner was very near the reef on the starboard hand. Franka, who was at the wheel, at once obeyed and was fooled, for the schooner, which was now leaping and singing to the strong night wind from the mountains smote suddenly upon the coral reef with a noise like the felling of a great forest tree, and began to grind and tear her timbers.

"Almost as she struck Solepa and Sipi stood by me, and together we sprang overboard into the white surf … Give me some more grog, dear friend of my heart. I am no boaster, nor am I a liar; but when I think of that swim to the shore through the rolling seas with those two women, my belly cleaves to my backbone and I become faint.... For the current was against us, and neither Sipi nor Solepa were good swimmers, and many

times had we to clutch hold of the jagged coral, which tore our skins so that our blood ran out freely, and had the sharks come to us then I would not be here with thee to-night drinking this, thy good sweet grog which thou givest me out of thy kind heart. Tāpā! When I look into thy face and see thy kind eyes, I am young again. I love thee, not alone because thou hast been kind to me in my poverty and paid the fines of my granddaughter when she hath committed adultery with the young men of the village, but because thou hast seen many lands and have upheld me before the teacher, who is a circumcised but yet untatooed dog of a Samoan. A man who is not tatooed is no better than a woman. He is a male harlot and should be despised. He is only fit to associate with women, and has no right to beget children....

"We three swam to the shore, and when the dawn came we saw that the schooner stood high and dry on the reef and that Franka and his men were trying to float her by throwing overboard the iron ballast and putting a kedge anchor out upon the lee side of the reef. And at the same time we saw three boats put off from the mainland. These boats were all painted white, and when I saw them I said to Solepa, 'Be of good heart. Thy husband is not dead, for here are three of his boats coming. He is not dead. He is coming to seek thee.'"

"The three boats came quickly towards the schooner, but ere they reached her Franka and those with him got into the boats in which they had boarded the vessel, and then we saw smoke arise from the bow and stern.... They had set fire to the ship.

They were cowards. Fire is a great help to cowards, because in the glare and dazzling light of burning houses or ships, when the thunder of cannons and the rattle of rifles is heard, they can run about and kill people.... I have seen these things done in Chili.... I have seen men who would not stand and fight on board ship run away on shore and slay women and children in their fury and cowardice. No, they were not Englishmen; they were Spaniolas. But the officers were Englishmen and Germans. *They* did not run away, they were killed. Brave men get killed and cowards live. I am no coward though I am still alive. It is quite proper that I should live, for I never ran away when there was fighting to be done. I have only been a fool because of my love for women. No one could say I was a coward, and no one can say I am a fool, because I am too old now to be a fool.

"As Franka and those with him left the burning schooner and rowed towards the islands, the three boats from the shore changed their course and followed him. Franka and his men were the first to reach the land, and they quickly ran up the beach and crouched behind the bushes which grew at high-water mark. They all had guns, and Sipi and Solepa and I saw them waiting to shoot. We were hiding amid the roots of a great banyan tree, and could see well. As the boats drew near Solepa watched them eagerly, and then began to weep and laugh at the same time when she saw her husband Preston was steering the one which led. She was a good woman. She loved her husband. I was pleased with her, and told her to be of good cheer, for I was sure that Preston

and his people would kill Franka and those with him, for as they rowed they made no noise. No one shouted nor challenged; they came on and on, and the white man Preston stood up with the steer oar in his hand, and his face was as a stone in which was set eyes of fire. When his boat was within twenty fathoms of the beach the rowers ceased, and he held up his hand to those who awaited his coming.

"'Listen to me, men of Rōan Kiti. We are as three to one of ye, and ye are caught in a trap. Death is in my mouth if I speak the word. Tell me, is my wife Solepa alive?'

"No one answered, but suddenly Franka stepped out from behind the bushes and pointed his rifle at him, and was about to pull the trigger when a young man of his party who was of good heart seized him by the arm, and cried out 'twas a coward's act; then two or three followed him, and together they bore Franka down upon the sand; and one of them cried out to Preston—

"'This is a wrong business. We were led astray by this man. We are no cowards, and have no ill-will to thee. Thy wife is alive. She swam ashore with two others when the ship struck. Are we dead men?'

"Then, ere Preston could answer, Solepa leapt out from beneath the banyan tree and ran through the men of Rōan Kiti towards the beach, and cried—

"'Oh, my husband, for the love of God let no blood be shed! I am well and unharmed. Spare these people and spare even this man Franka, for he is mad!'

"Then Preston leapt out of the boat and put his arms around her waist and kissed her, and then put her aside, and called to every one around him—

"'These are my words,' he said. 'I am a man of peace, but this man Franka is a robber and a dog, and hath stolen upon me in the night and slain my people, and his hands are reddened with blood. And he hath put foul dishonour on me by stealing Solepa my wife, and carrying her away from my house as if she were a slave or a harlot. And there is no room here for such a man to live unless he be a better man than I. But I am no murderer. So stand aside all! Let him rise and rest awhile, and then shall we two fight, man to man. Either he or I must die.'

"Then many men of both sides came to him and said, 'Let this thing be finished. You are a strong man. Take this robber and slay him as you would slay a pig.' But he put them aside, and said he would fight him man to man, as Englishmen fought.

"So when Franka was rested two cutlasses were brought, and the two men stood face to face on the sand. I kept close to Franka, for I meant to stab him if I could, but Preston angrily bade me stand back. Then the two crossed their swords together and began to fight. It was a great fight, but it did not last long, for Preston soon ran his sword through Franka's chest. I saw it come out through his back. But as he fell and Preston bent over him he thrust his cutlass into Preston's stomach and worked it to and fro. Then Preston fell on him, and they died together.

"There was no more bloodshed. Solepa and Sipi and I dressed

the dead man in his best clothes, and the Rōan Kiti men dressed Franka in his best clothes, and a great funeral feast was made, and we buried them together on the little island. And Solepa went back again to Honolulu in a whaleship. She was young and fair, and should have soon found another husband. I do not know. But Sipi was a fine wife to me."

The Fisher Folk of Nukufetau

Early one morning, about a week after I had settled down on Nukufetau as a trader, I opened my chest of fishing-gear and began to overhaul it. In a few minutes I was surrounded by an eager and interested group of natives, who examined everything with the greatest curiosity.

Now for the preceding twelve months I had been living on the little island of Nanomaga, a day's sail from Nukufetau; and between Nanomaga and Nukufetau there was a great bitterness of long standing—the Nanomagans claimed to be the most daring canoe-men and expert fishermen in all the eight isles of the Ellice Group, and the people of Nukufetau resented the claim strongly. The feeling had been accentuated by my good friend the Samoan teacher on Nanomaga, himself an ardent fisherman, writing to his brother minister on Nukufetau and informing him that although I was not a high-class Christian I was all right in all other respects, and a good fisherman—"all that he did not know we have taught him, therefore," he added slyly, "let your young men watch him so that they may learn how to fish in deep and rough water, such as ours." These remarks were of course duly made public, and caused much indignation, neither the minister nor his flock liking the gibe about the deep, rough water; also the insinuation that anything about fishing was to be learnt from the new white man was annoying and uncalled for.

I must here mention that the natives of De Peyster's Island (Nukufetau) caught all the fish they wanted in the smooth and spacious waters of the lagoon, and were not fond of venturing outside the barrier reef, except during the bonito season, or when the sea was very calm at night, to catch flying-fish. Then, too, the currents outside the reef were swift and dangerous, and the canoes had either to be carried a long distance over the coral or paddled a couple of miles across the lagoon to the ship passage before the open sea was gained. Hudson's Island (Nanomaga)—a tiny spot less than four miles in circumference—had no lagoon, and all fishing was done in the deep water of the ocean. The natives were used to launching their canoes, year in and year out, to face the wildest surf, and were, in consequence, wonderfully expert, and in the history of the island there is only one instance of a man having been drowned. The De Peyster people, by reason of the advantage of their placid lagoon, had no reason to risk their lives in the surf in this manner, and so, naturally enough, they were not nearly as skilful in the management of their frail canoes when they had to face a sweeping sea on the outer or ocean reef.

Just as I was placing some coils of heavy, deep-sea lines upon the matted floor, Marèko the native teacher, fat, jovial, and bubbling-voiced, entered in a great hurry, and hardly giving himself time to shake hands with me, announced in a tone of triumph, that a body of *atuli* (baby bonito) had just entered the passage and were making their way up the lagoon.

In less than ten seconds every man, woman, and child on the

island, except the teacher and myself, were agog with excitement and bawling and shouting as they rushed to the beach to launch and man the canoes, the advent of the *atuli* having been expected for some days. In nearly all the equatorial islands of the Pacific these beautiful little fish make their appearance every year almost to a day, with unvarying regularity. They remain in the smooth waters of lagoons for about two weeks, swimming about in incredible numbers, and apparently so terrified of their many enemies in their own element, and the savage, keen-eyed frigate birds which constantly assail them from above, that they sometimes crowd into small pools on the inner reef, and when the tide is low, seek to hide themselves by lying in thick masses under the overhanging ledges of coral rock. Simultaneously—or at least within a day or two at most—the swarming millions of *atuli* are followed into the lagoons by the *gatala* —a large black and grey rock-cod (much esteemed by the natives for the delicacy of its flavour) and great numbers of enormous eels. At other times of the year both the *gatala* and the eels are never or but rarely seen inside the lagoons, but are occasionally caught outside the reef at a good depth—forty to sixty fathoms. As soon, however, as the young bonito appear, both eels and rock-cod change their normal habits, and entering the lagoons through the passages thereto, they take up their quarters in the deeper parts—places which are fringed by a labyrinthine border of coral forest, and are at most ten fathoms deep. Here, when the *atuli* are covering the surface above, the eels and rock-cod actually rise to the surface and play

havoc among them, especially during moonlight nights, and in the daytime both rock-cod and eels may be seen pursuing their hapless prey in the very shallowest water, amidst the little pools and runnels of the coral reef. It is at this time that the natives of Nukufetau and some other islands have some glorious sport, for in addition to the huge eels and rock-cod many other deep-sea fish flock into the shallower lagoon waters—all in pursuit of the *atuli* —and all eager to take the hook.

As soon as the natives had left the house, Marèko turned to me with a beaming smile. "Let them go on first and net some *atuli* for us for bait," he said, "you and I shall follow in my own canoe and fish for *gatala* . It will be a great thing for one of us to catch the first *gatala* of the season. Yesterday, when I was over there," pointing to two tiny islets within the lagoon, "I saw some *gatala* . The natives laugh at me and say I am mistaken—that because the *atuli* had not come there could be no *gatala* . Now, *I* think that the big fish came in some days ago, but the strong wind and current kept the *atuli* outside till now. Come."

I needed no pressing. In five minutes I had my basket of lines (of white American cotton) ready, and joined Marèko. His canoe (the best on the island, of course) was already in the water and manned by his two sons, boys of eight and twelve respectively. I sat for'ard, the two youngsters amidships, the father took the post of honour as *tautai* or steersman, and with a chuckle of satisfaction from the boys, off we went in the wake of about thirty other canoes.

Oh, the delight of urging a light canoe over the glassy water of an island lagoon, and watching the changing colours and strange, grotesque shapes of the coral trees and plants of the garden beneath as they vanish swiftly astern, and the quick *chip, chip* of the flashing paddles sends the whirling, noisy eddies to right and left, and frights the lazy, many-hued rock-fish into the darker depths beneath! On, on, till the half mile or more of shallow water which covers the inner reef is passed, and then suddenly you shoot over the top of the submarine wall, into deepest, loveliest blue, full thirty fathoms deep, and as calm and quiet as an infant sleeping on its mother's bosom, though perhaps not a quarter of a mile away on either hand the long rollers of the Pacific are bellowing and thundering on the grim black shelves of the weather coast.

So it was on this morning, but with added delights and beauties; as instead of striking straight across the lagoon to our rendezvous we had to skirt the beaches of a chain of thickly wooded islets, which gave forth a sweet smell, mingled with the odours of *nono* blossoms; for during the night rain had fallen after a long month of dry weather, and Nature was breathing with joy. High overhead there floated some snow-white tropic birds—those gentle, ethereal creatures which, to the toil-spent seaman who watches their mysterious poise in illimitable space, seem to denote the greater Mystery and Rest that lieth beyond all things; and lower down, and sweeping swiftly to and fro with steady, outspread wing and long, forked tail, the fierce-eyed,

savage frigate birds scanned the surface of the water in search of prey, and then finding it not, rose without apparent motion to the cloudless canopy of blue and became as but tiny black specks—and then, *swish* ! and the tiny black specks which but a minute ago were high in heaven are flashing by your cheeks with a weird, whistling sound like winged spectres. You look for them. They are gone. Already they are a thousand feet overhead. Five of them. And all five are as motionless as if they, with their wide, outspread wings, had never moved from their present position for a thousand years.

"Chip, chip," and "chunk, chunk," go our paddles as we now head eastward towards the rising sun in whose resplendent rays the tufted palms of the two islets stand clearly out, silhouetted against the sea rim beyond. Now and again we hear, as from a long, long distance, the echoes of the voices of the people in the canoes ahead; a soft white mist began to gather over and then ascend from the water, and as we drew near the islets the occasional thunder of the serf on Motuluga Reef we heard awhile ago changed into a monotonous droning hum.

" *Aue* !" said Marèko the *tautai* , with a laugh, as he ceased paddling and laid his paddle athwartships, "'tis like to be a hot day and calm. So much the better for our fishing, for the water will be very clear. Boy, give me a coconut to drink."

"Take some whisky with it, Marèko," I said, taking a flask out of my basket.

" *Isa* ! Shame upon you! How can you say such a thing to

me, a minister!" And then he added, with a reproachful look, "and my children here, too." He would have winked, but he dared not do so, for one of his boys had turned his face aft and was facing him. I, however, made him a hurried gesture which he quite understood. Good old Marèko! He was an honest, generous-hearted, broad-minded fellow, but terribly afraid of his tyrannical deacons, who objected to him smoking even in the seclusion of his own curatage, and otherwise bullied and worried him into behaving exactly as they thought he should.

By the time we reached the islets the *atuli* catching had begun, and more than a hundred natives were encircling a considerable area of water with finely-meshed nets and driving the fish shoreward upon a small sandy beach, where they were scooped up in gleaming masses of shining blue and silver by a number of women and children, who tumbled over and pushed each other aside amidst much laughter and merriment.

On the larger of the two islets were a few thatched huts with open sides. One of these was reserved for the missionary and the white man, and hauling our canoe up on the beach at the invitation of the people, we sat down under a shed whilst the women grilled us some of the freshly-caught fish. This took barely over ten minutes, as fires had already been lighted by the children. The absence of bread was made up for by the flesh of half-grown coconuts and cooked *puraka* —gigantic species of taro which thrives well in the sandy soil of the Equatorial islands of the Pacific. Just as we had finished eating and were preparing

our lines we heard loud cries from the natives who were still engaged among the *atuli* , and three or four of them seizing spears began chasing what were evidently some large fish. Presently one of them darted his weapon, and then gave a loud cry of triumph, as he leapt into the water and dragged out a large salmon-like fish called "utu", which was at once brought ashore for my inspection. The man who had struck it—an active, wiry old fellow named Viliamu (William) was panting with excitement. Some large *gatala* , he said, had just made their appearance with the *utu* and were pursuing the small fish; therefore would we please hurry forward with our preparations. Then the leader of the entire party stood up and bellowed out in bull-like tones his instructions. The canoes were all to start together, and when the ground was reached all lines were to be lowered simultaneously; there was to be no crowding. The white man and missionary, however, if they wished, could start first and make a choice of position.

"No, no," I said, "let us all start fair."

This was greeted with a chorus of approval, and then leaving the women and children to attend to the camp, we hurried back to the canoes. Just as we were leaving the hut I had a look at the *utu* —a fish I had never before seen. It was about three feet in length, and only for its head (which was coarse and clumsy) much like a heavy salmon. The back was covered with light green scales, the sides and belly a pure silver, and the fins and tail tipped with yellow. It weighed about 20 lbs., and presented a very handsome appearance.

The fishing-ground to which we were now paddling was not half a mile from the islets, and lay between them and the outer reef which formed its northern boundary. It consisted of a series of deep channels or connected pools running or situated amidst a network of minor reefs, the surfaces of which were, for the most part, bare at low water. Generally the depth was from eight to ten fathoms; in places, however, it was much deeper, and I subsequently found that there were spots whereon I could stand (on the coral ledge) and drop my line into chasms of thirty-two or thirty-three fathoms. Here the water was almost as blue to the eye as the ocean, and here the very largest fish resorted—such as the *pura* , a species of rock-cod, and a blue-scaled groper, the native name of which I cannot now recall.

It must have been nearly ten o'clock when the canoes were all in position, and the word was given to let go lines. The particular spot in which we were congregated was about three acres in extent and about seven fathoms in depth, with water as clear as crystal; and even the dullest eye could discern the smallest pebble or piece of broken coral lying upon the bottom, which was generally composed of patches of coarse sand surrounded by an interlacing fringe of growing coral, or white, blue, or yellow boulders. A glance over the side showed us that the *gatala* had arrived; we could see numbers of them swimming lazily to and fro beneath, awaiting the flowing tide which would soon cover the lagoon from one shore to the other with swarms of young bonito, as they swam about in search of such places as that in

which we were now about to begin fishing.

Each man had baited his hook with the third of an *atuli* — at this stage of their life about four inches long and exactly the colour and shape of a young mackerel—and within five minutes after "" *Tu'u tau kafa* !" ("Let go lines!") had been called out several of the canoes around our own began to pull up fish—four to six pounders. I was fishing with a white cotton line, with two hooks, and Marèko with the usual native gear—a hand-made line of hibiscus bark with a barbless hook made from a long wire nail, with its point ground fine and well-curved inwards. We both struck fish at the same moment, and I knew by the zigzag pull that I had two. Up they came together—three spotted beauties about eighteen inches in length and weighing over 5 lbs. each. Then I found the advantage of the native style of hook; Marèko simply put his left thumb and forefinger into the fish's eye, had his hook free in a moment, had baited, lowered again and was pulling up another before I had succeeded in freeing even my first hook which was firmly fixed in the fish's gullet, out of sight. I soon put myself on a more even footing by cutting off the small one and a half inch hooks I had been using and bending on two thick and long-shanked four inchers. These answered beautifully, as although the barbs caused me some trouble, their stout shanks afforded a good grip and leverage when extracting them from the hard and keen-toothed jaws of the struggling fish. Then, too, I had another advantage over my companions; I was wearing a pair of seaboots which effectually protected my feet from either the

terrible fins or the teeth of the fish in the bottom of the canoe.

I had caught my eighth fish, when an outcry came from a canoe near us, as a young man who was seated on the for'ard thwart rose to his feet and began hauling in his line, which was standing straight up and down, taut as an iron bar, the canoe meanwhile spinning round and round although the steersman used all his efforts to keep her steady.

"What is it, Tuluia?" called out fifty voices at once. "A shark?"

"My mother's bones!" said old Viliamu with a laugh of contempt. "'Tis an eel, and Tuluia, who was asleep, has let it twist its tail around a piece of coral. May he lose it for his stupidity."

We all ceased fishing to watch, and half a dozen men began jeering at the lad, who was too excited to heed them. Old Viliamu, who was in the next canoe, looked down, and then cried out that he could see the eel, which had taken several turns of its body around a thick branch of growing coral.

"His head is up," he called out to the youth, "but you cannot move him, he has too many turns in and out among the coral." Then paddling up alongside he again looked at the struggling creature, then felt the line which was vibrating with the tension. Stepping out of his own craft into that of the young man, the line was placed in his hands without an inch of it being payed out, for once one of these giant eels can get his head down he will so quickly twine the line in and out among the rugged coral that it is soon chafed through, if of ordinary thickness. But the ancient knew his work well, as we were soon to see. Taking a turn of the

line well up on his forearm and grasping it with his right a yard lower down, he waited for a second or two, then suddenly bent his body till his face nearly touched the water, then he sprang erect and with lightning-like rapidity began to haul in hand *under* hand [12] amid loud cries of approval as the wriggling body of the eel was seen ascending clear of the coral. The moment it reached the surface, a second native, with unerring aim sent a spear through it and then a blow or two upon the head with a club carried for the purpose took all further fight out of the creature, which was then lifted out of the water and dropped into the canoe. Here the end of its tail was quickly split open and we saw no more of him for the time being.

To capture an eel so soon was looked upon as a lucky omen, to have lost it would have been a presage of ill-fortune for the rest of the day, and the incident put every one in high good humour. By this time the tide was flowing over the flatter parts of the reef and young bonito could be seen jumping out of the water in all directions. Immense bodies were, so I was assured by the natives, now coming into the lagoon from the sea, and would continue to do so till the tide turned, when those in the passage, unable to face a six-knot current, would be carried out again, to make another attempt later on.

By this time every canoe was hauling in large rock-cod almost

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[12] The Tokelau and Ellice Islanders are much amused at the white man's method of hauling in a heavy fish hand *over* hand. This to them is "faka fafine"—i.e., like a woman.

as quick as the lines could be baited, and the bottom of our own craft presented a gruesome sight—a lather of blood and froth and kicking fish, some of which were over 20 lbs. weight. Telling the two boys to cease fishing awhile and stun some of the liveliest, I unthinkingly began to bale out some of the ensanguined water, when a score of indignant voices bade me cease. Did I want to bring all the sharks in the world around us? I was asked; and old Viliamu, who was a sarcastic old gentleman, made a mock apology for me—

"How should he know any better? The sharks of Tokelau have no teeth, like the people there, for they too are eaters of *fala* ."

This evoked a sally of laughter, in which of course I joined. I must explain that the natives of the Tokelau Group, among whom I had lived, through constantly chewing the tough drupes of the fruit of the *fala* (pandanus palm) wear out their teeth prematurely, and are sometimes termed "toothless" by other natives of the South Pacific. However, I was to have my own little joke at Viliamu's expense later on.

Just at this time a sudden squall, accompanied by torrents of rain, came down upon us from the eastward, and whilst Marèko and his boys kept us head to wind—none of the canoes were anchored—I took the opportunity of getting ready two of my own lines, each treble-hooked, for the boys. Their own were old and rotten, and had parted so often that they were now too short to be of use, and, besides that, the few remaining hooks of soft wire were too small. As soon as the squall was over I showed

Marèko what I had done. He nodded and smiled, but said I should try and break off the barbs—his boys did not understand them as well as native-made hooks. This was quickly accomplished with a heavy knife, and the youngsters began to haul up fish two and three at a time at such a rate that the canoe soon became deep in the water outside and very full inside.

"A few more, Marèko," I said, "and then we'll go ashore, unload, and come back again. I want to tease that old man."

We caught all we could possibly carry in another quarter of an hour, and I was confident that our take exceeded that of any other canoe. This was because the natives would carefully watch their stone sinkers descend, and use every care to keep them from being entangled in the coral, whilst my line, which had a 12 oz. leaden sinker, would plump quickly to the bottom in the midst of the hungry fish; consequently, although I lost some hooks by fouling and now and then dragged up a bunch of coral, I was catching more fish than any one else. And I was not going to let my reputation suffer for the sake of a few hooks. So we coiled up our lines on the outrigger platform, and taking up our paddles headed shoreward, taking care to pass near Viliamu's canoe. He hailed me and asked me for a pipe of tobacco.

"I shall give it to you when we return," I said.

"When you return! Why, where are you going?" he asked.

"On shore, you silly old woman! I have been showing these boys how to fish for *gatala* , and we go because the canoe is sinking. When we return these two *tamariki* (infants) shall show

you how to fish now that they have learnt from me."

There was a loud laugh at this, and as the old man took the jest very good-naturedly I brought up alongside, showed him our take, and gave him a stick of tobacco. The astonishment of himself and his crew of three at the quantity of fish we had afforded me much satisfaction, though I could not help feeling that our luck was not due to my own skill alone.

Returning to the islets we were just in time to escape two fierce squalls, which lasted half an hour and raised such a sea that the remaining canoes began to follow us, as they were unable to keep on the ground. During our absence the women and children had been most industrious; the weather-worn, dilapidated huts had been made habitable with freshly-plaited *kapaus*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.