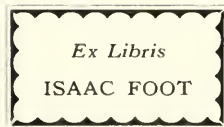


THE
PEARL DIVERS
OF RONCADOR REEF
LOUIS BECKE



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THE PEARL DIVERS OF
RONCADOR REEF



TWO OF THEM WERE CARRYING MISS CHESSEON, WHO AT THAT MOMENT HAD FREED ONE HAND AND TWISTED IT AMONGST THE ROOTS OF ONE OF THE TOUGH CREEPERS.

THE PEARL DIVERS OF
RONCADOR REEF

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

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THE PEARL DIVERS OF
RONCADOR REEF

THE PEARL DIVERS OF RONCADOR REEF

CHAPTER I

ONE bright but exceedingly boisterous afternoon in June three men were seated on the verandah of the "Queen's Hotel," in the newly-founded city of Townsville, situated on the shore of Cleveland Bay, in North Queensland. Eight miles across the bay, and directly facing the scattered line of buildings which stood mostly on the open, wind-swept beach, was Magnetic Island (which Cook discovered and surveyed in the *Endeavour*), its lofty green hills and snowy white beaches glinting in the bright afternoon sun. For some days past a south-easterly half-gale had been blowing, and the waters of Cleveland Bay were heaving tumultuously under its influence, and every now and then an extra strong and erratic puff would sweep along the sandy, dusty street, which ran parallel with the beach in front of the hotel, and send clouds of dust swirling high in air, and then out to sea.

The men had finished their luncheon, and had come out on the verandah to smoke, and to avoid the noise and whiskyfied odour of the overcrowded

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smoking room, for the hotel was crowded with visitors—principally diggers on their way to the rich and recently-discovered gold fields at Charters Towers, and the Cloncurry and Etheridge Rivers, in the far interior of the north-west of the colony.

The eldest of the three men was apparently about fifty-five years of age, with iron-grey hair and beard, and deep-set keen blue eyes. His face, neck and hands were tanned almost to the hue of old leather by constant exposure to torrid suns in many parts of the world—known and unknown—and his well-set and muscular figure matched the expression of his countenance, in which even the most casual observer could read quiet determination and undaunted courage. This type of man is common enough in new countries, such as North Queensland then was, and Dr. Hector Carew was a good specimen of his class.

The second man, in point of age, was his junior by at least a score of years, but he, too, was deeply bronzed by the fierce sun of the Austral tropics. His features showed traces of a long illness, and his naturally slight figure was so emaciated that his white duck suit looked three sizes too large for him—he was, in fact, only just beginning to recover from a severe attack of malarial fever, contracted in the jungles of one of the rivers on Cape York Peninsula, where he had been the leader of an unsuccessful and ill-fated party of gold prospectors, which had been attacked by a tribe of coastal blacks, only one other member of the expedition and himself escaping the

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general massacre. After two months of terrible sufferings, the two survivors managed to reach the coast and make smoke signals to one of the lightships stationed off a shoal on the Great Barrier Reef. Both were wrecks from fever and starvation; and a few days after reaching the lightship one died, and Frank Sedley, the one remaining member of a party of nine sturdy, vigorous, and adventurous pioneers, was taken from the lightship by a passing steamer and landed, penniless, at Cleveland Bay, to "take his chance" in the local hospital.

The third and youngest man of the three who sat together on the verandah had "sailor-man" written upon his face, even if his blue reefer suit—the coat sleeves of which were stripped of their narrow bands of gold lace—had not denoted the fact. He was a clean-shaven, fat and jovial-looking young fellow, with a particularly infectious laugh.

The three men had met by the merest chance only two weeks previously, but in that time a feeling of friendship had sprung up between them. Perhaps it was because of the fact that each one of them had met with recent ill-fortune, and the relation of their experiences had drawn them together. Carew a year before had been appointed Government medical officer to the local hospital, and within a month found himself the best-hated man in the place. The hospital, he soon discovered, was the home of moral corruption and peculation. All the officials and the nursing staff were in collusion with a number of dishonest tradesmen, who for years past had been

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plundering the institution in the most shameless and scandalous manner by supplying goods at an outrageous price and bribing the hospital officials to pass their "faked" accounts as correct. Carew sent in such a strongly-worded and condemnatory report on the state of affairs to the Government that the entire staff were dismissed, and the institution re-organised. Some of the tradesmen and the officials, at the instigation of the angry Carew, were prosecuted criminally and received sentences of imprisonment. Unfortunately, however, in one instance Carew had charged a wine and spirit merchant with supplying the hospital with spirits for the use of patients, which he stigmatised as "poison, adulterated, and unfit to be given to human beings." A libel action was the result, and the wine and spirit merchant, who was a wealthy man and whose brother was a Minister of the Crown, was awarded £1,000 damages. Everyone knew that Carew's statements were, in the main, correct, and sympathised with him. A subscription was inaugurated, and the money quickly raised; Carew refused to accept it and paid the money himself, although it ruined him, for it left him with only £200 in the world, and he had to resign his appointment. But he had a certain satisfaction—after he had paid the £1,000 damages—in giving the libelled man a fearful thrashing in the public street. Then he took a house and began a private practice, occasionally visiting the hospital as an operating surgeon when called upon—for although everyone who knew him termed him "Doctor Carew," he

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really was a surgeon. It was during one of these visits to the hospital that he saw Frank Sedley, who was then a dying man. Carew had had a large experience of malarial fever cases in his many wanderings in the East Indies, the islands of the north-west Pacific, and Mexico, and he saw at once that the new medical staff of the hospital—three young, newly-arrived English doctors—did not understand the case. They had never dealt with malarial fever. Theoretically they knew all that it was then thought possible to know; practically they knew nothing, and were killing Sedley by administering him a few grains of quinine daily. Carew took the case in hand, and saved the man's life, and, at his own expense, had him brought to the "Queen's Hotel," so that he might exercise a careful watch upon him. And for this Sedley was deeply grateful.

Just about this time, when Carew had been cast for damages in the libel action brought against him, there had arrived at Cleveland Bay an emigrant ship named the *Knight Templar*, the crew of which were in a state of mutiny. The vessel, owing to the incompetence and drunken habits of the captain, had run ashore on one of the islands of the Great Barrier Reef, where she remained hard and fast for several weeks. The passengers, who were mostly of a very low class of people from Liverpool and Glasgow, behaved very badly, broke into the hold and broached the cargo, amongst which was a large quantity of spirits. The ship's doctor and the first mate, Henry Waller—the third and youngest man of the trio now

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together on the verandah of the "Queen's Hotel"—in trying to re-establish order came into serious collision with some of the ruffianly male emigrants, and some of the crew who had practically taken possession of the *Knight Templar*, and turned her into a pandemonium. In the *fracas* Waller shot a sailor dead, and the doctor wounded another with a revolver bullet. Order was restored at last, and with the captain in *delirium tremens*, the crew still mutinous, Waller succeeded in refloating the ship and bringing her to Cleveland Bay, where he was promptly arrested and placed on his trial for murder, at the same quarter sessions at which Hector Carew was tried for libel. He was acquitted, the judge in summing up strongly indicating to the jury that the case was one of "justifiable homicide," and that Waller by his courageous and determined conduct had probably saved the lives of the four hundred persons on board the *Knight Templar*. For not only had he, in face of many difficulties, refloated the ship, and placed, almost single-handed, the ringleaders of the outbreak in irons, but had navigated her safely to Cleveland Bay. "The law," added the judge, "has placed this man on trial on a charge of murder. I leave it to you, gentlemen of the jury, to define the wide difference between murder and justifiable homicide. The one means death at the gallows, the other means an honourable acquittal. I may tell you that, had I been in the position of the prisoner in the dock when the *Knight Templar* ran ashore through the incompetence of her captain, I should have acted as he acted—that is, if I had his

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personal strength, courage and undaunted determination."

When Waller left the court, a free man, he was met outside by Dr. Carew, who gave him his most sincere congratulations.

"What are you going to do now, Mr. Waller?" he asked. "I suppose that as the captain of the *Knight Templar* has been dismissed, you will be given the command?"

Waller shook his head and laughed bitterly.

"No. I, too, have 'got the run.' You see, my evidence at the Marine Board inquiry two months ago showed up the owners in a very bad light. Both the doctor and I said that the ship was ill-found, hardly seaworthy, and quite unfitted to carry emigrants; then, too, we told the Board that the skipper was a notorious drunkard and had previously lost two other ships; also that he was a man suspected by Lloyds' insurance people. The result is as I have said—I have been dismissed."

"We are comrades in misfortune," remarked Carew, quietly. "Now, will you be my guest for a while? Although I have a house here in town I do not live there, but stay at the 'Queen's.' Come and camp with me until you decide upon your future movements."

The seaman's face flushed. "It is very kind of you, but—but you have just lost a thousand pounds, and I should feel that I was sponging upon you. So, whilst I thank you most heartily——"

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Carew clapped him on the shoulder and laughed in his grave, quiet manner.

“Come along, Mr. Waller. We are comrades in misfortune, as I have said, but I am not yet ‘stony broke.’ And I have a sick friend of mine staying with me, whom I want you to meet. His name is Sedley, and he, like you and me, has been a ‘most curst misfortunit person whateffer,’ as a Welsh skipper friend of mine used to say.”

And this was how the three men came to be together at the “Queen’s Hotel” that afternoon in June.

CHAPTER II

“WALLER,” said Carew, “you and Sedley have heard me speak of that Melanesian servant of mine who looks after my house here. As I told you, I found him knocking about the streets, earning his living by getting occasional work at the public-houses, cleaning stables, etc. He was brought here by a South Sea trading vessel, the master of which got rid of him because the poor fellow was suffering from ankylosis of the left foot bones. I operated, and he is now all right. He can speak only a very little English, but it so happens that I know his language. He is a native of the Ontong Java group of islands in the Solomon Archipelago; and fifteen years ago I was living there, making an ethno-

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graphical collection for the Hamburg Museum. I remained there over eighteen months, and picked up the language rather easily, as it is somewhat similar to that of Sikiana (Stewart's Island), which I know very well."

"I suppose this poor chap was delighted to have you speak to him in his native tongue?" said Sedley.

"Indeed he was. Now I am going to tell you something that I have learned from him that has interested me greatly, and I think it will interest you as well—in fact, the information he has given me is valuable, and may—I believe will—be worth a good deal of money to us."

"Suka—that is his name—told me, in reply to my inquiries as to how he got on board the trading schooner which landed him at Townsville, that about two years ago he, with seven of his fellow islanders, was seized by a 'blackbirding' schooner from Fiji. They were captured when they were in their canoes, fishing, some few miles off the southernmost island of the group, and the schooner at once stood away, steering south—evidently meaning to continue her kidnapping cruise amongst the Solomon group. The skipper, so Suka says, did not treat him and his companions badly, for as soon as the Ontong Java islands were out of sight, he had them brought up on deck, gave them plenty to eat and drink, and also presented them with pipes and tobacco and suits of dungaree clothing. The poor beggars, finding that their islands were out of sight and that there was no chance of escape, resigned

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themselves to their fate—which meant three to six years' labour on a Fiji plantation.

Early next morning, the schooner was abreast of an atoll which Suka had never before seen, although he knew of its existence by its native name of Pālan, as in years gone by it had afforded a refuge to a party of Ontong Java natives who had, in a number of canoes, been blown away from their own island in a northerly gale. They ran before it from midnight until dawn when the atoll was sighted right ahead. All the canoes succeeded in entering it safely; and the party remained on the chain of sandy islets for a week or so. The lagoon teemed with fish and turtle, and sea-birds abounded, so they did not suffer from want of food, and eventually they returned to Ontong Java (or Lueneuwa as the natives call it) none the worse for their adventure. The atoll is formed by circular reefs, or rather a series of connected and disconnected reefs. Some of them are only a few feet above water and are covered with drift-wood, with here and there a little scanty herbage of coarse grass and a saline creeper. On one of the reef islets there were a few young cocoanut trees growing—the nuts from which they sprang having drifted from Ontong Java or some other island.

“Well, as I have said, the blackbirding schooner was abreast of the island early in the morning. Suka and his fellow-islanders were below, together with twenty or thirty other Kanakas—some from one island, some from another. Presently a white sailor came below, and singling out Suka from his com-

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panions, motioned to him to go on deck. The poor fellow, who although robust enough in all other respects—you shall see him this afternoon—walked very lamely owing to his ankylosis, made his way on deck, and found the schooner hove-to, with a boat alongside, manned by native sailors and in charge of an officer.

“The skipper, a thundering blackguard of whom I had often heard, named Clissold, and whom I recognised at once by Suka’s description of his personal appearance, then came with the mate and examined Suka’s foot. The brutes evidently came to the conclusion that such a lame duck would not bring the usual price of £80 in Fiji from any planter, and so Suka was ordered down into the boat. After him came two other natives who had also been ‘cast’ by Clissold as not worth their skins. Where they came from Suka never learned, as he was not able to converse with them, nor could they converse with each other, being dissimilar in their language. One was almost blind from chronic ophthalmia, the other was suffering from some wasting disease which had reduced him to little better than a skeleton.

“Clissold, ruffian and blackguard as he was, and is—for he is still somewhere in the South Seas—was not altogether inhuman. He put into the boat as much provisions, biscuit, tinned meats, etc., as there was room for, together with a water butt, fishing lines and hooks, and a plentiful supply of tobacco and pipes, some knives and other articles, and then added half-a-dozen bottles of square-faced gin. No doubt

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he thought he was doing 'the correct thing' when he sent these three poor Kanakas to die on this lonely atoll, which I know to be the place on the chart named Roncador or Candelaria Reef. I have often heard the natives of Ekolo talk of it when I was living with them fifteen years ago.

"Suka and his two 'cast' companions were landed on Roncador, or Pālan as we may call it, and Clissold and the 'blackbirder' *Ringdove* went on to the Solomons.

"Within a week, the man who was suffering from ophthalmia suddenly disappeared—Suka believes that he was seized by a shark whilst bathing in the lagoon at night—for one evening he left the little hut of driftwood which they had built, and never returned. A few weeks later the other man died, and Suka was left alone.

Long months passed, and then one day a schooner appeared off the atoll, and lowered a boat, the crew of which came on shore to look for turtles' eggs, and discovered Suka. Unable to speak a single word of English, he could not tell his rescuers how he came to be on Pālan, of the death of his two companions in misery, and of his long loneliness.

"But he has told *me* something that the skipper of that vessel would have very much liked to know, and that is that the bottom of the atoll is one vast bed of black-edge pearl shell. Much of it lies in quite shallow water—so shallow in fact that Suka says that at low tide they can be picked up in half a fathom of water—just think of it, you fellows! Hundreds of

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tons of pearl-shell ready to be picked up without diving, and Suka says that he does not think any part of the atoll is over fifteen fathoms deep, as even in the centre the water shows green, so I think he is right, and I also agree with him that the deeper the water the better and larger the shell."

Waller and Sedley were listening with deep interest to Carew's story.

"All this," he resumed, "Suka told me some time ago, with many other details about Pālan—such as the finding of the passage into the atoll, the winds and weather, etc., etc., and I am now pretty well posted up on the subject. Although there are no trees on the islets, Suka says it rained very often at nights—heavy squalls from the south-east, and as he was there in the dry season we shall have no difficulty about water—that is, if we get there."

"Get there! Of course we shall get there," cried Waller excitedly, banging the table with his fist with such force that the coffee cups and saucers were upset in all directions.

"Keep cool, Fatty," said Sedley with a smile.

Carew went on :

"I did not say anything to you on the matter until this afternoon, for several reasons. One was that I wanted a chart—a general chart of the Solomons, and a detailed one of the Ontong Java group, as the natives call it—and could not get either in Townsville. So I had to send to Brisbane, and this morning I received both. This morning Suka and I had a very interesting hour together over those charts.

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“Now, to be perfectly frank with you both, Suka’s story has not been conducive to sleep for me. How could I raise money enough to go into the thing—that was my first worry. As you know, I have had to pay that blackguard Wilkins a thousand pounds. This left me something like £220 to go on with, establish a private practice in this new town of dust, drink, devilry, and downright damnation—alliteration does a man good sometimes—and keep up a respectable appearance. Now, I am not speaking scoffingly when I say that ‘the Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.’ I was not only shorn very close to the skin, but would have had my skin taken off me if I had not been able to have paid the damages awarded to Wilkins; I should have had to go to gaol until the money was paid. Now, I believe in this—that the man who ‘goes straight’ *will* come out all right in the end. Had I taken a bribe of £200 from that scoundrel Wilkins I should now be in the ignominious position of knowing that I had lent myself to fraud and was robbing the public. Well, this very morning, by the same mail that brought me the charts from Brisbane, I received a letter from Germany containing a draft for £400—money that I had abandoned all hope of ever getting. Some years ago, when I was collecting for the German museums, I sent home a private duplicate collection on my own account. It was sent to a firm in Berlin for disposal; the firm became bankrupt, and one of the partners absconded to Argentina. Six months ago he reappeared and all the creditors were paid in full.”

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“What a stroke of good luck!” remarked Waller.

“Yes; but that is not all. I seem to be getting a new coat of wool quite suddenly. This morning Clegg, of Charters Towers, called to see me about going into partnership with him. I declined, but offered to sell him my practice here. The result was that after some haggling over the matter he gave me a cheque for £150, and he comes in to-morrow. So you see I have now nearly £800. It is not much, but it must be enough for us.”

“I can raise about a hundred more,” said Waller.

“And I,” remarked Sedley bitterly, “cannot raise a shilling, so I must stand out; unless you will take me on as a ‘wages man’ at thirty shillings a week.”

Carew gave him a kindly smile.

“Don’t talk rubbish. All you have to do at present is to get rid of that fever. Now come along, both of you. I’ll show you the chart, and then you can help me to pack up my traps, so that Dr. Clegg can come in to-morrow. And this evening we shall decide what to do next. We shall have to go either to Brisbane or Sydney and buy or charter a small vessel. Waller, you shall be skipper.”

CHAPTER III

A SMALL and much weather-worn and battered-about-looking topsail schooner was making her way through Indispensable Straits, which separate the

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great islands of Malaita and Guadalcanar, in the Solomon Islands Archipelago. She was the *Restless*, of Sydney, and belonged to Carew and his friends, who at this moment were on the streaming deck—there was a strong breeze, and a heavy, lumpy sea, over which the vessel was thrashing her way, close-hauled and under shortened canvas. She certainly did not belie her name, for she kicked and plunged about, as Waller placidly observed, “like a cat in a fit,” and kept shipping a great deal of water. She was old, bluff-bowed, and square-sterned, a bad sailer, and by no means pretty to look at even when at her best, but nevertheless, and in spite of her age, she was staunch and seaworthy. Carew had bought her in Sydney for £400, paying half the amount down, and giving a bottomry bond for the remainder. This enabled him to spend a few hundreds upon re-fitting and provisioning the vessel, and three weeks after the purchase she sailed from Sydney for Ontong Java, where Carew intended to hire some natives as divers. In all there were but eight persons on board: Carew and his two friends, three white seamen and a cook, and Suka. Much curiosity had been shown in Sydney shipping circles regarding Carew’s purchase, and many inquisitive persons tried to find out her destination, wondering why she was sailing in ballast instead of taking a cargo of trade goods, as was usual with South Sea trading vessels. Carew, however, was not to be drawn, but implied that he thought he could “get a charter down in Fiji or Tonga.”

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Eight bells had just struck, and the wet and soddened cook announced dinner, jocosely informing Carew that the galley was working loose owing to the way in which the schooner was pitching and straining.

“She give a kick 'arf a hour ago, sir, and chucked every bloomin' saucepan off the range, and I gets a gallon o' pea-soup slung into my face. It was bilin' 'ot, too, it was, an' I was just lettin' out a yell o' hagony when over comes a lump of a sea, an' washes the soup outer me eyes, an' me an' the pots an' pans and heverythink helse inter the lee scuppers. So that's w'y there ain't no soup to-day, sir.”

“Never mind, cook. ‘It's a poor heart that never rejoices,’ you know. Better to get a little good pea soup in your face from a bucking ship than from a bucking sailor man, eh?”

The cook grinned. “I've 'ad that hexperience, sir, in my time, although as I didn't deserve it. I've 'ad 'ot coffee slung inter me face when I was in the American Navy, not knowin' as 'ow I'd filled the galley copper wiv salt instead o' fresh water.”

This was Carew's way with men under his command—and he was practically in command of the *Restless*, Waller being merely sailing master. Whilst he would tolerate no familiarity, he was always good-tempered, genial, and ready to joke, and had never lost by it. At the same time he could be a merciless disciplinarian—the nurses of the Townsville Hospital had quickly ascertained that fact when he had them “carpeted” before him, told them that they were

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not to consider themselves as "ornamental young women," but as nurses of a State hospital. "I find," he said in his quiet, caustic manner, "that you young women have been allowed most extraordinary liberties in the way of absenting yourselves from the hospital. You appear to have had no check whatever placed upon your movements. And, also, I regret to learn, you have been in the habit of entertaining male friends of yours to afternoon tea, at the expense of the hospital. Never let such a thing occur again whilst I am in charge. The wards are dirty, the beds and bed linen are in the same state, and would discredit a common London merchant-seaman's boarding-house, and yet I find that there is an enormous monthly laundry bill against the hospital. Your own apartments, I notice, are well kept, your bed linen is of the best, and you have provided yourselves with an ice-chest and seltzogenes, the which, I find, have been charged to the hospital. Now, I do not want to be harsh, and accuse you of combined dishonesty, but you certainly have not acted in a decent and becoming manner, and I must put a stop to your vagaries. You, Nurse Jagers, are the chief offender, and have set a very bad example to the others. Your training in such a great hospital as that of Charing Cross, in London, does not appear to have done you much good. To conclude, I wish you all to understand that I want you to realise that this is an institution supported by both the State and the public. For every £1 subscribed by the public the State adds another £1, and I am here to see that

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the money of the Government and the public is not wasted. I may tell you frankly that I do not approve of women nurses in colonial hospitals, and consider them an expensive and unnecessary nuisance. They do not attend to their appointed work, get absurdly large salaries for their position, and, in my view, are altogether undesirable. Now you may go."

That, as I have said, was Carew's way. He never minced his words.

* * * * *

The three met sat down to dinner in the stuffy little cabin, Sedley, now strong and robust again, remarking that if the others were as hungry as he was now continually, the *Restless* would soon run short of provisions.

"As a matter of fact," said Carew, "I think, Waller, that we might as well keep away for Mboli Harbour on Friday and get some fresh provisions, and whilst there you can attend to your rigging. We shall be all to pieces if this sort of weather keeps up much longer. Forty-two days out from Sydney and not through the Solomons yet! It is perfectly maddening."

"Well, we can't help it," remarked the placid Waller, "but you have only to say the word and I'll keep away for Mboli this instant. We certainly are getting 'a doing,' thrashing our way against this head sea and a stiff north-easter. Mboli Point is only thirty miles, and if you decide to run for it you'll see how this old hooker can skip when she is running free."

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"Then keep away, Waller. I have been quite seasick for the past week."

"So has everyone else, as far as that goes. She does pitch, being so light." And then Waller went on deck and gave the welcome order to keep the vessel away for Florida Island.

"Now," he observed genially, as he resumed his seat, "stand by for a bit of rolling for a change. I'll give her a little more head sail presently. What sort of a place is this Mboli Harbour?"

"One of the most romantically beautiful spots in all the Western Pacific islands," replied Carew. "I was there long years ago, collecting. Only for that beastly malarial fever it would be a paradise. It is seven years since I was there. I stayed at the house of the one white trader, a very nice fellow named Chesson. He was a well-educated man, and helped me greatly in classifying my collections, ethnographical and botanical. He was a widower with two young children, a boy and a girl, of sixteen and fourteen years of age. The poor fellow had a tragedy in his past. He was one of the staff of the Sydney Museum, and, although so young, had achieved much distinction by his writings on the bird life of Australasia—promised to be a second Gould, in fact. One day he let his young wife go out alone for a sail in Sydney harbour. The boat was run down by a steamer and the poor lady drowned. That was bad enough, but the tragedy was accentuated by the upper portion of her body being found in the stomach of a huge shark which

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was caught on the following day. Of course the newspapers revelled in it, and Chesson nearly went mad. He threw up his appointment, and, with his two infant children, sailed for the South Seas, and began life as a trader. I hope that we shall find him still at Mboli."

Waller, the optimistic, gave his fat, hearty laugh.

"Of course we shall, Carew; and jolly glad he will be to see you again."

Carew shook his head.

"Men live and die fast in the Western Pacific islands, Waller. You will get to understand by-and-by. Death always stares them in the face, day by day, especially those who are so careless and idiotic as to disregard the natives' customs, traditions and religious beliefs. Not that Chesson was one of that sort. But he was always too adventurous and careless of his personal safety. He actually crossed the great island of Bougainville alone and unarmed, and lived some months among the cannibal bush tribes, merely for the purpose of discovering the truth of an old story about a white man having been captured by the mountaineers forty years ago, and dying among them."

A little before sunset the battered, storm-tossed little vessel sailed round a lofty, palm-crowned headland and entered the deep, placid harbour, the blue waters of which were as smooth and unruffled as those of some small mountain lake. A fleet of canoes put off from the native village. They were manned by the wildest looking savages imaginable,

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who, however, greeted Carew in the most friendly but vociferous manner. He entered into an earnest conversation with them, and then turned to Sedley and Waller with a very grave look in his eyes.

“Poor Chesson is gone. He and his son and the three natives who formed the crew of his trading cutter were cut off by the natives of Guadalcanar two months ago. A woman alone escaped and brought the news here. She says that Chesson and his son were clubbed in the house of the local chief, and the crew were slaughtered on board, and the cutter looted and then burned. The woman was spared on account of her being connected with the murderers. She managed to make her way back here only a week ago. Poor Miss Chesson is broken-hearted. We must go on shore at once and see her. There is the house, over there, just showing amongst that clump of bread-fruit trees.”

The boat was quickly lowered and manned, and Carew and Sedley went on shore, and walked up to the trader's house. Edith Chesson saw them coming and almost ran to meet them, and something like a sob of joy burst from her when she recognised Carew, who drew her to him as a father would his own child. For some minutes, with her face to his broad bosom, she wept silently, unable to speak, and trembling from head to foot. Then Carew gently led her back to the house, and, as the tropic night fell and the myriad stars shone out, they sat on the verandah, and she told her story to her dead father's old friend.

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“Poor little woman!” said Carew, taking her thin little hand in his, and pressing it gently; “you shall be under my care now. And the first thing that I am going to do is to make you well and strong.” (She was thin almost to the point of emaciation and her face was as white as marble.) “To-morrow we shall discuss what is to be done. Who is staying with you in the house?”

“Only the two women servants. But they are very kind, and so, indeed, are all the natives. And I am not at all afraid of any of them; but”—and here she hesitated—“I *am* afraid of the new trader who lives across the harbour. He is away now on a trading cruise in his cutter. Father never liked him. And I *hate* him.”

CHAPTER IV

“WHO is he?” asked Carew, quickly.

“His name is Clissold, and he came here and opened a trading station three years ago. He was formerly in the Kanaka labour traffic and had a bad—a very bad—reputation.”

“I know the scoundrel quite well, my dear.”

“He came here in his cutter with only one other man who has since died of fever. Clissold bought a piece of land here and built a house, and within a few weeks my father and he quarrelled. The man persisted in visiting us, and father one day bluntly

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told him that he was not welcome and never would be. Clissold asked why? Had he not as much right to earn his living on Florida as my father? he inquired.

“‘Quite,’ answered my father, ‘but I don’t want you here. I will not associate with a man of your character!’

“After that he never came again, and, indeed, he and my father never again spoke to each other, even when they passed on the beach.

“But when the news of my father’s and brother’s deaths was brought here by the native woman who escaped, he called to see me, expressed much sympathy for me and asked if he could be of any assistance. Of course, I was quite distracted at the time and cannot remember what I said, except that I thanked him. He came again on the following day, when I was more collected, and then I began to feel a little bit frightened at his manner. He was not exactly rude, but he made me feel ‘shaky.’ He said that as he was the only white man on the island it was his duty to see that I came to no harm at the hands of the natives, who would be strongly tempted to kill me and plunder the station of all it contained. This, I knew, was nonsense, for they always liked and respected my father, and poor Harry and I have lived among them nearly all our lives, with the exception of the few years we spent at school in New Zealand. So I told him that I felt quite safe, and would be content to remain as I was and carry on my father’s business until a ship came, when I

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should endeavour to get to Auckland or Sydney. M'buru, the head chief of the district, was in the house at the time, paying me a visit of 'love for my father' as he termed his condolences, and I was quite glad of the presence of the savage old fellow. He gave me courage and confidence in myself."

Carew nodded. "M'buru is as decent and respectable a savage as Clissold is a blackguard."

"Yes. And he does not like Captain Clissold either. All the time we were talking he kept his eyes fixed steadily on the white man, until at last Clissold angrily asked him to go away, but I made a sign to him not to do so.

"'Why do you not go away, M'buru, Head of Mboli,' repeated Clissold, speaking in the native dialect.

"'Because Eta (myself) would speak to me of her father and of her brother—and I am now her father and her brother, and her uncle and her mother, and her foster-mother,' replied the old chief with an ugly scowl.

"Clissold pretended to be indignant and told me that the old man meant to be rude to me, but I knew exactly what M'buru did mean, and was grateful to him. He meant that he had constituted himself my guardian. He seemed to know that I was afraid of Clissold, and his speech had one good effect—Captain Clissold at once became most suave, and then went off, reiterating his offers of assistance and advice.

"He came again on the following day and begged

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me to see him on most important business. I asked him to sit down. He had a folded paper in his hand which he asked me to read. I did so. It was an account of the massacre of my father's party (taken, of course, from the native woman who brought the news here), then it went on to say that I was in a position of imminent peril, that I was in hourly danger of being murdered by the treacherous natives, and that he had offered me his assistance and protection, for he was aware of the fact that already the natives were discussing among themselves the partition of my father's trade goods and personal effects.

“‘I want you to add and sign a brief postscript to that, Miss Chesson,’ he said, ‘certifying to the truth of my statements. You have declined all my offers of assistance, although I again implore you to reconsider your decision. Now, I am as certain that these natives intend to murder you as I am certain of sitting in this chair, and I should not like to be held up to public contempt as a man who had failed to do his duty to a young and unprotected white woman living among treacherous savages.’

“I declined to sign the document, much to his (veiled) anger. Then he began questioning me as to whether my father had made a will. This was too much, and I rose from my seat saying that I did not care to discuss such a matter with a stranger. He made the most earnest protestations, said he had my welfare at heart and that I misjudged him cruelly. And the climax came on the following day,”—here she laughed—“he sent me a written offer of marriage.”

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"The old scoundrel!" growled Carew.

"I sent a reply by one of M'buru's young men. It was very curt, for I was angry and felt insulted. A few days after this I became ill with fever and was very despondent. M'buru had a litter made for me, and I was taken to a mountain village, where, with the two women, I remained a fortnight until I got stronger. When we returned, M'buru told me that Clissold had called almost every day demanding to see me. The chief would give him no information, and a quarrel ensued. Clissold tried to force his way into the house, and M'buru and his men threw him out and threatened to kill him.

"The man wrote me two more letters, which I sent back unopened. And then a week ago I saw his cutter leave the harbour, and was thankful to learn that he had gone on a trading trip down the coast, and would be away some weeks."

Carew pondered deeply for some minutes, then his face lit up.

"We must not leave you here, my child, even with M'buru to protect you, and there are matters that prevent my breaking our voyage and taking you to Levuka in Fiji, where you would be among white people; it would occupy too much time."

Then he told her of the character of the voyage on which the *Restless* was engaged, and of his anxiety to get to work on the pearl shell at Roncador as quickly as possible—three months before the bad weather season set in.

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“What I propose for you, Edith, is this: You must come with us to Leueneuwa and stay there whilst we return to Roncador and set about our pearl-shelling.”

“Oh yes, gladly, Dr. Carew. I have been there several times with my father and poor Harry, and like the islands and the people very much. I shall be quite happy there, I know.”

Carew nodded, and then asked her to send a messenger to M'buru asking the chief to come to them at once.

“Now,” he went on, addressing the girl and Sedley jointly, “we will fix up things with the old chief right away, and tell him of our intentions. He will lend us every assistance—of that I am certain. First of all, Edith, to-morrow morning we shall take stock of your father's trade goods, and pack them all ready to ship, together with all the casks of cocoanut oil in the sheds, the boats and the other gear. In four days Waller will have the schooner fit for sea again, and off we shall go to Ontong Java. There, Edith, if you like to begin trading again, you can do so. I expect to be away at Roncador for over three months, but we shall be neighbours—less than a day's sail apart. And I will leave one of our A.B.'s with you, a steady old fellow named Joe Cope. He is a good carpenter as well as a boatbuilder, and you will find him a most useful old man, although a bit garrulous.”

The girl smiled, and a few minutes later, whilst she was giving Carew some details of her father's

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property, the old chief appeared. He was quite satisfied with what Carew told him, promised his assistance, and also said he would provide the schooner with as much fruit, vegetables, fish and hogs as Carew liked to take.

Then, bidding their sad young hostess good-night, the three men left—M'buru to his village, and the white men to the *Restless*.

The next day was one of great excitement in the native village, for M'buru had given orders for two great feasts to be prepared, one in honour of Carew and Waller, the other as a sort of valedictory banquet to Edith Chesson, who had lived among them so long and knew every man, woman and child in the various villages on the coast, and in the mountains as well.

Learning from Edith that there were several head of cattle belonging to her father roaming about the open littoral on the north end of the island, Carew sent off Sedley with a party of willing natives to try and shoot at least one of the animals, which were almost wild, being the progeny of stock brought to the islands several years before, when many American whalships touched there to buy a bullock as a change from the everlasting salt junk. Sedley, armed with a Snider carbine, started off in high spirits, and Carew and Edith began the work of stocktaking and repacking the trade goods. Many articles, at her wish, were set aside as presents for the chief and other natives, and M'buru's eyes glittered with joy when, among other things, she gave him a brand new

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double-barrelled shot-gun, fitted with a 38-calibre rifle barrel beneath. It was a weapon that was the talk of the island when Chesson brought a pair of them home with him on his last trip to Sydney. There was nothing he desired more, and the old fellow went about with it throughout the village, caressing and pressing it to his cheek as the joy of his life and his only child.

Towards sunset loud yells of triumph resounded along the beach—the hunting party had returned, carrying the carcass of a two-year-old bull which Sedley had shot in a swamp situated some miles from the head of the harbour. This was a welcome addition to the schooner's larder, and Sedley being the "butcher" was up at daylight on the following morning cutting up the carcass with the skill of a practised hand—for most Australian bushmen and diggers learn to do their own butchering.

Four days later everything was in readiness for the *Restless* to sail. The native feast had been given, the schooner's decks stacked with yams, taro, hundreds of bunches of bananas, and baskets of other fruit, and, surrounded by a fleet of canoes crowded with vociferous natives bawling out their farewells, the little vessel at noon stood out of the harbour with a brisk, leading breeze, and then headed northward on her course for Lueneuwa.

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CHAPTER V

WITHIN the great reef-bound circle of Roncador Atoll the smooth, pale-green waters shone and sparkled under the bright tropic sun ; without, the ever-restless rollers beat and thundered upon the jagged coral barrier, the white, foaming ring of hissing surf rushing in sweeping torrents half way across, till its impulse was spent, then sinking down through a million crevices and bubbling holes to swell the gently heaving lake, under whose bosom lay the treasures of pearl-shell which Carew and his comrades had come to seek.

Moored in shallow water, and within a hundred yards of the shore in a safe and well-sheltered place, was the *Restless*, sitting much deeper in the water than she had done three months previously, for in her hold were sixty tons of pearl-shell, and she needed but ten tons more to complete her cargo. And this ten tons was now being sorted, according to size, and packed in cases ready for shipment ; then the schooner would return to Lueneuwa, where Carew would consult with his partners as to their next course.

Fortune had indeed smiled upon the adventurers. The vessel's former bad luck seemed to have left her the day that Edith Chesson had come on board, for the schooner made a remarkably quick passage to Lueneuwa after leaving Mboli Harbour, and on the

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morning of the fifth day out, Suka, who was aloft on the look-out, uttered a yell of delight.

“*Ke panua, ke panua!*” (The land, the land.)

At noon the schooner entered the noble lagoon through what is now called the Kaveiko Pass, and almost instantly she was surrounded by a fleet of canoes, the occupants of which, when they recognised the long-lost Suka, went into a frantic state of excitement, and, clambering on board, they embraced him as one returned from the dead. To Carew, also, they gave a warm welcome, and when, later on, he told them he wanted twenty men to dive for him, five times that number eagerly volunteered.

The next few days were passed in completing arrangements with the natives for the building of a house for Edith Chesson. They were delighted to know that she intended to remain with them for some months and carry on the business of a trader. No trading ship had visited the island for two years, and the people had made a considerable quantity of cocoanut oil, which, for want of casks, they had been obliged to store in canoes, hollowed-out tree trunks, and large bamboos. Edith told them that although Dr. Carew had no casks to spare from the schooner, that she would still buy the oil, and pay them half the value for it, and that she would let them keep it until she and Carew sent another vessel for it from Sini (Sydney), when they would receive the other half. For in those days cocoanut oil brought high prices in the marts of the world, and so Carew advised his dead friend's daughter to buy

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it at once, before some chance trading vessel came along and "snapped it up." So Edith paid out a certain quantity of strong twist tobacco, axes, knives and other articles of barter, and the matter was satisfactorily concluded.

Within a week, so quickly did the native builders work, the house was built, and Edith, with one of her former women servants, was installed, with old Joe Cope as their companion. The house was a combined dwelling-house and "store," and was built of cane and bamboo, and thatched with the leaf of the pandanus palm.

Something very like a sob escaped her when the time came for her to say farewell to the three comrades; but she struggled against it bravely as she put her hand in each of theirs in turn.

"You have all been so good to me," she said, with a quaver in her voice, "I cannot tell you; I should break down and begin to cry if I tried to utter all that is in my heart. . . . But oh, I wish you all—you, dear Dr. Carew, you, Captain Waller, and you, Mr. Sedley—all the best luck in the world, to compensate you for your past misfortunes. I trust you will soon load the *Reckless* with *montiara*,* and come sailing bravely back into this lagoon with everyone on board well and happy. As the time draws near for your return, I shall watch for you once every evening before sunset, from the top of the little headland on Kaveiko. And" (her voice became almost a whisper) "every night and morning I shall pray to

* One of the Malayo-Polynesian names for pearl shell.

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God to guard and protect you, and bring you back in safety to Lueneuwa—as I know that He will.”

Then, impulsively, she placed a hand on each side of the bearded cheeks of Carew and Sedley, and then on the fat face of the skipper, and kissed them on the lips, as a child would kiss its mother, or someone whom it loved.

* * * * *

In a ramshackle-looking but yet comfortable shed on an islet of coral *débris*, just abreast of the *Reckless*, Carew, Waller, and some of the crew of the schooner were attending to the packing of the last ten tons of pearl shell. Sedley was not with them, for he had met with a serious accident soon after they had established themselves on the atoll, and had to be sent back to Lueneuwa, to be placed under the care of Joe Cope and Edith Chesson. The accident was caused by his over-eagerness to assist Waller and the crew in hauling the schooner closer in to the beach during a sudden squall, which had lashed the usually calm waters of the atoll into a seething turmoil. When the anchor was let go again Sedley stumbled and fell on the flaked out cable just as it flew out. His left foot was caught in the chain and so severely crushed that Carew decided to send him to Lueneuwa, where he would receive better attention, nursing and food than on Roncador. In vain Sedley protested; Carew was inflexible, so Waller had sailed again for Lueneuwa and left behind the injured man.

“Well, old man,” observed Carew to his com-

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panion, 'we have done well; between £3,000 and £4,000 worth of shell in three months, and all obtained in shallow water; and I believe that there are another two hundred tons still in the lagoon.'

"How was it, I wonder, that when the party of Ontong Java natives were blown here they did not discover the shell?" remarked Waller.

"I cannot tell, but it may have been that in those days there was but little or no shell here; it is quite possible that the beds which are now spread over the lagoon may be the result of young oysters, which have been brought here and planted by white men, perhaps fifty years ago, and something may have prevented them ever returning. Then, again, as Suka says, the party of natives who were blown here may have seen plenty of shell, but as there was also abundance in their own lagoon, they did not trouble about returning here to get more. Their canoes, as you know, are very small and frail, and not fitted for such a long voyage. And all the time that I was living on Lueneuwa, although I often heard the people speak of Pālan, as Roncador is called, I never heard them say anything about the lagoon containing pearl shell. Suka, of course, who discovered it and told me, had no chance of communicating the fact to his countrymen, for, as I told you, the schooner which rescued him took him to Queensland, where I so fortunately came across him. And now they have given me a promise not to mention the fact to any white man or men who may visit them. If it were known in Honolulu, Fiji, or Samoa, half a dozen

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parties would make a rush for Roncador, and we should have to fight for our share, let alone our right of prior discovery."

Then Carew went on to say that he had been seriously considering what would be the best course for them to pursue when leaving the island on the present occasion. Should he place ten or a dozen of the native divers in charge to await the return of the *Restless* or another and larger vessel from Sydney, or should he destroy all traces of their present occupancy and leave the lagoon to itself.

"I think, Waller, the latter will be our best course. If we left any natives here they would be sure to attract the attention of any passing vessel, the captain of which would think that they were cast-aways, and come to their assistance; and if so he could not fail to discover the reason of their presence, and then 'the fat would be in the fire.' Then, also, I doubt if they would consent to stay here without a white man; they would be afraid of being kidnapped by some 'blackbirder' and carried off to Honolulu, Fiji or Tahiti. So we shall decide upon the second plan."

"I think you are right, Carew. Some passing vessel might come poking about here, and seeing the place was inhabited, send a boat on shore, or even come inside the atoll if her skipper discovered the passage. And in such clear water no one could fail to see the pearl shell."

That night the last of the valuable cargo was on board, and all was in readiness. At daylight all the

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native divers and Carew went on shore, set fire to the hut, cut down the few half-grown cocoa palms and burned or buried every possible article, such as empty beef tins, old cordage, water casks, etc., etc., that lay about the islet; and then the party returned to the schooner, the boat was hoisted up and secured, and the willing crew sprang to the windlass brakes and hove up anchor, the little vessel flapping her canvas and straining at her cable as if eager once more to feel the open sea. Half an hour after she swept through the narrow passage between the reef, and Roncador was left, for another six months, to the bellowing roar of the foaming surf and the wild clamour of myriad seabirds. Well did it deserve its name of "The Snorer," given to it by the pilot Maurelle, who discovered the place in 1791. One night when his ship was "lying becalmed (he says) we heard a strange and continuous sound coming from a far distance, as of a man snoring heavily. We were five leagues distant."

The deeply-laden schooner made a quick run to Lueneuwa, and passing through Kaveiko Pass entered the lagoon, and, rounding the palm-clad point, came in sight of a white-painted vessel, flying British colours, anchored off the village. She was surrounded by canoes laden with fruit and vegetables, and proved to be the missionary ship *John Hunt* of Fiji, making her first call at the lagoon, and had arrived only the previous day.

Passing on ahead of her, Waller brought to and let go his anchor abreast of Miss Chesson's house, and

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at the same moment Sedley and Joe Cope were seen running down to their boat, which was launched and awaiting them, and then Edith Chesson appeared in her doorway waving her handkerchief to Carew and Waller.

Sedley was soon on board and grasping their hands. He looked well, but his face wore an anxious and strained look.

“All well on shore, Sedley ? ”

“All well, thank God ! But we have had a terrible turn up here last week. Clissold came here and tried to abduct Miss Chesson, and in the *fracas* that took place I shot him.”

“No, Captain Waller,” interrupted Cope, “it was me as killed him ; and I ain’t going to let Mr. Sedley have either the blame or credit for it. I can swear it was my shot that did for him.”

“Come below and tell us all about it,” said Carew in his usual quiet manner. “Suka, tell your friends who are now coming alongside in their canoes not to disturb us—I will see them by-and-bye. And let the man in Mr. Sedley’s boat go back and tell the white lady that we are all well and will be with her in an hour or so. Now Sedley, my lad, don’t look so worried,” and he clapped him on the shoulder. “Come below, and we shall hear all about it.”

“Miss Chesson would have come on board with me,” said the younger man as they entered the cabin, “but she has visitors from the *John Hunt*—two ladies—and so could not well get away.”

“How is she ? ” inquired Carew.

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“ Oh, splendid, and looks more beautiful than ever,” was Sedley’s quick answer.

Fat-faced Captain Waller looked at Carew and deliberately winked.

CHAPTER VI

“ FIRST of all, Carew, tell me how you have fared on Roncador,” inquired Sedley.

“ Splendidly, my dear fellow, splendidly. Seventy tons of fine black-edge shell on board, worth from £50 to £65 per ton, according to size. And as yet we have only been tickling the place.”

“ Good. I am happy to hear it—not for my own sake,” he added quickly.

Carew smiled in his kindly way.

“ Well, you ought to be,” he said.

“ Perhaps our friend has discovered a greater treasure here on Lueneuwa,” said Waller, with a fat, chuckling laugh, and again he winked—this time at Joe Cope, who returned it in the most barefaced manner—and Sedley’s bronzed face flushed a deep red. Carew noticed his embarrassment, and at once came to the rescue.

“ Now, Sedley, go ahead, and tell us what happened, and how that hoary scoundrel got his deserts.”

“ Unfortunately his was not the only death. The cruel brute shot poor Siti dead, wounded Malu

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severely, and also killed a native boy who came to Miss Chesson's assistance. (Siti and Malu were the two old women servants she had brought with her from Mboli. They had been with her father since she was a child, and both were devoted to "Eta.") And besides him, two of his boat's crew were killed. Neither Joe nor I were present at the first of it, and what I tell you now, of that part, we heard from Miss Chesson and some of the natives. Now, I'll start at the beginning.

"All went on swimmingly after you left me here, Waller. The natives began making more cocoanut oil, and storing it in long bamboos and dug-outs; Joe began building a boat, and that boat was the means of saving Miss Chesson from being carried off.

"I, of course, on account of my foot, was a lame duck for the first eight weeks, and could do nothing but loaf around, watch Miss Chesson trading with the natives, or look at Joe and his boat-building. But as soon as I was able to walk I helped Joe with the boat, and when she was finished we used to go on trading trips to the various islands in the lagoon, for the natives made a lot of oil. Sometimes we would be away for two or three days.

"About a fortnight ago the people of Leuneuwa started off in their canoes to go to the island called Ekolo, to pull cocoanuts for oil making. They expected to be away eight or ten days. Nearly everyone went, only a few women and children remaining behind.

"The day after they left Miss Chesson got a

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message from the people on Kalan Island, near the west passage, asking her to send the boat there, as they had some oil for us. So off we went, leaving Miss Chesson, the two women, and a native boy in the house. She told us not to hurry back, as she would not be lonely, and said that we ought to take our rifles with us, as the natives said that there were a number of wild pigs on Kalan, which were devastating their plantations, and the people would be glad if we would stay there for a few days, and shoot as many as we could.

“We got to the island, bought the oil, and then had a day’s fine sport, getting eleven pigs, some of which we put in the boat to bring home to salt down. We left about midnight, and on our way called in at Ekolo, and presented the chief with a pig, then went on. There was hardly any wind, and we were still a mile from the house at daylight, when it fell a calm. Just abreast of where we were then the island is very narrow—less than a quarter of a mile—and only a few scattered cocoanut trees on it, and you can see the open sea on the other side.

“Suddenly, through the trees, we caught sight of a small white-painted schooner. She was hove to—for there was a breeze outside, although it was a calm inside the lagoon—and she was quite close in, so close that we could see her people moving about on deck.

“We at once took to the oars, and began to pull in to the house, and were only about two hundred yards off when we heard screams, and then gunshots,

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and, standing up, we saw several men dressed in European clothing running in and out of the house ; then there was another shot, and more shouting.

“We urged the heavily laden boat along till she grounded about fifty yards from the beach, it being low tide. Then, grabbing our rifles and cartridge pouches, we jumped out, waded on shore, and rushed up to the house. Just outside the door we found the woman Malu lying down, her thigh bone smashed by a bullet.

“‘Quick, quick, you go quick and kill him, Klisso. Klisso take away Eta!’ she cried in her broken English, and she pointed along the track that leads from the house through the cocoanut trees to the outer beach.

“We tore along the path, and soon caught sight of Clissold and his party of four Manila men. They were just about to descend the steep and rugged track that winds through those big coral boulders to the outer beach. Two of them were carrying Miss Chesson who, at that moment, had freed one hand and arm, and twisted it amongst the protruding roots of one of those tough creepers that grow on the coral boulders, and the men were trying to make her let go. Behind them were two others, carrying Miss Chesson’s clothing trunk, and last of all was Clissold. His back was turned to us, and he was coolly watching the two Manila men trying to force Miss Chesson to release her hold of the roots. He had his pistol in his hand, and the moment he heard us behind him he turned and fired at us.

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“Both Joe and I fired at the same time. He spun round and pitched down the path on top of the men carrying the heavy trunk. They dropped the trunk and ran; but the other two, who had Miss Chesson, let her go turned and faced us with the heavy old-fashioned Colt’s revolvers they carried, and the first shot they fired nearly wiped out poor Joe, for the bullet ploughed along the top of his head. But they both went down at our first fire, and when we came to look at them a little while after we found them both dying.

“Meanwhile the other two had got away down to the reef to their boat, which at once pushed off for Clissold’s schooner. I daresay that Joe and I could have wiped out the whole lot of them with our Sniders; but we had to attend to Miss Chesson, who had fainted. Her right arm was torn and bleeding from the rough usage she had received. We carried her back to the house, where an awful sight met us.

“Poor old Siti was lying dead on the floor, with a bullet through her heart. In her clutched left hand was a long tuft of Clissold’s white beard, which she had torn out. Quite near her was the poor native boy, who had not only been shot by Clissold, but stabbed over and over again by the Manila men.

“The house was in an awful mess. Malu says that after Clissold shot Siti and herself and the boy, he turned everything upside down, breaking open boxes, and searching among the contents. She saw him

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collect a lot of letters and papers, which he looked at hurriedly, tied together in a bundle and gave to one of the Manila men. Then he came across Mr. Chesson's two cash boxes, which were, as you know, full of English and American gold and silver. These he put into Miss Chesson's trunk, together with all her loose clothing that was in her bedroom, and then ordered two of the Manila men to carry it down to the boat. I believe that he was delayed in searching for Mr. Chesson's will, which Miss Chesson tells me is in one of the cash boxes."

Carew bent his head in assent.

"Yes. Edith showed it to me. It was made seven years ago, in Levuka, Fiji, Chesson leaving all his money and possessions generally to his son Harry and his daughter Edith. Go on, Sedley."

"That is pretty nearly all, doctor. Clissold's schooner, after the boat with the two Manila men who escaped came alongside, stood away to the eastward, two boats towing her so as to get well clear of the island as quickly as possible. No doubt those on board were afraid that the Leueneuwa people would come off in their canoes and capture her, and as there was only a very faint breeze they used their boats to get away as soon as they could.

"The *John Hunt* arrived here yesterday, and her captain and the missionaries on board told me that Clissold appeared in Levuka about a month ago, bought a schooner and shipped a crew of nine Manila men who had just been released from gaol after serving six months' imprisonment for mutiny on an

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Indian coolie ship. The captain of the missionary vessel thinks that Clissold must have ascertained from the Florida Island natives that Miss Chesson had come here, and that he had been hanging about the island for some time, as his vessel was sighted by the *John Hunt* four days previously, between here and Roncador. Now, that is the end of my yarn, as you sailor fellows say, and I want to know if I ought to go to Fiji in the *John Hunt* and surrender myself to the authorities there for shooting Clissold and his men—for I certainly did kill one of the men even if I did not kill him.”

Carew laughed quietly.

“Don’t worry yourself, my lad. These islands are out of the jurisdiction of the Governor of Fiji, and even if they were not the authorities in Levuka would not trouble you nor Joe Cope over the shooting of a notorious ruffian like Adam Clissold. All you need do is to send in a report of the affair to Commodore Goodenough, commanding the Australian station, and then, in the course of twelve months or so, a man-of-war will be sent ‘to investigate the case,’ and the captain of that man-of-war will do his level best not to find you. And if he does find you he will only talk a lot of stereotyped nonsense to you about the ‘impropriety’ of taking the law into your own hands, tell you not to do it again, and report to the Commodore that the affair was ‘a regrettable incident, characteristic of the lawless conditions prevailing on those islands outside of the jurisdiction of Her Majesty’s Government in Fiji, but that Mr. Sedley

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and the seaman Joseph Cope appear to me to have acted in quite a justifiable manner, considering the exigencies of the case.' ”

Waller chuckled.

“That’s the regular naval officer kind of gag. So cheer up, Sedley, old man.”

“Now for the shore,” said Carew. “By the way, Sedley, do you know where the missionary vessel is bound for, after she leaves here ? ”

“For Levuka direct, and she sails to-morrow. There are two missionaries and their wives, and I think one couple are to remain here. Just now the captain and the two parsons are away at Ekolo to choose a site for the mission house ; and the two ladies are staying with Miss Chesson till they return to-night.”

“I shall want to send a letter by that vessel to Fiji,” said Carew, as they descended into the boat ; “the commodore’s ship is cruising about there, I know, and I will write to him and apply for permission to be allowed to hoist the English flag on Roncador temporarily, until a ship of war comes and confirms our possession in the usual formal manner. And you, Sedley, must also write him a report of the Clissold affair, and Miss Chesson, Cope and the woman Malu must witness it.”

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CHAPTER VII

THE two missionaries and the master of the mission vessel all proved to be very pleasant fellows, and through Carew's influence with the natives a piece of ground was bought from them for a very moderate sum. Some days passed before the *John Hunt* sailed, and during that time something very important had occurred—of which the reader shall duly learn.

Once more Carew had to employ his surgical skill on poor Malu, who bore the knife with patient resignation, and without a murmur, being content with Edith holding her hand.

"Don't believe in administering anæsthetics to a native, Mr. Fife," remarked Carew to one of the missionaries who was assisting in the operation of extracting the bullet from the smashed thigh bone; "they bear pain in the most marvellous manner, and I have hardly ever known a case of a bullet wound or knife thrust which did not heal with the first intention. Purer blood than our ages-contaminated fluid, you see. Ha! here we are at last; here it is. Malu,"—and here he spoke to the patient in her own tongue—"thou wilt be a notable woman. This bullet is flattened out to the size of a half-dollar. I will make thee a present of it to wear in the lobe of thy ear as an ornament. Art in pain, my sweet child?" (She was sixty years of age.) "No? 'Tis well. I hate a whimpering child. Now, Mr. Fife, basin and

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sponges again, please. Edith, my dear, *you* have the makings of a good hospital nurse in you. You have done those dry cocoanut spathes exactly as I wanted them done. They make splendid splints, don't they Mr. Fife," and so he chatted on until the operation was finished, and Malu was carried outside on a litter and placed under the shade of a wild mango tree to receive the admiration and congratulations of some hundreds of native women, who passed the bullet from hand to hand.

In the afternoon Carew and Edith went for a walk through the palm-grove and were absent for an hour.

"Edith and I are going for a quiet walk—to talk business," he said with pretended gravity to Sedley and Waller, who at the time were in the sitting-room with the skipper of the missionary ship, smoking their pipes and spinning yarns.

"I should be much obliged, Dr. Carew, if you will give me a few minutes before you go," said Sedley, rising.

"Oh, all right, confound you. Come along into the store and say what you have to say. It is very rude to keep a lady waiting, eh, Captain Braithwaite?"

"Disgraceful, doctor—simply *disgraceful!* Mr. Sedley ought to be ashamed of himself"; and the skipper, who had 'heard something' from Mr. Joseph Cope, A.B., dug his elbow into the ribs of his brother master mariner.

Carew and Sedley went into the store—the entrance to which was from the sitting-room.

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“I know what it is you want to say to me, my dear boy,” said Carew, sitting down on a case of muskets, and motioning Sedley to a seat on a coil of Manila rope; “Edith told me all about it last evening. And I am happy to think that I have been the means of your meeting each other. Now, I am not Edith’s legal guardian, but I must become so for the time—I am like a bishop *in partibus*. My diocese is not defined clearly, but yet clearly enough for me to see that you two young people are lovers and will be very happy. Now you can ‘get,’ as we say in Australia. When Edith and I come back from our walk, you can show up again. And then we shall have to see Fife about the marriage, which can take place here to-morrow, as the *John Hunt*, as a matter of fact, is only staying here at my request. Fife knows all about it, for I have told him. Don’t sit there gaping at me”; and then Carew, with an aching heart, but with a genial smile—for he had indulged in visions of himself and Edith Chesson—pushed Sedley out of the room, and then went for his walk with her.

He had steeled himself to the inevitable, and when they returned to the house, Edith Chesson did not know that the quiet, calm-faced Doctor Carew had ever thought of her other than as a child of an old friend. For Carew was a MAN.

* * * * *

In the cabin of the *Restless* the three comrades were talking, or rather listening to Carew, who was outlining their plans for the future.

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“ You, Waller, will go to Sydney, calling at Roncador on the way, and leave me there with a party of thirty native divers. We must run no more risks, and, possession being nine points of the law, the sooner I am back there again the better it will be for us all. Then, when you get to Sydney, pay the rest of the money due on the *Restless* bottomry bond. Then go to old John Kelly at the Merchants' Exchange, give him this letter, and tell him all about Roncador. He is a man we can trust. He will sell the cargo of pearl shell for you to Dalgetty and Company, and you will have something like £4,500 in hand. Place it in Kelly's hand, and you and he can look out for and buy another vessel in place of the old *Restless*. Two thousand pounds will be sufficient for that. Then he will sell the *Restless*—the poor old tub won't bring more than £300, but it will be £300 to our joint account. Take £500 for yourself—I'm not paying you any wages as skipper, my 'fat-faced friend'—and put £500 each to the credit of Sedley and myself at the Commercial Bank. Trust old Daddy Kelly in everything. He is a rich man, as straight as a die, and only keeps on at the Exchange piling up money because he has no other interest in life. I have asked him to come in with us, so you need not be surprised if he offers to put in £5,000 or so. He is a queer old chap. Had over-eaten himself one day, and was taken seriously ill in Aaron's Hotel, and dropped down. I was staying there, and looked after him for a week or so. He asked me, in his gruff manner, how much he had to

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pay me. I said 'nothing,' as I was not entitled to practise in New South Wales. He glared at me, and said that I was an honest sort of lunatic, wrote out a cheque for £50, rammed it into me, and would not take it back when I protested. I paid it back again into his bankers, for I was not only not hard up, but could not legally take a fee, as I had not registered myself according to the New South Wales law. So we became great friends, and I am sure that when I was cast for that £1,000 damages in the libel suit at Townsville, that old Daddy Kelly, as he is called, would have sent me the money had I asked him."

Waller gave his fat chuckle. "He is one of the good angels that we poor sailor men never meet."

"Yes," remarked Carew, stolidly; "the only kind of 'angels' which you unmarried sailor-men meet are not good for you."

Then he went on :

"You, Sedley, will remain here, as Edith is quite content. She will have the society of Mrs. Fife, and you will be as jolly as a covey of sand-boys. Now this long-winded oration of mine is finished"; and then, turning to Waller, he said, with a smile, "Give the order to dress ship, Captain Waller; the *John Hunt* will respond with all the bunting she has. Sedley, my lad, get you ashore, and make yourself pretty. Only an hour for you, my boy. I shall give the bride away, and you and I, Waller, lucky dogs that we are, shall both kiss her."

JIM TROLLOPE AND MYSELF

JIM TROLLOPE AND MYSELF

OR, A LONG TRAMP ON AN AUSTRAL SHORE

CHAPTER I

ALTHOUGH the writer of these reminiscences of travel, adventure, and sport cannot in any sense claim to be a traveller of great experience—for his wanderings were nearly all confined to California, the islands of the North and South Pacific, and the coasts of Eastern and Northern Australia—he trusts that his readers will find in his narrative much that will interest and possibly instruct, although he fears that the continual reiteration of the personal “I” will prove annoying. This, however, cannot be well avoided, for on these wanderings and boat voyages he was usually solus, and perhaps “I” is preferable to the pedantic “we.”

I may mention here that I am a native of the eastern coast of Australia and, although sent to sea at an early age, I, in company with my brothers, was very familiar with a great part of the seaboard of New South Wales, along which we made long tramps, sometimes remaining away from home for weeks at a time. And when, in later years, I returned at intervals from my cruises among the islands of the

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North and South Pacific, I frequently had the opportunity of revisiting the scenes of my boyhood's days. And although I would be alone on these occasions, I was never in any sense lonely—being excellent company for myself—and my wanderings gave me the utmost enjoyment and happiness.

Only a few months ago I received a letter from a brother, two years older than myself, who, after an absence from our native district of thirty years, again found himself there to inspect and report upon some newly discovered silver deposits. "We camped," he wrote, "at the junction of the Hastings and Wilson Rivers. The country is marvellously little changed. Settlement has not made much progress—indeed, there are now more abandoned homesteads and selections than there were in the days of our youth. . . . The river was alive with large perch, which bit freely, and game is as plentiful as ever. . . . Although fifteen miles from the sea, we can, when an easterly is blowing, sometimes hear the surf on the bar quite plainly. . . . I wish you were here. . . . Come out of your cold English winter, and bask in the glorious Australian sunshine, and loaf under the cedars and blackbutts, and catch perch and river mullet."

Ah! I wish it were possible for me so to do, instead of sitting here in my study, looking at the bleak and snow-covered Sussex Downs.

I have, as stated, made many long and lonely tramps along the seaboard of New South Wales, and that which I am now describing was about the longest of all—not as regards the distance covered, but as to

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time. There being no need for me to hurry, I took matters very leisurely, and when I set out had no definite idea of making for any particular place, nor cared whether my tramp occupied me two weeks or two months. I only wanted to enjoy myself in my own fashion, go where I liked, and recover my health, which had suffered from a severe attack of malarial fever, contracted in the islands of the North West Pacific, and I knew that nothing could be better for me than the open air, rough plain food, and plenty of exercise. Most of the coast of New South Wales was familiar to me from childhood, and on this occasion I wanted to revisit the district where so many happy years had been spent.

The South Sea trading firm by which I was employed gave me four months' leave, and the first week of my arrival in Sydney was spent in making preparations. First of all, the matter of funds had to be considered, and I reckoned that I could get all the outfit I wanted, and pay all my expenses (in case I had sometimes to put up at hotels), for less than £20.

Looking in the shipping advertisements in the *Herald*, I saw that a timber ketch was to sail for Camden Haven in a few days, and within an hour I had seen her skipper, who engaged to land me at or near Camden Haven, with all my belongings, for the modest sum of two pounds. This included my food as well. And I blush with shame, even after all these years, when I recall the fact that I was on board for eight days, and had an appetite like a

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starving shark. This was owing to the change of climate driving the poison fever out of my veins. However, the worthy mariner did not grumble, for during the trip of 150 miles I caught plenty of fish for the ship's company (five all told), and shot a great number of birds as well at several spots on the coast. Let me enumerate my belongings as they were placed on the deck of the ketch *Margaret*:— D. B. 16 bore, with ample supply of ammunition; a Winchester carbine for kangaroo, with 250 cartridges; a hatchet in leather case; heavy jack knife; half a dozen of the best fishing lines that could be bought for money, with ample supplies of hooks, sinkers, etc.; a small tent and fly (seldom used); tin billy can, knife, fork, spoon, etc.; and a canvas "hold all," fitted so as to carry a week's provisions—salt meat, biscuit or bread, tea, sugar, flour, etc. And then there were other small articles in the way of tools, etc., that every sailor man or bushman always find useful.

We left Market Street wharf early in the afternoon, and ran down to Sydney Heads within an hour, before a fine breeze, and then we stood away to the northward, running along at about three miles from the land to avoid the strong southerly current. The *Margaret* was a centre-board vessel, and a fine sailer, and her skipper, who was also owner, was very proud of his craft. He and the mate and most of the hands were Scandinavians—big, stalwart, sober and honest fellows, and fine sailor men. The cook was an eccentric genius, and one of the merriest rogues that ever went to sea. He was either laughing, talking,

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or singing all day, and much of the night, was a London cockney, and was full of whaling yarns and reminiscences—having made many cruises in Hobart Town whalers.

During the night the breeze died away, and at dawn we were becalmed off Barranjoey Point, at the entrance to Broken Bay, a spot noted for its schnapper fishing grounds. Finding that we were in a little over forty fathoms, I abstracted a piece of raw mutton from the galley, and quietly let my line down over the side. In a few minutes I was fast to a powerful fish, and presently a 12-lb. schnapper was kicking about on deck. Then the skipper and crew joined in, and we had an extraordinary run of luck. The schnapper (the most beautiful and valued of all the Australian deep-sea fishes) were all, or nearly all, of the same size and weight—10 lbs. to 13 lbs. For two hours we fished without cessation, then the ketch drifted into eighty fathoms, and we took fewer fish. Getting out the sweeps we brought the vessel back into shallower water, and were again remarkably successful, and by eleven o'clock had taken nearly five hundred of these magnificent fish. Just then a small fishing steamer came in sight from the other side of the point, and came up to us. Her skipper stared in astonishment when he saw our decks covered with our take, and told us that they had not taken a dozen schnapper since dawn. He and his crew at once began to fish quite near us, and then from some cause or another the school of schnapper cleared out, and neither he and his crew, nor we on

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the ketch, got another fish. The steamer poked about for half an hour, trying first one place, then another, but caught nothing but small sharks and predatory "leather-jackets." Then the steamer skipper asked us if we would sell him our take. We haggled a bit, but finally (keeping only a dozen for ourselves), we let him have all the rest at a shilling. This was quite a stroke of good luck, and we were all well satisfied with the order he gave us on his owners for £24—making £4 for each of us. Then the steamer hurried off to Sydney, and we shortly after were favoured by a light breeze.

On the following day we found ourselves again becalmed, and drifting in too close to the shore, so at supper we anchored about a mile from the beach to wait for a breeze. There were several other coasting vessels anchored near us, and we were all lying abreast of an extensive series of tidal swamps and lagoons, known as the Myall Lakes, which teem with fish and game in prodigious numbers. These sheets of landlocked water reach from Point Sugarloaf to Port Stephens—a distance of more than twenty miles. My imagination had been fired by the accounts I had heard of the glorious fishing and shooting to be had in "the Myalls," and so I went on shore to pick up what information I could with a view of spending a week there at some future time. The few settlers (who were not fishermen) were a rough but yet civil lot, and were hospitable enough. They and their wives and children were of the hue of old leather, from constant exposure to the sun, and

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the quantity of tea that they drank—hot and cold—was enormous. I had dinner with only one family—father, mother, two grown up sons and five young children. The repast consisted of a round of corned meat, weighing about 20 lbs., about the same weight of boiled potatoes, nearly as much pumpkin and cabbage, and enough home-made bread for a score of hungry men. Then followed a huge peach pie of the variety of fruit known as “Yellow Mondays”—and very good it was too. All this was washed down by copious draughts of strong tea, served in pint mugs without milk, but sweetened with dark reddish-coloured “ration” sugar. After the meal was over, the two sons took me around in the vicinity, and gave me much useful information about the shooting and fishing, and promised to lend me all the assistance I wanted if I paid the lakes a visit at some future time. The whole family, in fact, were most kind and hospitable, and I said good-bye to them with some regret. But I had to return, as the little fleet outside the lakes were hoisting sails—a light breeze now rippling the water.

Our next stop was at the little coast hamlet of Forster, under the lee of Cape Hawke, where we landed cargo. Here I had some splendid shooting in the scrub—pigeons and gill-birds abounding. The latter, which the settlers call “leather heads” are excellent eating, and were very fat. Finding I had shot more birds than I could carry, I gave half of them to a young woman, whom I met driving some cows. She was on horseback, and riding

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man-fashion. Thanking me for the birds, she asked me if I would care to have a bucketful of honey (from the native bee). A party of blacks, she said, had brought her husband a great quantity the previous day, and she was too busy to clean and strain it off. I accompanied her to her home—a rough, but clean and comfortable slab house with a bark roof. Here I had the inevitable drink of tea, and a meal of fine, nicely fried whiting, with damper and fresh-made butter. The husband was a saw-mill hand at Forster, and good-naturedly offered to carry the bucket of honeycomb down to the boat—over a mile distant. On our way through the bush the conversation turned on the aboriginals of the district (Cape Hawke), of whom there were less than a hundred left out of a once numerous tribe. They were a quiet, harmless lot of creatures, rapidly disappearing from the effects of disease and drink, and my informant spoke very bitterly of the fact of some of the settlers paying these unfortunate creatures for casual labour in vile and poisonous spirits. “Then,” he added, “some black fellow kills his lubra (wife) or another black in a fit of drunken rage, is tried for murder, and duly hanged with all solemnity in Maitland or Sydney Goal. No punishment is, or can be, meted out to the white scoundrels who sold or gave him the liquor.”

This man, who was a fine type of the Victorian (Australian) bushman, had had a startling experience with the wild blacks of Northern Queensland, when there as a lad of seventeen years of age. He was one

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of a small party, who were prospecting for cedar country. Early one morning he was left alone at the camp to cook for the rest of his comrades, and was engaged in cutting and sharpening some saplings for tent pegs, when a black fellow's spear struck him on the back as he was kneeling on the ground, tomahawk in one hand, peg in the other. The point of the spear came out on the other side, but the haft broke off a few inches from where the point had entered. Staggering to his feet the lad made a run for the river bank, calling out to his mates. Suddenly he was confronted by a second black fellow, who stood in the path, and threw his spear just as the boy hurled his tomahawk. The spear missed, but the boy's weapon struck the wild man full in the centre of the forehead, and killed him almost instantly. The first assailant escaped into the jungle.

Bidding farewell to my new acquaintance, I went on board with my honey and birds, and, after supper, turned in early, being tired out.

When I awoke at daylight, I found the *Margaret* close hauled under shortened canvas, beating against a stiff "northerly."

CHAPTER II

LIGHT winds alternating with calms attended us during the next few days, which, however, I passed pleasantly enough, for we hugged the land closely throughout, and whenever it fell calm I always had

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my deep sea fishing tackle to fall back upon, and always, or nearly always being on soundings, we never ran short of fish—fish of all sorts and sizes, from the lordly and brilliant-hued king schnapper, to jew fish, white and black rock-cod, and the big deep-sea flathead; the last is one of the best of all the many Australasian food fishes.

The Scandinavian captain and crew of the ketch were one of the best lot of men with whom I ever sailed—before or afterwards. Not only were they good sailor men, but cheerful, straightforward, sober and religious, and it was a relief to me to find myself among such quiet fellows after a year and six months in a South Sea Island trader, where hard swearing and coarse language were the general rule from the captain and officers down to the youngest man before the mast.

We crossed over the bar at Camden Haven towards the close of a beautiful day, as the sinking sun was changing the light and dark greens of the forest-clad ranges beyond the little port into a soft, harmonious mingling of blue and purple.

There was but one hotel—or rather bush public-house—in the place. I did not care to stay there for the night, wishing to remain quietly on board the ketch, although I sent the heavy portion of my gear on shore to the house of a man I had known since I was a boisterous, dirty-faced urchin in short pants. This man, however, formerly a pilot, but now retired, came on board to see me, and warmly pressed me to stay under his roof at least for one night. I gladly

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agreed, and we went on shore together. One reason for my not wishing to stay at the public-house was that I was sure many of its frequenters would recognise me, and that my arrival would be the excuse for a noisy night. For in years past my father had been the resident magistrate for the district, and my brothers and myself were all well remembered by the rough timber-getters and bushmen for a hundred miles along the coast, north and south, and inland far up the rivers, where the mighty trees were felled, sawn, and rafted down to the local ports. There had been times when my father, as resident magistrate, had been compelled to commit the fathers of some of these men—and some of themselves who were now grown up—to trial for cattle stealing, which at one time was rife in the district. And although he was a stern and just man, he was humane in every sense of the word, and many of the rough men were well aware of the fact that the dark-faced, black-bearded man, who, in cold, judicial language, briefly told a cattle-stealer that he “had no other course, according to the laws of the Colony, but to commit him to prison for trial at the next Quarter Sessions,” did so, wondering if the prisoner’s wife wanted a £10 note. And that £10 note, or its equivalent, reached the prisoner’s wife in due course, surreptitiously, of course, but mainly through my dear mother’s planning.

My host and I sat up late that night, talking and smoking and listening to the pleasant hum of the gently breaking surf upon the bar. Soon after

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daylight I had a bathe in the surf, and, as I was dressing on the beach, a brown-faced boy, who appeared to be about fourteen years of age, came up to me, and stared at me for a few moments in silence.

“Well?” I said interrogatively.

“Heerd you was here, and come to arsk yer if yer would like me to come along with yer campin’ out.”

“What is your name?”

“Jim Trollope.”

“Never heard the name about here in my time. Do you live here?”

“Yes. I works at the sawmills — when I gets work. Mother lives here. She told me that my old man knowed all you chaps when you was kids. He uster to work on Gwalior Cattle Station on the Hastin’s River for Major Cockburn.”

A light broke in upon me—I remembered the man at once.

“Where is he now?” I asked.

“Dead this seven year. Mother married ‘Socky’ Cole, the punt-man. He fell outer the punt and got drowned two year ago.”

I thought for a few moments. The boy, though unkempt and semi-savage in appearance, had a good open face, and so when he told me that he had had no work for some time, I said that he could come with me at so much per day for as long as I might want him. Then I went to see his mother. She was a hard-faced sun-baked creature, who earned her living by cooking and washing for some of the mill men and



"WELL?" I SAID, INTERROGATIVELY. "HEERD YOU WAS HEER, AND COME TO ARSK YER IF YER WOULD LIKE ME TO COME ALONG WITH YER CAMPIN' OUT.

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Jim Trollope and Myself

timber-getters who were single. She was very civil, told me that Jim would be "right enough" if I "give him a clout on the 'ead now and then when he don't move hisself smart," and thanked me when I gave her ten shillings on account of Jim's future earnings. The boy, she told me, was over sixteen, and a good bushman, and knew the coast well, up and down, "for thirty mile or more."

So, although I was in no way anxious for company, I "took on" young Jim, intending to let him fish, shoot and camp with me as long as I remained in the vicinity of his home. And when, an hour later, he came to help me put our traps together, it did me good to see his eyes light up as he handled my fishing tackle and guns with respect bordering upon reverence.

"Like those lines, Jim?"

"My word! I never seed anything like 'em afore. Crikey! They're beauties. An' them big hooks with a curve in the shank, an' eyed an' mounted on brass wire snoodin's. Wot's them for? They're too big for schnapper, an' most too big even for a six-foot jew fish. Are they for sharkin'?"

"Well, they will do for shark fishing, Jim, for they will hold a sixteen footer; but I intend to use them for big rock cod in deep water. Many years ago—when I was a youngster like you—I was out with the pilot boat's crew off Tacking Point, and we caught two; one was 140 lbs., and the other 190 lbs. Perhaps I may have a try about here some day."

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Jim nodded, said he had heard of these big rock-cod, but never seen one of any size.

Leaving the heavier part of my gear with the old ex-pilot until my return, the boy and I made a start; our destination was a spot some few miles to the northward, where right on the coast there was a "pocket" of thick scrub between two lines of rather lofty hills. The scrub ran inland for some distance, and then gave place to fairly open country with lagoons, where there was good shooting. On the shores of the little bay, bounded by the hills, and along the beaches there was fine fishing—"green-back" bream, whiting and trevally, and in the scrub, just above high-water, there was a good camping place, and fresh water could always be obtained by digging a few feet.

Before we left the little township, we went to the general store and bought a few articles which we thought might prove useful. Among these were a couple of tin dishes—one round, the other flat-bottomed. These I thought we might find of service for mixing our flour for making damper, etc. The storekeeper asked me if we were going to do a little prospecting on the "black sand" patches of beach between Camden Haven and Tacking Point.

"Prospecting for what?"

"Gold," he replied, and then to my surprise he told me that until quite recently there had been a number of men—most of them inexperienced—engaged in beach mining for a considerable distance along the coast, north and south. The gold was,

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however, very fine, and the layers of black sand in which it was found were difficult to work, on account of being full of stones of all sizes. Still, the man said, some few of the men had done fairly well, making from £2 to £3 per week over and above their expenses. One party of three experienced beach miners from New Zealand, who worked in a systematic manner, came across an unusually rich patch, and in two months won gold to the value of £300. Most of the other men, however, after some months' work, gradually dispersed in search of other and more profitable employment, and the industry had now almost come to an end, except in the case of a few isolated parties of men who were still working on the beaches between Point Plomer and the Tweed River, on the Queensland border.

All this was news to me, and I was much interested, for these deposits, or rather layers of heavy black sand, were very familiar to me ever since my childhood. After a further chat with the storekeeper, I bade him good morning, and we started, crossing to the north side of the harbour in the punt, and then taking our way along a track that ran sometimes through the scrub and sometimes along a series of low sand dunes just above high-water mark, every now and then coming in sight of the bright blue sea, sparkling and shimmering under the rays of the glorious sun.

It was a lovely day, and as we tramped along, now in the cool, shady scrub, now on the open sand dunes, and heard the cries of the many birds, the

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murmuring call of the gently-breaking surf upon the snow-white beach, and the soft rustle of the breeze among the tree tops, my heart rose high to the joy of it all, and I could pay but little attention to my companion's remarks concerning his experiences of wild duck shooting, bird trapping, snakes, etc., although on any other occasion he would have found me an intent listener.

The scrub on this part of the coast might more properly be called open jungle, and consisted mostly of lofty, mottled-bark wild apple trees, up the trunks of which clambered lianas, some of them as thick as a man's thigh; here and there, in the more open spots, would be a group of half a dozen cabbage tree or bangalow palms, and underneath was a thick carpet of dead leaves, pleasant to walk upon, and giving forth no sound except one trod on a twig or strip of bark. Every now and then we would disturb a black-coated scrub wallaby, which would bound away with quick leaps and disappear into hiding in deeper and safer recesses beyond. But they need have had no fear, for although my gun was on my shoulder I had no intention of committing useless slaughter, as we had quite enough food in our "swags" to last us for some days, and, besides that, our store would soon be added to when we reached our camping place.

Two hours' easy walk brought us out upon the top of the beach, where for two miles our way lay along a narrow, winding track, bordered on each side with the low, prickly leaved native white currant bushes,

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all in full bearing. As we passed along, we every now and then stopped to gather handfuls of the delicious berries, which, I may mention, are quite a distinct fruit from the other variety of native currant, which is a most graceful plant, and whose fruit is only used for making jam.

The tide was falling, and soon after passing through the "currant garden," as Jim called it, we were enabled to take to the beach, and, removing our boots, walk along the hard, wet sand. A light south-easterly breeze was rippling the surface of the ocean, upon whose surface were vast flocks of snowy-white gulls, and nearer to us, perched upon the summits of some isolated and jagged rocks, within gunshot of the beach, were numbers of long-necked, glossy-plumaged divers. Many of them were standing erect, with wings outspread, and heads turned seaward, "a-warmin' their chesteses," as Jimmy remarked. In front of us, as we walked, flocks of tiny sandpipers ran ahead with marvellous speed, only rising in flight when they thought we came too near.

As the tide ebbed, the surf, gentle as it was, fell also, and soon only the faintest swish of wavelets laved the margin of the beach, and in the crystal water we saw schools of whiting and bream swimming to and fro within a few yards of us. Had we cared to have done so, we could have caught dozens of them in a few minutes, for bait was to hand, or I should say, "to foot," for everywhere the variegated shells of thousands of pippies (cockles) were showing in the wet sand, and we felt them under our feet as

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we walked ; and pippies are about the best possible bait that can be used for the smaller varieties of Australian fish, such as bream, whiting, tarwhine and some species of mullet. But we cared not to stop just then. We were waiting till we reached our camping place, where we knew we should have a glorious afternoon's sport among the noble green-backed, silvery-sided sea bream.

CHAPTER III

WE made our camp at the head of the tiny bay, near a clump of golden wattle trees, just coming into bloom, but which, despite their perfume and beauty, are trees to be avoided when flowering, for their branches are infested with small, poisonous ticks, which have an unpleasant trick of burrowing through the human skin and setting up local blood poisoning, unless they are pulled out before they penetrate too deeply.

We had left the tent at Camden Haven, bringing only the fly. This we soon rigged up on some saplings, covered the ground with grass, and made the interior ready for sleeping, for sometimes the night dews were very heavy, and our camp was in a fairly open spot. Running through the valley scrub was the course of a tiny rivulet not more than a fathom wide. In the rainy season, and also in the winter months, it was a merry little brawling stream, but at

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present the bed was almost dry, although water was easily obtained by digging down a few feet ; so Jim and I at once made a small well and fixed up our water supply. Then we got our lines, and went down to the beach to fish.

Never was there a sweeter spot. Imagine a bay of, say, an acre in extent, the entrance to which, between its walls of smooth, flat-topped rock, was so narrow that a boat to enter it would have to do so with oars apeak. At the mouth the water was deep—six to eight fathoms, but yet so marvellously, gloriously clear that one could see the small stones, seaweed, etc., at the bottom, and watch the fish swimming to and fro. From the entrance to the rapidly-shelving beach of snow-white sand the water shallowed quickly, and only the faintest ripples lapped the margin when the ocean swell, broken by the wall of rock, came gently heaving through the narrow passage. Back from the curving half-moon of beach was a line of low undergrowth of vivid green, and, beyond that, the loftier vine-covered trees of the scrub, and in the far distance the forest-clad spurs and peaks of the coastal range.

Just as we were about to bait our lines, Jim cried out :

“Oh, I say, mister, look there,” and he pointed to the top of a lofty and almost isolated wild-apple tree standing on one of the spurs near the scrub.

Two noble fish eagles had just settled on the tree and composed themselves to rest, presenting a

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beautiful sight as they stood side by side with their heads turned seaward and their plumage glistening in the sun. They appeared quite oblivious of our presence, though we knew that in reality they were watching us keenly.

"Them fellers is the cunningest birds agoin'," remarked Jim with a grin; "if I was on'y jest to say 'gun' to you, they would be a mile away in five seconds. But they mean to see if we are going to leave any fish behind us here on the beach."

We cast our lines out together, and almost before the sinkers had touched the bottom Jim's hook was fast in the jaws of a four pounder sea-bream, and then a sudden tug, and the quick "sizz" of my own line told me that I had hooked a "blue fish." Both of these fishes are game fighters, especially the latter, but we soon had them kicking about on the sand, unhooked them, and then quickly covered them up with a heap of kelp, then in went our lines again, and in twenty minutes we had more fish than we wanted, and ceased useless slaughter, though the incentive to go on was very strong. Our take was six bream, three blue fish, and one "rock" flathead—the latter a delicious flat fish of the gurnard type—ugly to look at, but irreproachable in all other respects.

Half an hour later we had two bream and two blue fish cooking in a Polynesian-cum-Australian aboriginal fashion. I was chief cook, Jim my pupil.

First of all we gutted the fish, then washed them in sea water to remove the sand from the scales. Then, without scaling them, we wrapped each, from

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head to tail, in strips of pliable green bark, and laid them aside until our oven was hot enough.

That oven was simple enough, yet one of the best in the world for people who lead a rough life, and are content to eat with their fingers if they lack knives and forks (to say nothing of table napkins and liveried flunkies).

We scooped out a shallow hole in the soft, rich soil of the scrub, made a fire in it of dry drift-wood on top of which we piled clean, water-worn stones from the beach, and let them remain till they were at a white heat and had sunk to the bottom of the oven. Then we laid the fish on the stones, and covered them over as quickly as possible with layers and layers of green leaves; over the leaves we threw soil until the whole was completely covered, and no smoke issued.

In half an hour the fish were done. Meanwhile Jim had made our billy of tea, and arranged our tin mugs, ship biscuits, salt, etc., on a sheet of bark outside the fly.

“Ready, Jim?”

“Yes, boss.”

“Then come here, and let us open the oven.”

We scraped away the top covering of steaming, hot soil with forked branches of bangalow palm, lifted the leaves, and got to the fish, which in their dark-brown baked bark looked like Egyptian mummies, but smelt—ah, only those who have cooked fish or meat in this manner can understand!

We laid the bark-enwrapped beauties on a sheet

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of bark, undid their coverings, and then with our sheath knives removed the entire sheath of scales, and—

“My word, mister, they do smell good,” said Jim, as I brought the salt and biscuits, and we squatted down cross-legged to our supper in front of the fly, and just within sight of the beach.

* * * * *

By sunset it was nearly dead low tide, and my companion suggested that we should go out upon the rocks and get a crayfish or two, and cook them that night with the rest of the fish. This would give us two days' supply of cooked food, and as we intended to devote the following day to visiting a big swamp six miles inland, where we knew we should get some good shooting, I fell in with his suggestion.

Crayfish are easily caught on the Australian coast in the summer months, either by hook and line or by setting a bait for them in the deep pools among the rocks, and then diving for them. Some of them are of great size, and weigh up to twelve pounds, and they are so plentiful in some places that after stormy weather, and when a heavy surf has been beating upon the coast, the beaches will be strewn with hundreds upon hundreds of very small or half-grown ones, which, unable to withstand the force of the waves, have been disabled and washed on shore to become food for the sea-birds and iguanas—the latter coming down to the beaches at night time to feed on them.

Taking our lines and the half of a fish we started

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off, Jim leading the way to certain holes on the south side of the little bay, with which he was well acquainted. Four years had passed since my last visit to the place, and during that time the south headland of the bay had greatly changed in its appearance owing to a heavy landslip, which had dislodged some thousands of tons of soapstone rock—in fact, the entire sea face of the point had tumbled down, carrying with it some large and ancient and gnarled honeysuckle trees growing on the summit—trees that I had known since I was a child.

The night was bright with stars, the sea smooth, and the wind had died away as we made our way from the camp, first along the bank at high-water mark, and then down to the beach towards the point.

Presently my companion called my attention to the hard nature of the sand on which we were walking, and, stopping, stooped down and scraped up a handful which he showed me, remarking upon its weight.

“It is pretty thick, too,” he observed, “and must have been washed up in the big easterly gale last June, because it is so hard set and smooth. We ought to try a few dishes of it to-morrow, and see if it is any good.”

“All right, Jim, we will try it before breakfast to-morrow; come along.”

Reaching the “lobster” holes—Australians always call crayfish “lobsters”—we chose a fairly deep pool, the sides of which were draped with long kelp, and

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the bottom covered with white sand and small round stones—just the place for crayfish. Baiting our lines with a large junk of fish, we lowered them down, and in less than two minutes we saw the long feelers of several crayfish emerging from out the gently-swaying borders of kelp; then three big fellows swam boldly out and seized the baits. Beneath each baited hook we had fastened several that were unbaited, and, waiting until the big crustaceans had begun to feed, we each gave a sudden jerk. Jim's hook held, mine did not, and I again lowered, but in a few moments I was again fast, and we pulled up our prizes and turned them over on their backs, their great plated tails cracking and flapping in indignant surprise at the mean advantage we had taken.

Two were quite enough, so, winding up our lines and seizing our prizes by their "antlers," as Jim called them, we made our way back towards the camp.

Half-way there we heard a dog bark, and presently saw the animal coming towards us along the beach.

"That's Joe Moss's dog," said Jim, "an' Joe can't be fur away when you see his dog."

"Who is Joe Moss?"

"One of the coves that used to be beach-minin' round about Camden Haven. He an' another feller named Dick Tarby are mates, an' neither of 'em ain't no good. They does more loafin' than workin'; but sometimes they gets a job fellin' timber. Then they comes to the pub, and spends it on old

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Jordan's snake juice. Hallo!—well, I'm blest!—there they are, both of 'em, at the camp." And then the lad added, with quick intelligence: "Don't you say nothin' to 'em about this patch of black sand. Our tracks will be covered up at high tide, an' the charnces are they don't know nothin' about it. But I daresay they have sneaked after us to see if we are doin' any prospectin'."

On reaching the camp we found the two men seated on the ground near the tent, smoking. Their swags and some mining tools lay near by. Both bid us "good evening," civilly enough, and asked if we would give them some water to boil their billy, as they were going to camp near us for the night.

Of course we gave them the water and asked them to have some supper as well. This they ate, and then proceeded to try and "pump" us as to our future movements, evidently not believing that we were camping out for mere pleasure.

"Have you had a try at any of the black sand patches along the beach yet, mister?" asked Tarby, addressing himself to me, and looking at our prospecting dishes.

"No," I replied; "are you and your mate having a try at it?"

"Yes; if we come across any likely-looking places. I heard, mister, that you knew this part round about here quite well."

"Pretty well; but there was no beach mining in my time—even when I was last here four years ago."

After half an hour's chat we all turned in—the two

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strangers spreading their blankets a few yards away from the fly.

As I stretched myself out I said to Jim in a loud voice that we must make an early start if we wanted to get to Green Hills Rocks by eight in the morning.

Green Hills Rocks were eight miles further along the coast to the north.

“All right, boss,” replied Jim sleepily; “that’s the place fur bronzewings. My word! We orter get a rare lot of ’em now the Cape gooseberries is ripe, and at the back o’ Green Hills there’s a big patch of burned out country that orter be fair covered with gooseberry and native raspberry bushes by now.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS midnight there came a sudden change in the weather; the wind sprang up suddenly from the south-east, and with it came signs of rain, and ere long the surf began to thunder on the beach.

Jim awakened me.

“I say, boss, it’s goin’ ter rain hard as well as blow, an’ them two coves will be arskin’ to come in under the fly. Now, afore they does, I want to tell you that there will be a rousin’ big sea a-rollin’ in soon, and even at low tide at daylight that patch o’ black sand will be covered up with kelp an’ sea grass a washin’ up over it. An’ so I don’t think that these chaps would notice it, anyway, unless they hangs on here fur a day or two.”

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“Right, Jim. But we’ll shift from here, anyway, at daylight—rain or no rain—and these fellows won’t hang about here if the weather keeps bad. They have no tent, and as far as I can see, not much tucker.” Then I went to the front of the fly and called out: “Won’t you two chaps come in out of the rain?”

They came in quickly enough, for the rain now began to come down in sweeping sheets, and for the next two or three hours we sat up, talking and smoking and listening to the noise of the surf and the crashing of the branches of the trees about us. Fortunately our fly was well secured, and, furthermore, was of watertight American twill, so all four of us, and our belongings as well, remained dry. At daylight Jim and I began packing up our traps, then lit a fire with some dry drift-wood, to boil a billy of tea, and told our unwelcome visitors that we were making an early start for Green Hills Rocks. The rain, I observed, had ceased, the wind had dried the fly, and Jim and I were making preparations to be off at once. The two loafers grunted a sullen acquiescence, and said that if I did not mind they would come along with us, although—and here Tarby made some very forcible remarks on the violence of the wind, and the low-down practices of Nature generally to prevent honest people from earning a decent living by hard toil. He certainly was an amusing ruffian in some respects, and, had he been able to divest his language of its luridity, would have been interesting as well.

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Well, all started off soon after sunrise, taking sometimes to the beach where it was hard and free of obstructions, such as piles of kelp, etc., and sometimes to the narrow track (made by cattle from a station in the vicinity) running along the coast line, over the sand dunes, and through the scrub.

Two miles from Green Hills Rocks we came across a patch of hard black sand. It was literally a "pocket" in mining parlance, for it lay between, or rather was encompassed by, a number of jagged, creeper-covered reddish-coloured rocks, and the action of the surf had formed layers of gold-bearing sand some eight to ten inches thick, two yards or so in width, and about fifty or sixty feet in length. Tarby and his mate at once panned off a dish of the sand, using sea-water, and from the two dishes obtained quite half a pennyweight. This was, as he and his mate said, "good enough" for them; for if the rest of the sand gave a like result, the two men could get about two ounces per week between them, and they estimated that it would take them three or four weeks to work the patch out.

Moss, who was an undersized, foxy-faced creature, with furtive, shifty eyes, now indicated by his manner that he and his mate no longer desired our company, and that they would be pleased to see us move on. This annoyed us very much, and I observed that, if Jim and I were inclined to work the patch, we had as much right to do so as they had. But, I added, we had come out for other purposes, and he and his mate could eat the

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sand if they wished. Tarby merely laughed, and said we need not "get our monkeys up." Then Moss had the impertinence to ask me if I would give them a few days' tucker. This request met with an emphatic and pointed refusal, and Tarby growled out to him something about his having "too much bloomin' cheek." And as Tarby had helped to carry our fly part of the way, I relented, and gave them a little tea, sugar, and flour, and half a pound of tobacco, for which Tarby offered to pay me, Moss not even giving me a "thank you."

Bidding Tarby good-day, but ignoring Moss, Jim and I started off along the beach, and proceeded for a mile or so until we rounded a rocky headland. Here, under a projecting shelf of cliff, which sheltered us from the violence of the wind, we consulted as to our future movements, and decided to strike into the scrub for at least a mile, then head back for our former camp and guard the patch of black sand we had discovered, even if we could not work it for the present. For we had no shovel, nor any timber to make a dolly and cradle, and even if we had we should run the risk of being discovered by someone before we had been many days at work; and as the Government did not require licences to be taken out by beach miners, any party stronger than ourselves could oust us.

Then a happy inspiration came to Jim. He proposed that as soon as we reached our former camp we should set to work with our dishes, and carry the sand up into the scrub, dump it down in a safe

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spot on the bank of the little rivulet, where we should be safe from observation, and pan it off dish by dish, and give up the idea of a dolly and cradle altogether. It was an excellent idea, and we acted upon it, for, after a hurried meal, we started off, struck inland, and in three hours were back at the camp. Our first step was to set up our fly in a deep little gully, about five hundred yards from the beach, and within a few yards of the little stream. Then as a spell of rainy weather seemed imminent, we collected a lot of dry wood, covered it up, and made the camp quite comfortable. Hardly had this been done when rain began to fall, and by three in the afternoon it was coming down in a steady torrent; but, fortunately, the wind had now moderated from a gale to a stiff breeze, and this enabled us to go to the beach and fish for an hour in a sheltered position from under the lee of the soapstone landslip. We caught all we wanted for a two days' supply, and also picked up a number of young crayfish on the beach; they had been washed on shore during the night, and were quite fresh—some being still alive.

We had brought one of our tin dishes with us, and on our way back examined the patch of black sand, now thickly covered with kelp, sea-grass, drift-wood, and other *débris*. Removing some of this, we filled the dish to the brim with the heavy sand, and carried it back to the camp; and drenched through as we were, we were so excited that we must needs pan it off there and then, using the water from the now rapidly-running rivulet. The result was nearly two

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pennyweights of fine gold. This was quite satisfactory; in fact, a pennyweight to the dish would have paid us well.

“Jim,” I said, “we must work like niggers to get all that wash-sand away from the beach as quietly and as quickly as possible. And we shall run no risks—we must do it by night. Someone might come along during the day and see us, and then the fat would be in the fire. As for Moss and Tarby, they are safe enough for some weeks, unless, as is quite likely, one of them comes along here on his way to Camden Haven to buy ‘tucker.’”

Jim nodded. “Yes, and if he did, and it was low tide, he might get a sight of the patch by just looking down from the track along the top of the beach. And that beast of a half-bred dingo cattle-dog of Moss’s would nose out our camp in no time.”

We returned to the fly to change our soddened clothes, get something to eat, and discuss as to what we should do still further to prevent any chance of our being discovered by any passing traveller. Jim, as usual, suggested the most practical thing. This was to remove our camp a further two miles up the gully, in the densest part of the scrub, where the smoke of a fire would not be likely to be noticed, or if noticed, no one would make his way up from the beach to see the cause of it. In the scrub itself there was plenty of game—black wallaby, paddy-melons, and pigeons, and we could also catch plenty of fish in a tidal lagoon known as Cattai Creek, some five miles along the coast, and not far from the spot

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where Tarby and Moss were then working. At nightfall, however, we would return to our find, and work at the patch of sand until we had removed it all, piled it in a safe place near the little rivulet, and then could pan it off at our leisure. We lost no time in making the change of camp for the third time, and, heavily laden with our gear and the soddened fly, ploughed our way through the steaming rain-soaked scrub till we came to a suitable spot. It was in a deep, heavily timbered gully, and we were glad to find several small, but permanent, waterholes among some rocks at the top of the gully. Clearing away some of the undergrowth, we again set up our fly, boiled a billy of tea, and then I set to work on my mackintosh with my palm and needle, and out of it made two bags to use for carrying the sand, and Jim made two serviceable shovels by stripping off pieces of gum-tree bark, and planing them down to the required thinness with a clasp knife.

We "lazed" away the rest of the afternoon till an hour before sunset, and then made our way to the little bay, and at once tackled the sand. The rain was still falling, but the night was fairly clear, and we toiled away, digging up the wash-sand, filling the bags, and, with light hearts, carried the heavy loads up the steep bank to the place where we intended to wash it off. We worked throughout the night, only ceasing now and then to refresh ourselves with the inevitable drink of hot tea. That night we succeeded in stripping off the greater part of the upper (landward) side of the patch, filled in the depression with

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kelp and other *débris*, and watched the incoming tide swash it to and fro. At seven in the morning we were back in camp and sound asleep, and when we awoke the sun was pretty high overhead, though obscured by the still falling rain.

Just as we were talking about our movements for the day, a fine big scrub wallaby came leaping down the side of the gully towards us, quite oblivious of danger, and Jim, seizing my gun, bowled him over stone dead. He was as fat as a pig, and we had his carcass cleaned and hung up under a bough within quarter of an hour.

As we did not care to remain idle in camp for the rest of the day, we decided to go and see how our two "friends" were faring. So taking the gun, my "hold all," and our fishing lines, we struck through the scrub, and a couple of hours later were talking to Tarby, who was alone. Moss, he told us, had gone off at daylight to the camp of some men who were erecting a lighthouse at Tacking Point, to see if he could buy some meat, flour, tea, etc., from them.

"How are you doin', Mr. Tarby?" asked Jim.

"Pretty well. We ought to get about half an ounce a day, but there is an awful lot o' stones in the sand, which hinders us a lot. Are you camped at Green Hills Rocks?"

"No," replied Jim, most truthfully; "we can't do much fishin' in weather like this on the beaches. But we are going to do a couple o' hours' fishin' in Cattai Creek this afternoon."

Tarby and his mate had no tent, but they had

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made a rough "breakwind" of some sheets of bark under the lee of a honeysuckle scrub, and Tarby showed us the ten or fifteen pennyweight of gold that they had washed out. After a few minutes' chat we left him, and made our way along the beach to the mouth of Cattai Creek—a place very dear to me from old associations of my boyhood.

Here we caught a couple of dozen of noble whiting—big fellows of over $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs., packed them in the "hold all," and started off on our way back. Luck attended us that afternoon, for, as we were passing along a narrow cattle track which led through the scrub above high-water mark, we came across a pile of rusty ironwork, parts of sugar mill machinery, boiler plates, etc., and amongst it were several coils of fencing wire—then quite a novelty in the Australian colonies.

This collection had been part of the cargo of a Sydney steamer named the *Prince of Wales*, which, a year previously, on a voyage from Sydney to Brisbane (Queensland) had run ashore near by. Most of her cargo, which was of a general character, had been landed, and, I regret to say, been stolen by the settlers of my native district.

Jim at once noticed the fencing wire.

"That's the stuff for us, mister. We can make a good raddle out of it, and get rid of the stones in the wash-dirt afore we pans it off."

We set to work and unwound about ten fathoms of the rusted wire, broke it off, and went on our way jubilant.

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All that night we worked again at the golden patch of sand; and when dawn came, laid ourselves down to sleep with a feeling of intense satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

NIGHT after night we stuck to the work of carrying up the wash-sand, beginning at dusk and leaving off at dawn. On the tenth day we had finished, and the stuff was ready for washing-off. We had already raddled it free of stones, working at the heap an hour or so every day in the afternoons; this we could do without fear of being seen by anyone from the beach, as we were hidden by the scrub. Still our tracks might have been observed, and this gave us continual anxiety. So far, however, we had not seen a single person except Tarby and Moss. We were many miles from the main bush road, and travellers were few and far between along the actual coast line. Our main object was to finish the carrying up of the last bagful of the precious sand—once that was done we did not mind who saw us or even came and watched us washing-off—possession of the sand was everything. From time to time we had panned off a few trial dishfuls, and in all cases obtained nearly a pennyweight per dish—sometimes over a pennyweight.

For some days the weather had been beautifully fine, although rather too hot during the greater part of the day. Jim and I had paid a visit to the contractors' camp at the new lighthouse and bought a

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few articles from the overseer, such as flour, coarse salt, etc. The latter we wanted for our fish and meat, for the hot weather turned both very rapidly, and it was not convenient for us to go out every day fishing and shooting; nor did we care to visit the nearest township—twelve miles distant—to make any purchases. For there I was well known, and had many old acquaintances whose hospitality it would be difficult to avoid without giving offence.

And Jim and I were perfectly happy. We had all we wanted to eat and drink, we were doing honest work, and there was every prospect of our making quite a respectable sum of money by our toil, which in itself was both interesting and fascinating. Our appetites were marvellous, and our food, though simply cooked, was of a varied character—game (“squatter” and bronzewing pigeons, golden plover, gill birds), fish, rock oysters, and crayfish. The oysters were really delicious, and were so abundant that we could have filled a three-bushel bag with them in an hour; and as for crayfish, we could catch all we wanted at any time of the day or night.

I must mention that about a week after we had begun operations I had thought it advisable for Jim to go and see his mother in case she was feeling anxious about him, and, as I was sure she was a discreet woman, I told him that he could let her know what we were doing, and that we should not be finished for another fortnight; also that he and I were “full mates,” and would share equally whatever gold we won.

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I also gave him a note to my old friend the ex-pilot, asking him to send me some few articles I required, among which was my Winchester. He started off early in the morning and was back by sunset, carrying quite a load, amongst other things being an enormous loaf of soda bread which his mother had made, several pounds of butter, and a round of fresh beef. That evening we had a special supper, and hardly felt fit for much work. However, we went at it as usual and did fairly well.

Jim told me that his mother had specially warned him against Tarby and Moss, and advised him to put an end to the latter's half-bred dingo—if he got a chance. If Moss should happen to come to Camden Haven by way of the beach, the dog, she said, was sure to scent the camp, and we might be sorry for it, as Moss was “a thunderin' sneak, and a thief as well.”

At last came the day when we finished carrying up the sand, and were ready to wash-off. First of all, though, we brought the fly back to where we were to work, made the camp comfortable, and turned in early so as to have a good night's rest.

Soon after daylight we rose to go for a swim in the sea, and just as we were descending the bank, caught sight of a man walking along the beach, and coming towards us. We recognised him at once—it was Moss, accompanied by his dog. We at once planted behind some wild currant bushes and watched him, and presently, to our satisfaction, saw him turn off and go up over the bank.

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“He’s taking the old cattle track, leadin’ up along the foot of the spurs,” observed Jim, “and so won’t come within more’n half a mile of us. It is a short cut for him, and saves three miles. But we had better wait a bit to make certain.”

We returned to the camp and waited for an hour, and then feeling sure that all was safe and that Moss was probably quite three miles away from us, were about to go for our bathe, when Jim clutched my arm.

“Someone or something is comin’,” he whispered. “Yes, it’s Moss’s dingo. Look, there he is—he’s going for the beef bag.”

Our beef was suspended from the branch of a big and shady mimosa tree, about fifty yards from the camp. The meat was in a calico bag to prevent it from being spoilt by the blow-flies, and also to be out of reach of iguanas or native dogs.

The dog owned by Mr. Moss trotted out from the scrub and made directly for the tree, under which he stopped and eyed the bag for a moment or two. Then he made a noble spring and set his teeth in the meat shaking it savagely to and fro, trying to tear it out of the bag, although he was swaying about in the air.

I motioned to Jim to hand me the Winchester, which was just inside the fly.

“Don’t miss him,” whispered Jim.

The Winchester cracked, and the animal dropped without a sound, and began rolling about in the sandy soil. Jim rushed up to it, and gave it a blow on the

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head with a piece of wood, and then lifting it up, dropped it into a thick clump of currant bushes.

“Dead as a door nail,” said my companion, as he hurried back to the fly and sat down beside me. “He must have come acrost our tracks near the old camp, and followed them down. Let us keep quiet awhile, although I don’t think we’ll see anythink of Moss. An’ anyway, if he was within cooey of us, he couldn’t have heard that little crack of the rifle—there’s too much wind among the trees, as well as the noise of the surf.”

After waiting some time we left the fly, took the defunct animal, and buried it deep in the sand, and then had a glorious bathe in the breakers, in a spot safe from that terror of the Australian coast—the dreaded “grey nurse” shark, which is very partial to cruising about in the surf close in shore, when the water is not too shallow. Jim, I must mention, was a great shark catcher, and also a sworn enemy to snakes, and had had many experiences with both. Some of his adventures I shall relate in the course of this narrative.

After a hearty breakfast we turned to at the heap of wash-dirt, and worked without cessation till long past noon; then, after the usual billy of tea and some cold beef and Mrs. Trollope’s soda bread, we again resumed what was to us a labour of love. The result was about five-and-twenty pennyweights of fine floury gold, beautifully bright, and free from foreign matter. Some of it was so fine that it would adhere to the finger tips even when the skin was not moist. That

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we lost a good deal in the washing-off process was certain—owing to its fineness—and I wished that we had a few pounds' weight of quicksilver to use for amalgamation purposes, and also better appliances for washing-off. Still, the first day's result was most satisfactory to us both, for the gold was of a high quality, and would bring top price.

Day after day found us at the rapidly diminishing heap of wash-dirt. We began at daylight, and worked until nearly four o'clock. Then we dried the gold we had won by putting it on a tin plate, and holding it over some hot coals, then carefully scraped it out into a tin pepper pot—our gold safe. About an ounce per day was our average, especially if the weather was dry and warm, with no wind. If it rained, or there was much wind, our takings would not amount to more than ten pennyweights (half an ounce).

So far not a soul had come near us, but, as we were panning off the last twenty dishes of the heap, we had a visitor.

He was one of the head stockmen employed on a local cattle station some thirty miles along the coast (in the Hastings River district), and when I saw him riding along the hard beach sand I felt sure that he was a man whom I had known well years before, in fact, when we were both lads, and whom I had last seen four years previously, when he was a newly-joined trooper in the New South Wales Mounted Police. The rigid discipline of the force had, however, proved too much for a young fellow of his

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temperament, and so, after a year's service, he had resigned his smart uniform, with the heavy cavalry sabre, carbine, and other military trappings, and gone back to his mother bed of the bush as a stockman. And Nature had intended Gilbert Ross to be a lover of herself, and of all her beautiful gifts of birds and beasts—and never to be a mere police trooper, with carbine in its becket, and useless, jangling sword banging against his charger's anatomy.

And Gilbert Ross was, I have said, an old comrade of my boyhood's days, and as he came trotting along the hard sand of that lonely beach, looking for stray cattle, my heart warmed to him, and running out to the top of the sand bank, I waved my hands and gave a loud "Coo-e-e!"

As we grasped each other's hands in silence, I think that all our happy boyhood's memories flashed across our minds, and I daresay that our eyes filled. Then we "bucked up," and talked of all that had happened to both of us since we had last met. He was much interested in our beach mining, came to the camp with us, and helped us pan off the last of the stuff. We estimated that we had in all about fifteen ounces, which would be worth over £56.

Ross was much impressed.

"It was a very rich patch," he remarked; "one of the best, I suppose, that was ever found in this part, although I know of a party of four, who were working the beaches near the Bellinger River, getting two ounces a day for over a month. Hang me if I don't sling my billet and have another try at mining

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again, but not on the beach. I know of some very likely country at the head of the Hastings, and got several good prospects in some of the gullies there."

"Ross," I said, "let Jim and me join you. To tell you the exact truth, I do not care much if I break my four months' leave, and my employers invest me with the Noble Order of the Sack. I am sick of island trading and supercarguing, and mining has always had a strong fascination for me."

We talked the matter over thoroughly, and when Ross bade us good-bye it was with the understanding that we were to meet at the town of Kempsey—seventy miles distant—that day fortnight. Ross was to give the owner of the station a week's notice, and join us, with three saddle-horses and a pack-horse. At Kempsey we were to take out our miners' rights (10s. each), buy stores, etc., and then make our way to the headwaters of the Hastings River, and thoroughly prospect the country of which he had spoken. Ross's worldly wealth amounted to about £70, but then he had half a dozen horses—two of these he would sell, and keep the four best. We estimated that we could buy two extra saddles, and a saddle and bags for £10; I had my own tent and fly; the tools, powder and fuse, etc., would run into another £5, and then, of course, there were the provisions. But we hoped to live largely on game.

That night Jim Trollope and I—as he expressed it—"gassed like two wimmen."

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CHAPTER VI

WE broke camp on the following morning, packed our belongings into as small a compass as possible, and left them under some sheets of bark (in case it rained), and started off for Camden Haven, as I wanted to make arrangements for the rest of my gear with my old friend the ex-pilot, see Jim's mother and obtain her consent to his joining Ross and me ; and write some letters for Sydney, to go by the overland mail, *viâ* Newcastle. Then I intended to return to our abandoned camp, get our swags and set off for Kempsey by way of Cattai Creek, Lake Innes, and the mail-coach road. I thought it very likely that I should be able to buy a pack-horse at Camden Haven to carry the tent, fly, and such provisions as would last us to Kempsey.

On reaching Camden Haven, we found Mrs. Trollope busily engaged in washing. Drying her hands, she shook hands with me, gave her son something between a kiss and a bite, and asked me if he had "been goin' straight."

"Straight as a die, Mrs. Trollope ; works well, and makes a good mate for me. And I want you to let him come with me for perhaps a couple of months longer. We have got over £50 worth of gold, and Jim takes half. I am going to sell it to the Bank of New South Wales at Kempsey, or else send it to the Sydney Mint. Shall I give Jim's share to you or to him ?"

"You put it in the bank for him, if you please

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Perhaps you might let him have two or three pounds for himself to get some new clothes."

"But how are you off for ready money yourself, Mrs. Trollope?"

"I've got £17 odd in the house at this moment. And I don't want nothin' from nobody; but if I did, I wouldn't mind a-arskin' you for it. For I knowed your mother, and your father too, and you hasn't got your father's hard face and his cold way of speakin' to us folks as is Dissenters."

I laughed.

"My father had a 'hard face,' as you say, Mrs. Trollope; but I think he had a kind heart, even as a magistrate."

Mrs. Trollope came over to me, and passed her toil-worn hands through my hair.

"Yes, he had a kind heart, and was always ready with his money when poor folks were in trouble; but——"

"But what, Mrs. Trollope?"

"Well, just this—he hadn't your mother's love and pity for them as was distressed and in trouble. He would give his money—an' your mother giv' suthin' more than money. She giv' us love, an' come an' helped us—or leastways she sent her servants to us. Ah! she was a good woman, and didn't care a blue cuss whether folks was Church of England, or Methodies or Baptisties, or anything. All she wanted was to see people happy. Your father was a man as lots of people had a high respect for, but I, an' a lot more, never liked him."

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“ Why, Mrs. Trollope ? ”

“ “ Cos he was too thick with Canon Ffrench, and if ever there was a man as I hated like pizon it was him—he looked on us dissentin’ folks as if we were no better than so many mangy dingoes or bush rats, and took a pleasure in showin’ it.”

“ He had few friends, I know, Mrs. Trollope. All of our family except my father disliked him intensely ; as a boy I both hated and dreaded him, and my mother, as I daresay you know, made no secret of her dislike to him as a clergyman.”

The woman nodded and dropped the subject, and after a little further chat, I bade her good-bye, went and saw my old ex-pilot friend, and packed up the rest of my belongings. Whilst Jim and I were engaged in doing this, a black fellow named Tobias came along and lent us a hand. He told us that he was one of a party of half a dozen aboriginals who were camped at Lake Innes, and that he had come to Camden Haven to buy tobacco and flour. I offered him a few shillings to help us carry our traps and lead the pack-horse—if I could buy one. He at once agreed, and Jim and I then visited the various settlers in search of an animal, but no one would sell us one. However, one good-natured man offered to lend me one for 30s., if we would promise to send it back by Tobias. This we agreed to do, and shortly after we were under way.

After picking up the rest of our gear at our last camp, we ended a good day’s march by bringing up at the mouth of Cattai Creek, or rather lagoon, where we were to stay for the night. As the sun

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set the scene was a very beautiful one—the shallow, reed-margined lagoon was shining like a plate of burnished silver, and fish were leaping about all over its surface, whilst on the opposite side to where we fixed our camp, a flock of black swans were sailing gracefully about. The entrance to the lagoon, which at some times of the year (during a dry season) is completely closed by a wide sandbank, was now well open, owing to the late rains, and the flood tide was pouring in through the passage at a great rate, bringing with it swarms of fine sea-mullet, and Tobias soon speared a number of them for our supper—every time he threw his slender spear transfixing two or three.

Our camp was fixed near a clump of golden wattle trees, midway between the ocean beach and the lagoon, and the night was so intensely starlight that Jim and I could not get to sleep till past midnight—tired as we were with our day's march. Our sable companion was in his glory. After eating three large mullet, and a piece of damper large enough to satisfy three white men, he borrowed my gun and went off after opossums. He shot two, roasted them on the coals, and finished one right off, leaving the other, as we thought, for his breakfast. But towards daylight, when I awoke, I saw him engaged on the second, and by the way he ate at breakfast, one would have thought that he had eaten nothing for at least a couple of days.

Making an early start we reached Lake Innes and its long-abandoned and ruined homestead by noon.

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Lake Innes and its district had been the property of a retired military man—Major Innes—and the house he had built had once been, in the old colonial days, one of the finest in the colony, or indeed anywhere in Australia. He had been given the land as a Crown grant, and had expended a fortune upon it. The labour of building the great house, clearing the bush, and laying out extensive orchards, vineyards and gardens, had been performed by over a hundred of his “assigned” convict servants, whom he treated in a humane and merciful manner. In the course of a few years “Lake Innes” became one of the most beautiful and valuable estates in the colony, and its wine, fruit and cattle were famous; and I well remember being told that when Governor Gipps came from Sydney to visit the estate, the major “turned out seventy mounted men (convict servants) to meet him on the road.”

Alas! the glories of “the Lake” did not last very many years. Financial misfortunes overtook the old Peninsular soldier, and the estate fell into the hands of one of the Sydney banks, which failed to make it pay; the beautiful pictures and the works of art brought from Europe had been sold when their owner came to grief, the great house was left to caretakers, the once fruitful orchards, vineyards and gardens were steadily encroached upon by the ever-growing scrub, the surrounding settlers cut out and stole the painted-glass windows, and carried away the carved doors, and ripped up the polished floors; the deadly black and brown snakes basked in the sun on

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the wide verandahs, and the opossums and iguanas wandered at night time through the lofty and deserted rooms, that were once filled with gaily dressed men and women, and had echoed to the sound of merry music and dancing. And, in and about through the broken windows and the gaping doorways, there crept insidiously what was to prove the final curse to the whole estate—the slender shoots of the lantana plant. Years before the major had brought out from England two small pot plants of the shrub. He had obtained them when he was serving in Portugal, and was pleased with the gay white and pink flowers, and the clustering berries, ranging in hue from pale green to red, and then to jetty black. He planted them at Lake Innes to form a border. They grew and throve amazingly under the hot Australian sun, and the birds carried the seeds broadcast, not only about the district, but throughout the coastal part of the colony generally, until in time hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of acres of land became overrun and rendered valueless by an ineradicable pest, that suffered naught else but itself to grow. And now after fifty years of its evil life it had destroyed the once rich lands of the estate, and overgrown all but a few hundred acres of non-receptive soil and the mighty gum trees, which the old soldier had left unfelled to tower above the surrounding jungle and scrub in lordly contempt of the wretched foreign interloper that had destroyed their lesser brethren of the wild Australian bush.

The party of blacks to which our friend Tobias

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belonged were camped a mile or so from the old house, and soon paid us a visit, accompanied by a score of mangy curs. We got rid of them by giving them some tobacco, in return for which they offered us several pounds of wild honey (full of dead bees) tied up in a sheet of bark; this we declined with thanks.

We made our supper that evening of grilled pigeons, and instead of hot tea drank copiously of deliciously cold water from the long-disused homestead well, which we obtained by lowering a billy can into the water by a fishing-line.

Just as we were getting ready to start on the following morning, we saw a horseman coming along the track. Both man and horse were dead beat, and we had to assist the former from the saddle. Almost unable to speak, he asked us for water. This we quickly gave him, and then attended to the poor horse, who drank can- after can-ful as quickly as we could fill it. The traveller was a bush missionary, and, after we had given him something to eat and some hot tea, he told us that he had wandered off the main track in search of water; he failed to find any, and then lost his way. That night he suffered greatly from thirst, and had camped in a lantana thicket only two miles away, quite unaware that he was so near water. He was quite an old man, nearly seventy years of age, and yet as simple as a child, and his worn-out and exhausted appearance filled us with pity. But he had a plucky heart, and made light of his misadventure, observing that he was used to

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such mishaps, and that it was his own fault—he was such a poor bushman. Yet this old fellow annually travelled some thousands of miles through the loneliest and least settled parts of Queensland and New South Wales, often sleeping out at nights, often hungry, and penniless as well, yet always bright and hopeful, and doing all in his power to minister to the spiritual wants of isolated settlers in the lonely bush. Although I had never seen him before, I had often heard him spoken of, even when I was a child. His shabby garments, and the awful parodies of horses on which the brave old gentleman made his long journeys, were the cause of many a joke, but even the roughest and hardest-swearing bullock driver had a kindly feeling for “poor old Dicky Coll, the parson”—they made fun of him and his woebegone “crock,” but respected him, nevertheless, as a good, earnest, and self-sacrificing man. “He’s a good sort,” was their verdict.

We delayed our start for several hours in order that Coll might have some rest, as we wanted to put him on the right track for his destination—a little township on the Manning River, to the south of Camden Haven. He travelled with us for ten miles, and before we parted we filled his almost empty saddlebags with provisions—beef, damper, tea and sugar. Although he did not smoke himself—he admitted that he wished he had learned to do so, as he was sure that “it must be a wonderful comfort in the bush”—he gladly took some sticks of twist tobacco, to give to any wandering aborigines he

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might meet. "Poor creatures!" he said; "they love tobacco, and it does them no harm, like spirits. Good-bye, and God bless and protect you."

A few days later Gilbert Ross told me a story about this quiet old bush missionary that will illustrate the character and courage of the man. About ten years previously Coll was travelling in Central Queensland, when he came across a party of six diggers, *en route* to a newly-discovered goldfield. It was in the middle of summer, water was scarce everywhere, and when Coll joined them they were pressing forward to reach certain waterholes, where they intended to camp for a few days. On reaching the spot they found the waterholes were dry, and filled with the dead bodies of a number of cattle which had died of thirst. Forty miles further on were other waterholes situated on a sheep station, and so the wearied men and horses started off again, under the blazing sun, and suffering from the agonies of thirst. It took them four-and-twenty hours to get within sight of the place, and by this time two of the men were delirious. As they drew near they saw that the shepherds' hut was abandoned, and nailed on the door was a written notice. It said that the waterholes (which were enclosed by a three-railed fence) had been poisoned by the owner of the station in order to destroy the native dogs, and warned travellers against drinking from them. Maddened with thirst, the poor men gazed at the beautiful clear water with agonised eyes. To drink it meant death. And the next water was at the head station itself—twenty miles further on, and to get

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there was impossible. The leader of the party drew his revolver, and was about to shoot one of the horses so that they might drink its blood, when Old Coll stayed his hand.

"Wait," he said; "if that water has been poisoned, how is it that we do not see any dead dingoes or birds about? I do not believe that it is poisoned."

"Are you game to try and see?" asked the leader.

"I am," replied the old man quietly. "I shall take a long drink, and if I die it does not matter. I am an old man, and my work is near to an end. I have no one in this world depending upon me. Most of you are married men with families. It is my belief that Mr. Douglas" (the owner of the sheep station) "has had this notice put up simply to prevent people travelling with cattle or sheep from giving their stock water. He is a hard man."

He went to the waterholes and drank copiously again and again. And when at the end of ten minutes he seemed none the worse for it, the rest of the party crawled down and drank also.

Old Coll's surmise was correct. The water had not been poisoned, and the notice had been put up by the selfish owner of the station to prevent his waterholes being depleted by travelling stock.

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CHAPTER VII

A FEW days later Jim and I reached Kempsey, and put up at a quiet and inexpensive place to await the arrival of Gilbert Ross. The first thing we did was to call at the office of the local stipendiary magistrate, and take out three "miners' rights"—for Ross, Jim, and myself. The magistrates' clerk was a very supercilious young man, and when I asked for three "miners' rights" I saw at once that he had never before been asked for such permits. Kempsey was not a mining district, and the application for a "miner's right" was something beyond his conception. He was a most elaborately dressed person, with a beautiful curling moustache, and when he told me that it was not "just then convenient" for him to issue "miners' rights," as he could not place his hand on the book containing the forms, I galvanised him into life and civility by a few words.

"This is a mining registrar's office. I have come here for three 'miners' rights.' If you cannot furnish me with the documents I shall telegraph to the Minister for Mines at Sydney, and report that there is no competent person here to issue them."

Jimmy Trollope grinned as the glorified young man, with an exceedingly red face, rose from his seat, went to a press and found a new (and unused) book of forms. I showed him how to fill in each one, and then asking him if he had authority to sign as

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deputy mining registrar. "He really did not know," he admitted.

"Oh, well, where is Captain Cromer?" (the local stipendiary magistrate and mining registrar). "I want these 'miners' rights' without delay. Not at the office to-day? Then you had best take them to him for his signature, or off goes my telegram to the Minister."

The young gentleman glared at us both for a moment or two in speechless indignation. We were such a roughly-dressed, travel-stained, dirty-looking pair of ordinary swagmen that he could not conceive how I should address him—a Government official—in such a manner. But the threat about the telegram had its effect.

"Very well," he said haughtily; "I daresay that Captain Cromer will settle your business—or send you about your business—very quickly."

As luck would have it, at that very moment old Captain Cromer happened to be passing down the dusty street, and Jim caught sight of him. He was an old friend, and a long associated brother magistrate of my own father, and I had known him from my pinafore days. Hot-tempered, autocratic, and dogmatic, he was at heart a good old fellow. He was only acting temporarily at Kempsey during the leave of the resident magistrate. When I bellowed out to him across the street, he turned, glared savagely at me under his bushy white eyebrows, and at first did not recognise me. When he did, he greeted me most warmly, and asked me

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to lunch—much to the surprise of his dandified clerk.

“I suppose you have given up the sea, then?” he asked, as we walked down the street together.

“Oh, no, but I have four months’ leave, and perhaps may take the liberty of extending it to six, or more”; then I told him of my plans.

“Well, I wish you and your mates all good luck. I will let you have the ‘rights’ after lunch.”

Going into the local branch of the Bank of New South Wales, I sold the gold outright for cash, and gave Jim his share, which he at once banked, with the exception of a few pounds. Then we visited a saddler’s shop, bought saddles, bridles, horse-bells, hobbles, etc.; then to an ironmonger’s, where I bought Jim a very good double-barrelled muzzle-loader, and all the mining tools we wanted; and when, two days later, Ross arrived with the horses, we were practically ready to start.

Before leaving the township on the following morning, I wrote to the Sydney firm of South Sea merchants by whom I was employed, and resigned my appointment, but asking them to let me rejoin one of their vessels at the end of six months, if there was a vacancy for me as supercargo or “recruiter” in the labour trade. I was not very anxious as to what their reply would be. If they took umbrage at my throwing up my berth, and refused to take me in again, I knew that I could always start myself as an independent trader in a small way, either in Samoa, the Marshall, or the Caroline Islands.

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Ross brought with him five horses, two of which we used as packs. One of these was newly broken in, and resented the indignity of a pack-saddle. He allowed the saddle and load to be put on his back quietly enough, except that he kept trembling and starting. But the moment Jim took his halter to lead him out of the hotel yard, he gave a squeal, and then a grunt, and bucked most savagely, to the great amusement of a number of the townspeople who were standing by. For ten minutes he tore and plunged about the yards, making furious efforts to rid himself of his pack; then he lay down and tried to roll. This was too much. Getting him on his feet again, we took off the pack-saddle and load, then Ross saddled the unwilling animal, mounted him, and let him amuse himself by another bout of bucking, till he gave in, exhausted, and then quietly submitted to the pack-saddle.

We left the town soon after breakfast, and crossing the Macleay River in the horse punt, kept along the left-hand bank (going down) for fifteen miles, where we camped for our midday meal, near a selector's homestead.

"We are bound to be followed by someone from Kempsey," remarked Ross, as we drank our tea, and ate our beef and damper. "I saw three or four fellows hanging around the hotel yard when we were packing up, and I daresay they are not very far off at this moment. However, we must expect to be followed—a prospecting party always is. But we shall give them a run for their money for a couple of

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days, and then shake them off when we once get into the ranges at the head of the Hastings. If we can't, we'll tire them out by camping, and keeping them waiting."

Ross's surmise was correct, for at sunset, just as we were going into camp for the night—thirty miles from Kempsey—we saw four horsemen coming after us along the track. Coming up, they gave us a civil "Good evening," dismounted, and began to talk. They frankly told us that they had thought it worth while to follow us and see "what was on."

"Right you are," said Ross with a laugh; "it is a free country. My mates and I are a prospecting party—it is no use our saying we are not. But we haven't fixed on any place as yet. We are just going to potter around between Trial Bay and Crescent Head, and maybe try the country at the headwaters of some of the creeks."

The men seemed to be satisfied with this statement—which was true enough. They were decent, respectable-looking fellows, but only one of them seemed to have had any experience of gold mining. Two of them had worked at the Inverell tin mines (in the New England district of New South Wales), and these had the idea that we intended to prospect for tin, for there was a good deal of stanniferous country about the Macleay, Bellinger, and Nambucca Rivers. They camped beside us, and we spent a very friendly evening, "yarning" and smoking. They had a pack-horse and tent, and, as far as we could see, about a week's provisions at the outside. No one of them

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had a gun, and this meant that they would not be able to remain out long. We, however, each having a gun, and I a rifle as well, could keep ourselves going for an indefinite time, for game was fairly plentiful, and we had a 50-lb. bag of salt as well. Then, too, we had fishing lines—and between game and fish we could be very economical with our supply of salt beef and bacon.

As we were saddling up at daylight next morning, Ross and I decided that, as our friends evidently meant to stick to us, we should turn off to the southward and camp for a couple of days at some swamps between Smoky Cape and the Macleay, where there was good feed for the horses and a fair amount of shooting. These swamps were at the headwaters of a fine, but shallow, creek, which was a tributary of the Maria River, and when we reached there and told our four "not wanted" companions that we intended to spell there for a couple of days, they seemed annoyed and disconcerted.

"Look here," said Ross, "it is no use you chaps thinking we want to give you the slip. We could not. We mean to spell here for a day or so, and after that I daresay we shall have a look about the head of Deep Creek near the old silver workings. I believe that there is antimony about there—it is just the same sort of country as Corangula Creek, and the Corangula Creek star antimony is bringing £70 a ton now. So I shall have a try."

Leaving Jim in charge of the camp, Ross and I took our guns and started off for the swamps, and

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did not return till dusk, when we found that our friends had gone. They had told Jim that they would "look us up" at Deep Creek, and see what luck we were having. The leader had, of course, tried to "pump" Jim in our absence, but that astute young person was quite able to hold his own.

After two days at the swamps, we crossed over some precipitous country to Deep Creek, where, in the olden days of the colony, considerable silver had been found. (There is another and better-known Deep Creek further north, where heavy deposits of silver were discovered later on.) But the area of silver-bearing country was but small, and it was soon worked out.

We remained three days at this place, prospecting for antimony ore, and by trenching along some of the spurs came across several small veins or lodes, but not of sufficient importance to induce us to go in for the heavy labour of sinking a shaft. But we determined to go on prospecting, for we were certain that our four former companions were not far off, and that they were keeping a close watch upon us. Ross, however, had his plans. He knew every bit of this part of the country, and although the four men were perhaps all good bushmen, he was certain that they did not know its intricacies as he did, and that we could succeed in getting away from them if we exercised patience.

On the morning of the fourth day Jim shot a big grey kangaroo, and as we were skinning it after breakfast two of our friends paid us a visit. They

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told us that they were all camped in a gully two miles away, and had obtained some fairly good silver prospects; and we saw that they were interested in our antimony ore specimens. We showed them the trenching we had done—to the more convince them that we had actually been working. Before they left, they asked us if we meant to stay in much longer at Deep Creek. No, we replied, we thought not—it did not strike us as being “good enough.” They mentioned that they were short of beef and flour, and with a wise judgment Ross gave them a hind quarter of kangaroo, and we “lent” them some flour.

When they had gone Ross turned to me with a smile.

“These fellows must think we are asses to lend flour and give them meat. It would have been natural for us to refuse; but I did it with a purpose. If we had said ‘No,’ they would of course imagined that we refused because we were anxious to see them compelled to clear out for want of tucker. But look there, my boy, do you see that?” and he pointed to a bank of dull grey clouds in the south-east.

“Heavy rain is coming on,” he continued, “and before night it will be upon us, with wind as well. It ought to be as dark as pitch, and that will be all the better for us.”

“You mean us to slip away?”

“Yes. Let us have everything ready. We must keep the horses near the camp, and as soon as we are satisfied that those fellows are turned in snug

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under their tent, we'll make a break, cross the creek before it gets too strong with the flood waters, and push up into the ranges for a few miles and wait for daylight. By this time to-morrow we must be forty miles from here—in a bit of country where those jokers cannot find us in a month."

CHAPTER VIII

THE storm that burst upon us that night was a very heavy one, and the roaring of the gale amongst the lofty tree tops made an appalling clamour and drowned the sound of the torrential downpour of rain. We succeeded in crossing the creek only just in time before its foaming waters rushed down in heavy flood.

In single file, and leading our horses, we made our way along the sides of a wild and precipitous gully, Ross guiding us with unerring accuracy, though every now and then either one of our party or the horses would come a cropper over a fallen tree or run up against a boulder in the pitchy darkness. For four hours we crawled along drenched to the skin but in good spirits, until we reached a series of basalt caves situated at the head of the gully. Here we "spelled" for an hour or so, and succeeded in lighting a fire and making a billy of tea; then, after a smoke, started off again, just as the rain began to

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take off and a few stars peeped out from the black sky as if to encourage us. At the head of the gully we entered upon a plateau of fairly good country, lightly timbered but interspersed with hundreds of wildly fantastic granite boulders, some of them being of an almost human shape and seeming to lean over towards us with threatening and terrifying gestures.

At last the welcome dawn appeared, and with it the rain ceased and we heard the call of the birds, and soon came the glorious sun, and a strong cool breeze swept down from the misty ranges far beyond and dried our sodden clothing. A short camp for breakfast and again we were on the march, keeping at a steady pace till past noon, when Ross drew rein and pointed to a deep valley that lay at the foot of the plateau which we had now crossed. We had done over thirty miles since leaving the camp on Deep Creek.

“This is the bit of country of which I told you,” he said, as he swung himself sideways on his saddle. “There are half a dozen creeks running into that valley and all of them carry gold—whether much or little we shall soon know. And anyway we shall not be disturbed, for although there are a good many mobs of wild horses and cattle running about here, no one ever tries to get any of them—the country is too rugged to attempt it. Now, after me and take care of the horses going down, for it is mighty stiff and the ground is slippery from the rain.

It took us another two hours to reach the bottom of the valley, and then Ross brought up at an ideal

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camping place. It was an open spot about an acre in extent, well grassed and with of plenty of timber all around, and within a few hundred yards of a creek.

Unsaddling and turning out the horses to revel in the rich, sweet grass, Ross and I set to work on the tent, and Jim went to the creek for water. He had scarcely been away ten minutes when he came tearing back at top speed making frantic gestures to us to lie down and keep quiet.

"Quick," he gasped, "and get your rifles. There's a small mob of cleanskins (wild cattle) feedin' on the bank this side of the creek. There's an old brindle bull and eight or nine cows an' calves, an' if they don't get wind of us we ought to get the chance of a shot at short range."

Hurriedly taking off our boots and seizing our rifles, Ross and I crawled on our stomachs through the grass to the bank, and soon caught sight of the cattle about a hundred yards away. They were coming directly towards us, feeding as they came, and owing to the strong breeze that was blowing against our faces had no sense of impending danger. The old bull was a magnificent creature with a coat like satin, and all the cows and calves were in splendid condition.

"Wait a minute or two," whispered my companion; "do you see that red cow with the year-old calf? She's the best of the lot. I'll take her in the shoulder, and you must give her another shot the moment she goes down. Let the calf go."

Suddenly one of our horses neighed near by, and

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in an instant the old guardian bull was on the alert, sniffing the air, and not a moment too soon Ross's rifle rang out and the cow went down with a thud, and then pitched headlong down the bank into the creek with a heavy splash. The rest of the mob vanished like deer.

Rushing down to the creek we found the poor cow attempting to swim or rather scramble across to the other side. I was just about to shoot her through the head when Ross stayed me, and, cruel as it seemed, told me to wait till she reached the bank, as we should never be able to get such a heavy beast out of the water. So we followed her across, and then ended her sufferings by a merciful bullet through the back of her head.

The labour of getting the carcass further up on the bank, skinning it and then hoisting it up to a tree branch ready for cutting up in the morning, when it would be "set" and cool, was a very heavy task, and by sunset we all three were done up, though highly pleased at our good fortune in obtaining such a supply of beef.

At daylight we began work—Jim getting breakfast and Ross and I attending to the butchering, cutting up and drysalting the meat. The rest of the day we spent in making our camp comfortable, and when darkness fell we ate a hearty supper and turned in, tired but happy, and not to be disturbed by the melancholy cry of the mopoke nor even the howling of some dingoes that were gathering round to feed upon the offal and bones of the defunct cow.

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Before sunrise we were eating our breakfast of grilled steak and damper washed down by copious draughts of tea, and then taking our shovels and prospecting dishes we set out on our first day's prospecting work. We had named our camp "Clean-skin Creek," and crossing over through the now clear, cold water we followed the left-hand bank right up to the source.

"Let us try here first," said Ross, casting his eye around approvingly. "We shall get the colour of gold here at any rate. Of that I am certain."

CHAPTER IX

GILBERT ROSS was right in his contention, for the very first dish of wash-dirt that we panned off gave us a few "colours" of gold, and the second and third showed still better results. This was encouraging.

"It is my belief," said Ross, "that there will be some big and rich reefs found in this broken country some day. All these gullies about are full of small 'leaders,' some of them showing gold, some not a trace of it. I never had the time to prospect thoroughly, but we shall do so properly this time. This gold comes from these 'leaders' and stringers, and from no great distance either. Now, Jim, my son, bring along the dishes, and we shall try a bit further up. There is only a few inches of water here,

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and it won't take us long to make a bit of a dam to keep it back; then we can get at the bed of the creek itself and see how that pans out."

Shovelling away the soil, stones, and vegetable *débris* from each side of the narrow creek, we made a dam high enough to keep back the running water—which was only about four inches deep—for some hours. Then all three of us set to work with our shovels on the exposed bed of the creek, shovelling out sand, stones, gravel, dead and rotten logs, etc., and piling the whole up on the banks.

"That'll do for the present," cried Ross, pitching his shovel out upon the bank; "let us try a few dishfuls before we do any more digging. It is no use for us to break our backs for nothing."

Jim filled our two dishes, and we carried them to the dam and roughly washed them off.

Oh, the delight of it! There, in my dish, were at least five pennyweights of coarse gold, and one piece of about four pennyweights, which was adhering to a fragment of water-worn quartz.

"Hurrah!" I cried, "we have struck it at last. Look at this, Gilbert."

Ross made no answer beyond a nod, and went on washing-off. Then he looked up, with a smile on his bronzed and handsome face.

"And look at this," he said quietly, holding out his dish to Jim and me to look at.

Gleaming brightly amidst some fine black and reddish-coloured sand was quite half an ounce of gold—most of it coarse and in flat water-worn

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pellets. Jim's nut-brown countenance expanded into a vast smile.

We held a hurried discussion as to our best course of action, and resolved to take out no more wash-dirt that day, but to begin operations lower down by building a bigger and stronger dam with a "run off" and a race. This, if the rain would only hold off, and the creek not come down in flood, would enable us to work the bottom in a leisurely and systematic manner. The dam we had already made we cut into, and let the accumulated water run off gently on its natural course. Then, after congratulating ourselves on our good luck, we stretched ourselves under a shady tree for a smoke, before resuming operations on the rest of the wash-dirt, now rapidly draining and drying under the hot sun.

"I think," observed Ross, "that this bit of the creek just here will prove to be the best, for the wash-dirt seems to be pretty thick, and that bar of rock down below there has made a sort of a water pocket here. But where the gold comes from I cannot imagine. So far I can see no sign of an outcrop or 'blow' of quartz anywhere about on the sides of the gully. Quite possibly there may be dozens of small reefs and leaders criss-crossing everywhere, but not showing on the surface—they may all be covered up with the accumulation of vegetable mould of centuries. If so, our only way to find out would be to trench along one or more of the spurs. Then, again, it may be that the reef runs along the bed of the creek itself—or did so once, until it

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became disintegrated by time. I have known of such a case on the old Calliope diggings in Queensland. There we were getting gold—coarse, fine, and nuggets running up to ten ounces—from the bed of a creek, and there was not the sign of a reef anywhere within six miles; nothing but a monstrous 'blow' of white, hungry quartz, half an acre in extent, and with not a grain of gold in a thousand tons of it. Now, come on, you fellows, and let us finish off. We have a good many hours of daylight left, and can easily finish before sunrise."

With a right good will we turned to again, and when we finished there was a pretty sight to behold—over forty ounces of beautiful gold, worth £150. Amongst it were several small nuggets, some of the pure metal itself, others embedded in or attached to fragments of quartz.

I shall not weary my readers with the technical details of our arduous labours for the next four or five weeks. We toiled as only diggers can toil—especially when they are doing well; and despite one great and bitter disappointment we were well rewarded, for out of that unknown and unnamed creek we found a hundred and sixty ounces of gold, exclusive of one nugget of five, and one of three and a half ounces. We should have done better still but for a terrific thunderstorm which, during our third week, swept away our dam and put the creek into a roaring torrent within an hour. And, unfortunately, in addition to losing some of our tools, one of our pack-horses was drowned. He was the only one of

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our animals which ever gave us any trouble by his persistent habit of straying from the camp at night time. On the day of the storm I had short-hobbled him and let him feed along the bank. He evidently must have slipped into the creek and been carried away when the rush of water came. We afterwards found his body caught in the branches of a white cedar tree about four miles down the creek.

At the end of five weeks, and as the result of some good prospects we had obtained at the head of another creek nine miles distant from Cleanskin Creek, we broke camp at the latter place, and the next day found us at our new quarters. It was a wildly picturesque bit of country, amidst rugged and forbidding granite spurs, mostly bare of timber, though our camp was in primeval forest. The creek was narrow, but in places very deep, and some of the deeper pools abounded in small but excellent fish, very much like grayling. They took the hook freely, especially if baited with a grasshopper or cricket, and we had many hours' excellent sport. We also came across several mobs of wild cattle, but for a long time they were too quick for us, and we had to content ourselves with kangaroos, rock wallabies, pigeons and cockatoos. These latter, when hung for a couple of days, are excellent eating, like the Australian king parrot, and Jim was now proving himself a first-rate cook, though he could never succeed in making a satisfactory damper. This either fell to Gilbert Ross or me.

At this creek, which we called Mullet Waterholes,

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we did not get as much gold as we anticipated, owing to Ross injuring his foot very severely with a pick. Still, at the end of a month we had added forty-two ounces to "the bank," as we called our canvas gold-bag, and were quite satisfied.

Our flour and sugar were now at a very low ebb, and, if we intended to keep on, must be replenished. It would not do for us to visit Kempsey or any of the larger settlements to buy stores of any kind, as we were afraid of being shadowed as lucky diggers, so Ross proposed that he and Jim should make their way to the coast to the little hamlet of Russell at Smoky Cape (on the shores of Trial Bay), where there was a combined general store and public-house. Here they could obtain all the flour, sugar, etc., we wanted and be back within a week or eight days. Then, after their return, we intended to prospect some of the other creeks in the vicinity of Mullet Waterholes.

Taking two pack-horses to carry the bags of flour, and riding the two other best horses, Gilbert and Jim set off early one Monday morning, and I was left to myself. They had scarcely been out of sight of the camp for five minutes when I heard the well-known report of Ross's rifle.

Grabbing at my shot gun, which was loaded, I ran as hard as I could up the stony spur to see what was wrong, and in a few seconds more was nearly knocked down by a mob of twenty or so wild cattle which came rushing madly down, making for the jungle on the creek. Then Jim appeared on the crest of the

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spur, and bellowed out to me that Ross had shot a fine fat heifer—one of the mob.

This was a bit of luck, although it meant delaying Ross and Jim for a couple of days to skin, cut up, and salt down the prize. For a prize she was, although she took the last of our coarse salt.

After my companions left me for the second time, I put in my first day at mending boots, sewing clothes, and doing the whole family washing.

As I was returning from the creek carrying "the family wash," I met a dingo slut and three pups, face to face. They had been feeding on the refuse of the heifer and were so full that they were hardly able to do more than go off at a trot—turning back and showing their teeth at me every now and then.

CHAPTER X

DURING the absence of my "mates," I had much to occupy me, both mentally and physically, and I think that I greatly benefited by being left to commune with myself and Nature in that lonely spot, even for the short space of eight days and nights. I was used to long periods of loneliness, for during my past career in the Pacific Islands I had twice been left very much to myself. Once was when I and a native of Niué (Savage Island) spent seven months by ourselves on an uninhabited island in the Equatorial Pacific. The story is a brief one, so I

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may tell it here in this narrative of my trappings and wanderings in the Australian bush:—

I was then the supercargo of a South Sea Island trading vessel sailing from Sydney, and during our cruise we called at Uea—commonly known as Wallis Island. It is an isolated spot three hundred miles to the westward of Samoa, and populated by a fine stalwart race of Malayo-Polynesians, who speak a curious *patois* of the Maori, Samoan and Fijian dialects. The one white trader on the island was a man who had led a most adventurous career in the Pacific, and one evening he told me that he had “missed many chances of making a fortune,” and then asked me if I was prepared to pay him a hundred pounds for a secret that would be worth many thousands of pounds to the firm by which I was employed as supercargo.

“I am an old man, and, as you know, almost blind, and have a well-deserved reputation as a hard drinking old scallywag. But no one can say that I am not honest.”

“I know that, Martin,” I replied.

“Well, if you will give me a hundred pounds I will tell you of an island where there are thousands of tons of guano—guano as good as that of Baker’s or Howland Islands. It is covered up by vegetable mould and sand.”

I knew that the old fellow was “straight,” and had no hesitation in giving him £50 down and a written order on my firm’s agents in Samoa for another £50 payable in six months.

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Then we sailed direct for the guano island. It was one of the Phoenix Group in the Equatorial Pacific, and within half an hour of our arriving there I was satisfied that the old trader's story was quite true and that there was at least £100,000 worth of guano on the island.

I was young, honest and quixotic, and decided to remain on the island, send my ship back to Sydney with the news of this valuable discovery, telling them that I was remaining on the island until they sent a staff of native labourers to ship the guano, for it was quite possible that old Martin, "straight" as he was, might, in his cups, tell someone else what he had told me, and that the island would be taken possession of by other parties.

So, with one native sailor to keep me company, I remained on the island. My vessel, on her way to Sydney, was dismasted, and it was seven months before we were relieved. During that time we suffered great hardships, for we had landed with only three months' provisions, and for the remaining four lived on sea-birds' eggs, fish, and turtle flesh. And my generous employers, who netted over £90,000 from the guano deposits on the island, rewarded me with the magnificent sum of £200 as a bonus for my long sojourn! They "considered" that my salary of £35 per month as supercargo was in itself ample compensation for seven months' misery, "as I had nothing to do, and no worries nor anxieties." Had I had sufficient sense I should have kept old Martin's secret to myself, gone

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to some Sydney merchant, and made many thousands of pounds.

My second experience of loneliness was on the great island of New Britain, in the Western Pacific, where for two months I lived alone on a tiny island off the coast, "shepherding" some black-edge pearl shell beds which had been casually discovered by some of the native seamen of a schooner on which I was a passenger. At this place, however, I was well content, for I had plenty of food, and during the two months collected two tons of pearl shell, worth £70 a ton.

* * * * *

When Ross and Jim Trollope returned with all the provisions we wanted, they brought with them a letter from a much-loved sister which had been following me about for many months, urging me to visit her at her home in Brisbane, Queensland.

"Do not go back to those horrible South Sea Islands before seeing me again," she wrote. "I am quite an old woman now—forty years of age—and my husband and five children, who have never seen you, want you to come to us for even a few weeks before you go a-wandering again. I do not know how you are situated as regards money; but if you want some—and I am sure you do, as you were never careful—go to Francis Adams, at the Commercial Bank in Sydney, and he will give you whatever you want up to two hundred pounds (£200). I have written to him. I do hope that you have some decent clothes.

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I do not want to be unkind, but you are so careless in that way."

I read this letter to Gilbert Ross.

"You must go and see your sister," he said. "If you do not go now, you may not have another chance."

And so I decided to go.

It was a sorrowful parting for us, and when I rode away, after a hearty hand-grasp with Gilbert Ross and Jim Trollope, I felt that there was a big hole in my Australian heart.

“FOR THE BENEFIT OF SAILORS’
KIDS”

“ FOR THE BENEFIT OF SAILORS’ KIDS ”

CHARTERED by the naval authorities at Sydney to take a cargo of coal to Cooktown, North Queensland, for the use of one of Her Majesty's ships then engaged on the New Guinea survey, the Island trading vessel, of which Tom Drake was supercargo, sailed one day in November, and fourteen days later passed through the Great Barrier Reef at Trinity Opening, and came into smooth water. After landing a few tons of cargo at the then newly-founded township at Port Douglas, the *Ysabel* proceeded on her way to Cooktown, inside the Great Barrier. That is, tried to proceed, but heavy north-easterly weather set in, raising a tremendous sea. For two days her skipper tackled it, bringing to at night, and then gave up till the weather moderated, by anchoring under the lee of a headland not far from Cape Tribulation, and near the mouth of an alligator-infested tidal river. At this time nearly all of the rivers debouching into the Pacific from Cape York down to Rockingham Bay—many hundreds of miles—were almost unknown, except to a few adventurous parties of cedar-getters, who, at the daily risk of their lives from fever and savage, cannibal blacks,

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plied their dangerous and laborious vocation in the hot and steamy jungles that clothed the rivers’ banks. Great confusion existed as to the names of these rivers, and even the location of their mouths, which were often hidden from seaward view by belts of mangroves. Some of them had half a dozen names, each party of cedar-getters who entered a river giving it a name of their own choosing. With the discovery of the Palmer River goldfields, some hundreds of miles in the interior, and, later on, of those on the Hodgkinson River, came the opening of new ports. Cooktown, at the mouth of the Endeavour River, was the first, then followed Port Douglas, Mourilyan, and others, and the loneliness of the cedar-getters’ lives was occasionally broken by the visit of some daring party of diggers journeying along the wild and savage coast, seeking some new and shorter track through the rugged coastal range to the goldfields beyond. Time after time would a party of cedar-getters or diggers enter one of these rivers and be no more heard of, and then, perhaps long months after, a patrol of native police would come across their camp, and find the skeletons or charred bones of the former occupants, who had been surprised and slaughtered by the “ myalls ” (wild blacks). Then began the task of vengeance. The black police, as savage and ruthless as the “ myall ” murderers themselves, would, under the leadership of a white officer, follow the trail of the savages until they in turn were surprised and shot down mercilessly, neither age nor sex being spared.

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On the day following that on which the *Ysabel* anchored, the heavy rain squalls ceased, though the wind continued to blow a gale, and although she was in smooth water inside the Great Barrier Reef, a terrific sea was running a few miles from the shore.

Like all South Sea traders, she carried a native crew (her ultimate destination after leaving Cooktown was the islands of the North-West Pacific), and on the cessation of the rain some of them came to Drake and asked him if he would not like to take a boat and go up the river for some shooting, for they had seen vast numbers of duck and geese flying overhead, making their way from the storm-swept coast to more sheltered situations inland. Glad of leaving the ship, the supercargo assented, and one of the boats was at once lowered. The party consisted of four Polynesian sailors, the second mate, and Drake, and they took with them an ample supply of provisions—such as tinned beef, biscuits, tea, sugar, etc.—and started off with pleasurable anticipation of a long and good day’s sport. Each of the native seamen had a single-barrel muzzle-loader shot gun (their own property), and the second mate and supercargo, in addition to their breech-loading 12-bores, had each brought a Snider rifle—mainly for the purpose of getting some shots at the alligators, but also in case of blacks being about the river.

A few minutes’ pull brought them to the mouth of the river, which was alive with fish, jumping and splashing about in all directions. After passing the mangroves, they entered the river proper, on the

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muddy banks of which many alligators were lying. The reptiles quickly slid into the water at the boat’s approach, but one of the very largest gave Finch (second mate) the chance of a side shot, and to the crew’s delight the hideous creature turned on its side, opening and snapping its jaws, and lashing its tail to and fro in the soft mud. Another bullet through the neck at a distance of ten yards settled it—the first had taken it under the forearm.

The sound of the shots had disturbed an immense number of wild-fowl somewhere near, and just as their clamour ceased the men heard two shots in quick succession, and then a “Coo-e-e!”

“Cedar-getters,” said Drake to Finch; “they must be round the bend of the river.”

After pulling half a mile they rounded the bend, and came across a patrol of native police. They were camped in a cleared space on the right-hand bank, and the officer in charge told Drake that it had formerly been a cedar-getter’s camp of five men, who had been killed by the blacks a year previously. He and his black troopers were on patrol, and making their way along the coast to Cooktown. They had slept in the cedar-getters’ hut, which, although it had been plundered by the “myalls,” had a good roof of bark over it. At the back of it was what had once been a good garden, in which the poor cedar-getters had grown maize, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and other vegetables, and the officer showed Finch and Drake scores of large yellow pumpkins, full grown, lying amidst wild vines and creepers—the seeds of

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the previous crop had taken root, and yielded as prolifically as if they had been sown by hand, and the vines tended. After an hour’s chat and smoke, and several nips of ship’s rum, the officer bade his men saddle up, as they had to resume their march. He told Drake and Finch that about a mile down the river they would come to a narrow left-hand branch, by following which for another two miles they would enter some large swamps, where they were certain to find any quantity of geese, duck and teal, with good cover to shoot from.

“At the same time,” he added, “you must look out for niggers. I have come down along this bank from the head of the river, up in the ranges, and we have not seen a sign of a nigger—only some old camping places, so I suppose there are none about the river just now. Still, one can never tell; and now that the rains have come, and the swamps and marshes are covered with geese and duck, it is quite possible that some small, wandering mobs of niggers may have come down from the ranges, goose hunting. I would go with you, but it’s out of my beat—my instructions were to patrol along this bank—the other side and all the coast southward is in charge of another sub-inspector, who patrols the Cardwell (Rockingham Bay) District. So keep a good lookout; don’t go too far from your boat; and, quite apart from niggers, there are alligators in some of the swamps and lagoons, especially the deeper ones. Don’t try to pick up anything you shoot that falls in water deeper than would reach to your knees. These

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swamp alligators are the very devil for collaring a man unawares. Now good-bye, and good luck,” and swinging himself into his saddle, the swarthy-faced sub-inspector trotted off, followed by his sooty-faced blue-uniformed Danites, who, with becketted carbines trotted after their officer in single file.

Before starting, the crew half-filled the whaleboat with huge pumpkins—always a treat for sailors—and then pushed off. As they made their way down the river again to the branch which they were to take, the second mate and the supercargo discussed their police officer acquaintance and some of the startling stories he had told them of the murderous attacks by the blacks upon cedar-getters and isolated parties of diggers, and the terrible reprisals by the native police. For, about two years previously, some thousands of Chinese had been pouring into the rich alluvial gold-fields of the Far North of Queensland, most of them landing at Cooktown direct from Hongkong. These made for the Palmer River diggings ; others swarmed into the country by way of the ports on the Gulf of Carpentaria, and marched on foot through desert country to the rich alluvial gold fields on the Etheridge, Gilbert, and Cloncurry Rivers, crowding out the white miners, and proving a curse to the country, for they brought no money into it, and every pennyweight of gold they washed out was sent to China. Many hundreds of them perished on the way, and hundreds were speared by the blacks. As soon as a party of these alien diggers had secured a few hundred ounces of gold, some of their number

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would be despatched with it to Cooktown or Normanton, to place it in the hands of the Chinese merchants there for shipment to China. Unarmed and cowardly, they often fell an easy prey to the myall blacks, and the gold dust and nuggets they carried were cast aside by the savages as valueless rubbish.

“ But,” the officer had added, “ it is not always the niggers who murder these gold-carrying Chows — take away the ‘n’ from niggers, and substitute a ‘d,’ and you’ll get at the truth. We, in the police, know a good deal, and I and other officers in the native police, could put our hands on half a dozen diggers who have not won an ounce of gold honestly since they came upon the fields—but are now rich men, with big banking accounts—they got their gold by shooting down and then robbing parties of Chinese diggers on their way to the coast. Why, not six months ago one of our patrols came across seven dead Chinamen, all of whom had been shot. I won’t mention names, but we know very well who shot them—two well-known ‘prospectors,’ as they call themselves. Ten days or so after the Chinamen’s bodies were found, these two jokers rode into Normanton and sold seven hundred ounces of gold to the Bank of Australasia there ; said they had struck a rich little alluvial patch on the Einnasleigh River. And they have wiped out other parties of Chows as well ; but of course the niggers get the blame, as they do most of the killing. I once found the remains of three poor devils, who had been speared in their sleep

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by the niggers, and my black troopers found about forty ounces of alluvial gold scattered about the place where they had camped—the niggers had taken it out of the dead men’s pouches, or whatever it was carried in, and chucked it away.”

“What is done with gold found under such circumstances?” Drake had asked.

“The Curator of Intestate Estates at Brisbane is supposed to get it,” the officer said with a dry smile, which Drake and Finch quite understood. The two “prospectors” to whom the officer referred, had, he concluded, not been seen at any of the gold fields for over five months, and it was supposed they had gone south to Sydney or Melbourne. “They were last seen in this part of the country where we are now, and said that they were making for Cairns (Trinity Bay) to get a steamer going south. But they never turned up there. I daresay they were alarmed at the talk going about them, and thought that the Cairns police might want to look into their swags, for just then there was another party of Chinese diggers missing who were known to have a lot of gold in their possession. Most likely these two chaps, who were well mounted, and had spare horses, thought it best to get into New South Wales or Victoria overland, and went there by the great stock routes, like all ‘overlanders.’”

* * * * *

Turning into the branch of the river, and using Polynesian canoe paddles (with which the boat was provided) instead of oars, on account of its narrowness,

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the boat sped swiftly over the sluggish stream, disturbing several mud-embedded alligators on the banks, and then after a two miles’ pull the river suddenly opened out into a series of swamps, or rather tidal lagoons, the margins of which were lined either with tall reeds or low undergrowth. The surface of the water was covered with thousands of water-fowl, ducks, geese, teal, water-hens and pelicans. On the right hand side of the largest swamp the land was fairly high, and free from dense scrub, and thither the boat was headed, towards a clump of wide-spreading trees standing in an open space. Here the party landed to eat their midday meal, under the shady trees, for the day was now uncomfortably hot. Leaving two of the men behind—one to boil water for the tea, and the other, with a Snider rifle, to act as sentry with instructions to fire if he saw any blacks—Drake, Finch, and the rest of the seamen started off along the bank, and in a few minutes the four guns were making havoc among the geese and duck feeding in the reeds. With the first shot they rose in clouds and filled the air with their clamour, only to circle a little distance and then settle down again on the open water. In half an hour each man had as many birds as he could carry, all shot within five hundred yards of the camp.

“ That will do for the present, Finch,” cried Drake. “ Let us get to camp, and we’ll have another turn at them after dinner.”

Gathering the birds together, they were all walking

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leisurely back to the camp when they heard the loud report of the sentry’s rifle.

“Run, boys ; run,” shouted Drake, dropping his birds ; “the niggers must be about the camp !”

A few minutes’ hard running brought them in sight of the camp. To their surprise, neither of the two men seemed at all alarmed ; one was attending to the fire, the other coming towards them, carrying his rifle in one hand and a wild goose in the other.

“What made you fire ?” said Drake, testily.

“Because, master,” replied the man, speaking in his native Samoan, “I was frightened. I have seen two dead men, and I fired my rifle to bring you back. Ah, they are bad to look upon.” Then he told his story :—

As he was keeping watch, he saw a flight of geese pass over the camp, and one, which was wounded, fell into a narrow gully a few hundred yards distant. He ran to pick it up, and was returning with it, when he saw “a lot of things” lying scattered about under a clump of stinging trees. Going closer to examine, he was horrified to see the bodies, or rather skeletons, of two human beings, lying amongst a heap of articles—broken spears, torn clothing, saddles, boots, and battered prospecting dishes—and so fired his rifle to bring the shooting party back.

Hurrying to the spot, Drake and Finch beheld a gruesome sight—the two almost fleshless skeletons of men, who had evidently been speared and clubbed to death, for a number of broken spears were lying about, and both skulls were literally battered to

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fragments. The men had evidently been camped in a tent near by, for its remains, torn into strips, were scattered about. Two saddles and a pack-saddle, minus the stirrup leathers and straps, had been thrown over the remains, and a little distance away were the skeletons of three horses, which had been speared in their hobbles, for both the hobbles with the hobble-chains were still round the whitened bones of their forelegs. Here, too, were a number of broken spears. All around were the marks of fires on the ground, surrounded by horse bones, showing where the myall blacks had cooked the horseflesh.

“ Poor beggars ! ” said Finch, shudderingly, as he gazed at the dreadful spectacle under the glossy-leaved stinging tree ; “ we shall have to bury them.”

The two men took a drink of spirits to fortify themselves, and gave one to each of their crew, and then told the latter to cut a forked sapling, and draw out the poor remains of humanity, whilst they dug a grave with boat paddles in the soft soil.

Quickly, and in silence, the work was begun and completed, and then Drake and Finch asked the men if they had come across any letters or papers of any kind.

“ No,” they said, “ they had not noticed any.”

“ Then look again.”

He and Finch were walking back to the fire, when the latter stooped and picked up a small object from the ground. It was a tiny, square glass phial, covered with silk netting, and filled with a thick yellow liquid. He knew what it was in an instant.

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“Chinese essence of peppermint, and rattling good stuff it is, too, for a headache,” exclaimed the seaman as he handed it to his companion. “I suppose it must have belonged to one of those poor chaps, and the niggers threw it away. Hullo, there are a couple more.”

Drake stopped suddenly. Something had flashed across his mind at the sight of the phial.

“Finch, do you remember what the police officer told us about the two fellows who made a business of murdering and robbing Chinese diggers. Now——”

A loud “Come back, sirs, quick!” made them turn. Harry, one of the native seamen, was running to them, evidently much excited.

“There’s a lot of gold lying about on the ground, sir; some of it is loose, and some is tied up in little bags. Look, sir, here is some,” and, opening his hand, he displayed a number of small nuggets, ranging from one to three ounces each.

Drake was an Australian by birth, and had had experience as a digger. Taking the nuggets from the man, he examined them.

“Alluvial gold,” he said to Finch. Then dropping the nuggets into his pocket, he bade Harry go back to his shipmates and wait.

“Finch, I believe that those two awful things we have just buried are the two prospectors, and that this gold has been taken from poor wretches of Chinamen whom they have murdered. Now, let us go and see.”

Reaching the spot, where the sailors were still

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searching, by clearing away the grass, dead leaves and twigs, one of them handed the supercargo four small linen bags, each containing about twelve ounces of fine gold ; then a soiled and blood-stained belt made of sisal hemp, which had been cut partly through, but still contained nearly forty ounces of gold in small nuggets. Other bags were also lying about, cut or torn open, and empty, and the gold that they had contained had been tossed away on all sides. Every now and then the men would find nuggets of varying size, and as the leaves were scraped away, coarse and fine gold showed itself on the black soil.

The white men held a hurried consultation. It was necessary for them to get out of the river before dark, or the skipper would be alarmed, yet they did not want to leave any of the gold still on the ground. Then an idea came to Drake.

“ Run to the boat, two of you, unbend the main-sail and jib, dip them in the water, and bring them here with the bucket and some more paddles. Hurry up, my lads. Now, Finch, the rest of us must set to work and cover all this place about here with a thin layer of dry leaves and dead grass—no big sticks, mind, as I’m going to set fire to it. Then, as soon as it burns down, we can scrape up the ashes, and about an inch of the top soil with it, turn it into the jib and mainsail, and dump it, load by load, into the boat until we have the last of it. If we are careful we can’t lose even any of the fine gold, and when we get to the ship I’ll pan off the stuff.

Everyone went to work with a will, and in a short

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time the ground beneath and around the clump of stinging trees was ablaze. The grass and leaves burned away quickly, and then all hands began vigorously scraping the hot, but not burning, ashes and top soil into heaps, which were put into the wetted sails, and carried to the boat. In two hours the work was completed, and then, after a hurried meal and a half pannikin of grog each, the crew took to the paddles, and sent the deeply-laden boat down the river, Drake and the officer, too excited to talk, paddling with their brown-skinned shipmates.

Darkness fell as they gained the mouth of the river and saw the bright riding light of the *Ysabel* in the darkness. As the boat ranged alongside, old McLeod, the skipper, leant over the rail, pipe in mouth.

“What have you got?” he asked.

“Geese, ducks, teal, pumpkins and nuggets of gold,” replied the second mate with a curious, hysterical kind of laugh.

“Ah! And I suppose the grog jar is empty,” said the unbelieving McLeod, with good-natured sarcasm.

* * * * *

All the following morning and afternoon, Drake, aided by some of the crew, was busied on the main deck in panning off the wash-dirt, with the result that a further three hundred ounces of gold were obtained. This, with that which had been found previously, brought the total up to five hundred and twenty ounces. Whilst panning off Drake came

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across several small silver coins of the Hongkong currency, and most damning proof of the guilt of the prospectors, two heavy gold rings set with jade inscribed with Chinese characters.

That night, after supper, the table was cleared and the gold weighed. It was pure, water-worn alluvial, and of the highest value, without a fragment of quartz adhering to any of the nuggets, and Drake, who was a competent judge, valued it at £3 18s. per ounce.

Then ensued a discussion. What was to be done with the treasure? Could they honestly keep it? Would they be defrauding anyone? The gold was undoubtedly obtained in the first instance by Chinese, who had been cruelly murdered by the two prospectors. Was there the slightest probability of the names of the original owners or their relatives in China ever being ascertained, even if the most strenuous efforts were made? Such a search could only be made by the Government of Queensland, and the Government of Queensland were very unlikely to do such a thing, even if there was any prospect of success. All these questions were weighed carefully. No one of the four men present wanted to do anything that was not right—that is, the captain, Drake, and the second mate did not, but the mate, a long-headed down-east Yankee, was very emphatic in asserting that the finders had every moral and legal right to their discovery.

“As for the Curator of Intestate Estates, I can tell you this much,” remarked McLeod. “Twice I

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have had dealings with a Curator of Intestate Estates—once in Melbourne, and once in the West Indies. In the one case a saloon passenger of mine from London committed suicide by jumping overboard, and left £700 behind him. The Curator took charge of the money and effects. Nothing was known of the man except his name. The Curator spent about £5 in advertising in the London and Melbourne papers, and then stopped. No one replied. That was sixteen years ago, and he has the money in hand still. The other case was that of a Jamaican nigger steward of mine who died of fever at Manila, and left £110. The Curator at Jamaica claimed it, and it took the nigger’s family, who lived in San Francisco, three years to get the money out of him—less £40 odd charges.”

His hearers listened attentively.

“ Now, supposing we handed this gold over to the Curator of Intestate Estates at Brisbane? What would be the result? Who but the Treasury would benefit? Even if they wanted to, and could find the names of the dead Chinamen, they would take ten years to start the inquiry, and in another ten there would be about ten thousand Chinese all claiming to be the nearest relatives. And they wouldn’t get a cent—the Government would look out for that. Morally—there’s no ‘legally’ about it—the finders have the right to this £2,000 worth of gold. Anyway, that is my opinion. And now look here, you fellows. Here is a chance for you to do something for the Seamen’s Orphan Society. The society

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is in debt, and fifty or a hundred pounds would be a lift for it. If you handed over this gold to the Curator of Intestate Estates, and asked *him* to give a hundred quid out of it for the benefit of sailor men’s widows and kids, he would only write you ten lines and say he ‘would consider the advisability of mentioning the matter to the proper authorities in due course,’ and that would be the last of it—the Seamen’s Orphan Benevolent Society would never get a cent from the Curator.”

Burt, the mate, rose suddenly and went into his cabin, and returned with a five-shilling piece.

“Look here! I’m tired of so much jaw. Let us toss up and see whether you communicate with your durned Kew-rater or not”; and before anyone could stay him, he spun up the coin.

“Heads fer the finders, tails fer the Kew-rater.”

The coin rattled on the table, and all the men bent anxiously over it.

“Heads it is,” gasped Finch with a sigh of relief.

“Heads it is,” echoed the skipper. “Now I suggest that three-fourths go to Mr. Drake and you, Finch, and the rest to the men you had with you.”

“Not at all,” said Drake; “do you think that you and Burt stand out? No—£1,500 between Finch and me, £400 between you and Burt, and the rest to the men.

“And I propose that we make up £200 for the Seamen’s Orphans’ Society,” suggested the second mate. “It will sort of make us feel we are doing

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the square thing—just for the benefit of sailors’ kids.”

“ That’s nice and handsome—and fair all round,” observed Mr. Burt, who, with his hand in his pocket, was tenderly caressing the crown piece—which had a queen’s head on both sides.

THE "MANURUA" AND THE
"MARGUERITE"

A TALE OF TWO "SHARKERS"

THE "MANURUA" AND THE "MARGUERITE"

A TALE OF TWO "SHARKERS"

WHEN I was about twenty-two years of age, I one day found myself in Honolulu with a little over \$1,000 in my possession—the result of a trading voyage to the Marshall and Caroline Islands, in the North Pacific. I had been supercargo of the schooner in which the voyage had been made, and was paid off at San Francisco. In that city—which in those days was aptly described as a place that only wanted a roof over it to make it the most wicked house on earth—I had remained for but a few weeks, and then took passage for Honolulu in the old side-wheeler *Moses Taylor*. For Honolulu was the centre of all the Polynesian Islands trade and ventures, and I was sure that there not only would I meet many old South Sea Island comrades, but "drop into something good," in which I could invest my small capital of \$1,000. So thither I went, eager once more to assail the gates of the bright City of Fortune which lies within the beautiful Land of Adventure. I was young and vigorous, and burning

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with an unquenchable desire to wander still further among the lovely islands of Polynesia and Micronesia—and thence to the savage lands of New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland, and the Solomon Group. No scheme was too wild, no quest too mad and dangerous for me—and others like me—to embark upon in those fierce days of excitement, when Honolulu was the rendezvous—and, alas! too often the grave—of all the restless wanderers and adventurers who there met together from the confines of the North and South Pacific—from Singapore and Yokohama in the west, from San Francisco, Panama and Valparaiso in the east, and from Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand, and turbulent Fiji in the south. Wild, wild days indeed were those, and when men threw down a twenty-dollar gold piece on the bar of the "Fort House Hotel" in Honolulu, they cared not that it bore upon it, metaphorically, if not literally, the stain of blood. For there were cruel things done then in the South Seas—whole communities of natives being ruthlessly carried off to slavery in the cotton plantations of Fiji and the guano deposits of the Chincha Islands on the west coast of South America.

* * * * *

One evening I fell into conversation with a bronzed-faced old man of over sixty years of age. His name was Hedriott, and for over a quarter of a century he had been master of sperm whalers, sailing out of New London, Connecticut; but he had now retired from whaling and settled in Honolulu, where he had built

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a nice country house. The quiet, aimless life, however, did not suit him—he was a widower and had no family—and he told me that he had just bought a small fore-and-aft schooner of ninety tons, and was contemplating making a trading voyage, or going into the shark-catching industry among the low-lying atolls of the North Pacific. I was at once interested, and, to make a long story short, agreed to embark in the latter venture with him, and put in my capital of \$1,000. Dried sharks' fins and tails were then worth from £60 to £75 per ton in Honolulu and San Francisco. They were exported to China—where they brought a still higher price—by various Chinese firms, and the business was a highly profitable one.

Early on the following morning we made an arrangement with the principal Chinese firm in Honolulu to sell them all our future cargo at £65 per ton, and at once began our preparations. These were carried out as secretly as possible, for there were two other vessels then in port, fitting out for a shark-catching cruise, and we did not want to give them an inkling of our destination, which was the uninhabited Arrecifos, or Providence Islands, Atoll, in lat. $9^{\circ} 45' N.$, long. $161^{\circ} 30' E.$ I was well acquainted with the place, knew that the lagoon swarmed with sharks, and felt sure that Hedriott and I would make an exceedingly good thing out of the cruise. But we were rather nervous about the other vessels, both of which were owned and manned by parties of Greeks and Levantines—for

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the principal of the Chinese firm had told us that one of the Greek skippers had been boasting of some new and unvisited atolls to the South-west Pacific which were full of sharks, and that he and his crowd were the only people who knew of them.

Within three days we were ready for sea. The schooner was named *Manurua* (Red-bird) and our crew consisted of fourteen Polynesians—Hawaiians, Gilbert Islanders, and other natives—all good, stalwart fellows who had shipped for the cruise on a "lay"—*i.e.*, shares. Hedriott, the mate and I were the only white men.

One of the Greeks' vessels—a heavily-built brigantine of two hundred tons—was lying quite near our schooner, and one morning her skipper and some of his dirty, truculent crew paid us a visit. We received them civilly enough, but knew that their object was to "pump" us. I had purposely spread out a new chart on the cabin table, and when the Greek *padrone* saw that I had marked off the course between Honolulu and Christmas Island (a spot well-known to shark catchers, and fifteen thousand miles due south of Honolulu) his eyes lit up, and, in his mongrel English, he wished us "gooda-lucka," said he should be afraid to venture so far in his old *Margharita*, and would have to content himself with his former fishing grounds—French Frigate Shoals, five hundred miles west of Honolulu. Then the greasy, ear-ringed ruffian bade us good-bye — *he* satisfied that we were bound to Christmas Island, and *I* that he had lied to me about French Frigate

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Shoals. One reason that made Hedriott and I suspect that he and his consort were going to Arrecifos was that both vessels were undergoing a rapid but extensive overhaul to fit them for the voyage of 2,600 miles.

We sailed that evening, and after getting a good offing stood away on our true course, W.S.W. Favoured by a strong N.E. trade wind, the little *Manurua* bounced along in gallant style, and fourteen days later swept into the noble lagoon of Arrecifos, and dropped anchor within a cable's length of one of the seventeen palm-clad islands which encompass this great lake of the North Pacific.

Work was at once begun by building houses of palm leaf, roofed with thatch, for the ship's company to live in, and within a week we began fishing. Every day we caught from two to three hundred sharks of all sizes, cut off the valuable fins and tails, and suspended them on long lines of cinnet, stretched from one cocoa-palm to another, to dry. The livers of the very large sharks we "tried out" in ordinary whalers' try-pots, and poured the oil off into casks, which were headed up and stowed in the schooner's hold—Hedriott and I being the coopers. It was horrible work, but we went about it merrily, and with good hearts, for every barrel of oil meant £5 to £7, and every ton of dried fins and tails £65. And at night we sat around our supper fires, and ate as voraciously as had the sharks we had killed during the day. And then we slept—ah! how soundly and how sweetly—under the gently-rustling cocoa-palms.

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For we were worn out with the toils of the day, and kindly Mother Nature was good to us—to white men and brown alike.

On the dawn of the tenth day, Hedriott and I were aroused by a loud cry from one of our native seamen.

"Big square-rig schooner comin' in!"

We recognised her in an instant. It was the *Marguerite*—the larger of the Greek "sharkers." Her decks were crowded with an unusual number of men. She came through the lagoon very quickly, and, as she passed us, Captain Pasquale Zambra, standing on the after-deck, assailed us with a torrent of the foulest abuse, and his ruffianly crew brandished their knives and threatened to cut our hearts out if we did not lift anchor and clear out of the lagoon within an hour. And, to emphasise their threats, one of them jumped into the lower fore-rigging and fired six shots at us with a revolver, badly wounding one of our native sailors in the knee. Then, with a chorus of foul gibes and curses from the motley swarm of blackguards on her decks, the *Marguerite* went ahead and brought to and anchored about two hundred yards distant.

At this moment, all of the ship's company, except two, were on board, for we were engaged in turning in our lower rigging afresh, and the suddenness of this treacherous attack threw us into confusion. But only for a few minutes.

Almost choking with fury, old Hedriott—generally so calm and quiet—bade me attend to the wounded



ONE OF THEM JUMPED INTO THE LOWER FORE-RIGGING AND FIRED SIX SHOTS AT US WITH A REVOLVER.

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man, and then his voice came to him, and it sounded like the bellowing of a bull, as, striking his clenched fist on the fife-rail, he thundered out :

"Men, come aft, and get your arms. Steward, pass up all the Sniders and a box of cartridges. God helping me, men, I shall show these bloody-minded Dago swine that though I am nigh on seventy years of age, Lucas Hedriott is not afraid of a gang of cut-throats."

All the fighting blood of our semi-savage crew responded to the old man's appeal, and they rushed aft to receive their Sniders, and at the same time I heard the mate call for four hands to man a boat and bring off the two men who were on shore.

The wounded man was a Gilbert Islander. The pistol bullet had struck him on the knee-cap, fracturing it, then passed round to the back, and lodged just within the skin. Cutting it out, I dressed, and then hurriedly bandaged the fractured bone, and told the man to lie quiet. He rolled his eyes at me, showed his teeth in a savage grin, and was on deck after me in a few minutes with a Snider in his hands.

Meanwhile the Greeks had lowered a boat and pulled ashore in advance of our own, and, to show that they meant business, assailed our two native sailors with pistol shots, but they, being fleet of foot, ran along the beach towards the rescuing boat, and got on board the *Manurua* in safety. Then the boat party from the Greek vessel set to work, and in a few minutes all our huts were in flames, the try-pots

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overturned or broken, and our colony of pigs, poultry and goats shot down.

Hedriott and the rest of us on board watched the destruction in silence. Our chief anxiety had been the rescue of our two men, and now that these were on board, we felt that we were masters of the situation.

For old Hedriott, having originally fitted out the *Manurua* for a trading voyage among the Western Pacific Archipelagos, where the natives were much addicted to cutting off ill-manned and poorly-armed ships, had done the right thing, and I had supplemented our little vessel's armament by a smooth-bore, breech-loading swivel gun, which could throw a thirty-eight-ounce iron shot with precision for 800 to 1,000 yards. I had bought the weapon in San Francisco from the California Arms Company in Sansome Street, had seen it tried, not only with its solid shot, but with case shot, and had designed selling it at the end of our cruise, with 1,000 rounds of ammunition, to one or another of the native rulers in the Caroline Islands. Our small arms consisted of Snider carbines (converted from Enfield rifles) and single-shot breech-loading pistols for the crew, and the newly-invented Henry (Winchester) sixteen-shot rifles and Colt's revolvers for Hedriott, the mate and myself. Then in addition to this the old man had brought two whaler's bomb guns, and about fifty of Pearce's bombs. The latter we thought likely we might sell to some chance sperm whaler.

In less than twenty minutes we had the swivel

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mounted on its tripod, and bolted down on the top-gallant fo'c'sle, from where we could train it in any direction, except directly astern. All these preparations were noticed on board the *Marguerite*; her crew were running all over the decks, shouting and gesticulating and clearing the four six-pounder guns which she carried on the main deck—two on each side. Then she hoisted a signal for her boat to return, and at the same time over a dozen of her crew began firing at us with old, smooth-bore Tower muskets; the heavy, round bullets hitting our little vessel everywhere, but doing no harm to anyone, although the *Manurua* had a low freeboard and we were all much exposed.

Tom Gentry, the mate, was a splendid fellow. He had been a commissioned officer in the Confederate Navy, in the American Civil War, and when Hedriott and I went to the swivel gun to work it, he pushed us aside (with much lurid language) and told us to look after the men and the small-arm fire. Then, sighting the gun, he fired, and we saw the shot smash into one of the *Marguerite's* quarter boats. And within five minutes he had knocked a hole through another boat which was carried, bottom up, on top of the deck-house, sent two shots clean through the deck-house itself, and then turned his attention to the boat returning from the shore, doing his best to sink her. Meanwhile the fire from our crew had sent all the ruffians who were firing at us under cover—some of them running below—and no further attempt was made to get the six-pounders to bear on us—as a

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matter of fact our quick and unexpected response to the attack had thrown them into the wildest confusion, and we heard Zambra yelling out a series of orders, and presently the brigantine's head sails were run up, her cable slipped, and she began to forge ahead, so as to get out of range. Zambra himself was at the wheel—crouched down on deck so as to expose himself as little as possible, and the musketry fire ceased. Then Zambra yelled out to his men to sheet home and hoist the topsails, but no one obeyed, for fear of being shot. However, the breeze was strong, and with only her head sails up, the vessel went through the water pretty quickly.

Gentry had failed to hit the shore boat, which was now alongside the brigantine, under the port bow, where those in her were secure from our fire. Meanwhile the swivel banged merrily away, and as the *Marguerite* presented her square old-fashioned stern to us, we yelled with delight as Gentry sent shot after shot crashing into it.

Then Hedriott ordered us to cease firing, the Hawaiian colours were run up, and we gave a cheer, and watched the other vessel. She kept dead before the wind, then brought to about a mile and a half away, and again anchored.

Breakfast was served as quickly as possible, the arms examined and cleaned, and our vessel then towed close in to the shore, abreast of the burned houses, the destruction of which was a serious loss to us, for among other things destroyed was a new suit of sails, much boat and fish-

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ing gear, all our spare clothing, and a month's provisions.

As we were talking over the events of the morning Gentry said he was sorry he had missed sinking the one boat remaining to the Greeks, but that he meant to destroy her within twenty-four hours.

"Those fellows may try and rush the schooner with that boat," he observed, "they outnumber us by four to one, and will, if they can, wipe us out. I believe that something has happened to the smaller vessel, and that Zambra has all of her hands with him on the brigantine."

This we afterwards learned was correct—the other vessel had suddenly sprung a leak, and foundered two days after they had sailed from Honolulu—her crew having barely time to get into their boats and be rescued by her consort.

Towards noon we saw the *Marguerite's* boat go on shore to a small, well-wooded island (one of a chain of nine, all connected by a reef), and two of our crew were sent to see what was afoot. They made their way through the palm groves and scrubs, then along the reef without being observed, and in a couple of hours returned, and reported that Zambra and about twenty of his people were busy building houses landing stores, and digging a well.

"That settles it, then," said Hedriott, "they mean to stay here and fish, and we shall have to put up with it."

"No, we won't," remarked Gentry, quietly. "Big as this lagoon is, it is too small for us if we let that

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gang stay here." Then he told us what he intended doing that night.

As the day wore on we saw the brigantine's people take the damaged boats on shore, haul them up on the beach, and begin to repair them. And we also saw that not only was there a look-out man on the topgallant yard of the *Marguerite*, who could watch all our movements, but that two sentries were posted at that end of the little island nearest to us.

Tom Gentry had smiled grimly. He had made his plans with precision, and could afford to smile, and at that moment he was busily engaged in making up three heavy charges of four-ounce dynamite cartridges, each charge weighing one pound. These he parcelled up tightly in canvas, inserted very short fuses with the detonators, and then frayed out the ends of the fuses so as to ensure their lighting quickly.

An hour after darkness fell, he and a Hawaiian sailor, armed only with their pistols, set out along the weather side of the chain of islands. Gentry was certain that they would not be seen by the two sentries, and it was his intention to approach Zambra's party from the farther side, destroy all three boats, and then escape into the thick palm groves, and wait till daylight.

Looking at his watch just as he was starting, he said, "It is just seven now. It will take us two hours to work round their camp and get to the boats, so I guess you'll hear something about nine o'clock. Then you can do all the rest. Keep under easy sail,

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and if the brigantine tries to get away you can knock the sticks out of her with the swivel. Zambra has got to shift out of this lagoon, but not until we have had a bit of talkee-talkee with him.” And so off he and his companion went, the dark night favouring their daring enterprise.

Hedriott and I fully recognised the value of his plan to destroy the boats. We were but seventeen men opposed to over fifty desperate scoundrels, who would have had no hesitation in capturing the *Manurua*, and slaughtering everyone on board if they could do so by surprise. And their three boats would have enabled them to do this, for our little vessel was, as I have said, of a low free-board, and we could never have beaten off a sudden rush of three boats.

In those wild days there was no law in the South Seas, except in the older settled groups, and the disappearance of the *Manurua* and her company would have aroused but little or no interest—such things were common. “Cut off by the natives somewhere in the Western Islands,” was all that would have been said.

On board the schooner everything was in readiness for us to slip away at a minute’s notice. Our big fore-and-aft mainsail, foresail, and all head sails were quietly hoisted, and our native crew were placidly awaiting the order to slip the unshackled cable.

It was twenty minutes to nine. Hedriott and I were sitting on the rail, smoking, and trying to see the *Marguerite* through the darkness, when suddenly there came three thunderous reports in quick

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succession, then a dead silence, and then the wild clamour of countless thousands of affrighted sea-birds.

The shackle pin was knocked out, the schooner canted smartly round, and was soon slipping through the water, and in a quarter of an hour we could see the brigantine. Lights were being carried about on her decks, and we could hear loud shouts proceeding both from her and the shore. Presently a great fire of dried cocoanut leaves blazed up on the beach, and by its light we saw that *Zambra's* people were making a raft in frantic haste by lashing together dead logs of pandanus (screw pines). At the same time we were observed by those on board the *Marguerite*, and a perfect Babel ensued. We kept steadily on towards her.

The raft was carried down by about a dozen men, who, as soon as it was afloat, pushed off, using bits of broken boat planking for paddles. They had but three hundred yards to go to get alongside, and quickly covered the distance and clambered on board.

With no lights showing, the *Manurua* came swiftly on towards the larger vessel. Then, when we were within easy speaking, Hedriott called me to the tiller and gave it to me.

"Run up close under his stern," he said quietly, then he called out to some of our crew to haul the head sheets to windward, so as to deaden our way.

Suddenly three men ran aft to the stern rail of the *Marguerite*. One of them was carrying a lantern; another had a white cloth of some kind bent on to a

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whale whift; the third, who was in his shirt and trousers, hailed us. It was Zambra himself.

"Whata in the nama God-a you wanta, you gentleman?" he cried.

"To talk to you, you dirty, unwashed swine," replied old Hedriott savagely, "to tell you to keep quiet until daylight. If you attempt so much as to ship your windlass brakes and try to heave up and get away, I'll slaughter the lot of you."

"I promisa you—I swear to you I do nothing; I giva in."

Reiterating his promise to wipe out the lot of them if they disobeyed his warning, Hedriott called out to the men at the head sheets to let draw again; then the schooner shot ahead, and we continued making short tacks till daylight, feeling very content.

At dawn we saw Tom Gentry, the Hawaiian sailor, and a stranger on the beach. We sent a boat, and when they came on board found that the third man was one of Zambra's fellows. He was wounded in the head by a Snider bullet, and had begged Gentry to let him come on board with him, swearing on the Cross that he was a respectable Genoese cooper, and had taken no part in the attack upon us. Furthermore, he told us that there were three other men wounded besides himself, that Zambra and his fellow-captain had actually meant to attack us within a few days, as soon as his boats were repaired, for they were certain that we were not to be overpowered by treachery—though the latter plan was strongly favoured by most of the gang.

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Gentry told us that he and his comrade had no trouble in getting to the three boats. Lighting the fuses, they dropped one into each boat, and then ran for safety behind two cocoanut trees. All of the thirteen Dagoes (there were fifteen, including the sentries) were lying about round fires some little distance from the boats, and the terrific explosions drove them out of their wits with terror. They all, except the wounded Genoese, fled to the beach, and would have tried to have swum off to the brigantine, but they were in deadly fear of the sharks. Well satisfied with his work, Gentry was leaving the scene with his companion when they ran against the Genoese, who implored their assistance.

After breakfast, we in the schooner sailed in between the *Marguerite* and the little island, let go anchor in five fathoms, and ran a kedge out astern, so that we could rake the brigantine fore and aft with the swivel if she showed fight again. The Genoese had told us that there was no water left on board but a few gallons, and that their first landing party (after burning our houses) had had to collect young cocoanuts for drinking, and that as yet no water had been obtained from the well that they had dug on the little island, owing to the sandy soil caving in continuously.

"Good," remarked old Hedriott grimly, when he heard this; "we have them in a tight place, and" (here he used some shocking expressions) "we'll give them a lesson that they won't easily forget."

Our dinghy was manned. Hedriott and I went on board the *Marguerite*. We were received at the

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gangway by Zambra and his fellow rascal of a skipper. Hate and murder were in their eyes, and in those of their scoundrelly, ruffianly-looking followers, who gathered around them.

Before either of us could utter a word, Zambra passionately implored us to let him have water—if only for his wounded men.

Hedriott eyed him up and down in suppressed fury.

"Your tongues will have to rattle dry against your teeth before you get a mouthful of water from me," he said savagely, and then his eyes blazed as they lit upon the face of one of the brigantine's crew.

"Ha, Peter Metaxa, you here! You infernal crawling cut-throat that shipped with me as boat-steerer in the *Fontenoy* ten years ago," and leaping forward, he struck the man in the mouth with such violence that the fellow—a short, sturdy Greek—was sent flying across the deck and fell in a heap. Then Hedriott turned to Zambra.

"You want water, you Greek dog? Well, you may, or you may not, get it. First of all, bring all the small arms you have on board, and lay them down here on your main hatch."

There came first muttered curses, and then an angry growl of dissent from the crew of the brigantine as they clustered together and handled their knives and old-fashioned muzzle-loading pistols.

Hedriott eyed them in contemptuous silence for a moment or two, then leisurely mounting on the port bulwarks by the gangway, he asked Zambra if any of his wounded men were below.

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"No, none; all are afta, on decka," was the half-sullen, half-agonised reply.

Hedriott raised his hand twice quickly to watching Tom Gentry on board the *Manurua*, and the swivel gun banged in response, and a thirty-eight ounce solid shot tore its way through the bows of the brigantine, passed along fore and aft, above the 'tween deck, and lodged in her already battered stern. Then Gentry quickly re-loaded, and trained the gun upon the group gathered on the main deck.

"There, my beauties, do you see that?" cried Hedriott fiercely to the terrified, but still scowling, ruffians around us. "Do you see, you treacherous cut-throat Dago dogs, that we have the pull on you! Now, I'll get to business. Every musket, every pistol, you have is to be laid on that main hatch within ten minutes, and I'll send my longboat for them. I am paying you a good price—a pint of water for each musket and pistol. Don't try and hide any, or you will be the worse for it, for I shall stop the water. And I want to see you run those four six-pounders overboard as well. As soon as you are ready with your arms, I'll send the boat for them, and then measure off the water. That is all."

They glared at us in impotent rage as we went over the side. We got into the dinghy, pushed off, and before we reached the schooner the four guns were run overboard.

Within half an hour we had all their small arms on board, and we sent them fifteen gallons of water.

Utterly unable to either fight or heave up and get

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away, Zambra and his colleague, a few hours later, asked us to let them come on board and "have a talka."

This was what we wanted, so the boat was sent.

Both the scoundrels began to weep when they spoke, and detailed their sorry plight, begging us for more water, and imploring us to let them clear out.

Hedriott was not a cruel man. We had won, and could now be merciful. So we agreed to let them have a week's water, sufficient to take them to Eniwetok Atoll, where they could get more, and where also they would see thousands of sharks, and not be able to kill any, for they had no boats.

Eager to get away, they set to work—the dreaded swivel proving an incentive to their exertions—and by four in the afternoon they had their water on board. Then, as the windlass was manned, and sails loosed, Tom Gentry hailed Captain Pasquale Zambra.

That gentleman stood up on the rail.

"What you wanta?" he asked sullenly.

"Only to tell you this: If I see you, or any one of your mongrels so much as look ugly at anyone on board this ship, I'll send a shot through you. Now you can git."

In silence the anchor was hove up, and in silence the *Marguerite* sailed out of Arrecifos lagoon, and left us to ourselves.

A "BLACKBIRDING" INCIDENT

A "BLACKBIRDING" INCIDENT

IN the earlier days of the Kanaka labour trade among the islands of the North and South Pacific, many atrocities were committed by ships sailing under British, French, Hawaiian, and Peruvian colours; and in 1866 two armed vessels, manned exclusively by Peruvians, swept down upon the natives of the Ellice Group, and carried off nearly four hundred of these poor people to the guano deposits of the Chincha Islands, where, with the exception of a score or so, they all perished miserably within a year of their capture.

My connection with the Kanaka labour traffic began about the middle of the "seventies," when it was in the first stage of being conducted in a humane manner, though there was then no legislation whatever concerning it. Any irresponsible person could fit out a "blackbirder"—as labour vessels were then called (and the term has stuck)—and by fair means or foul obtain a cargo of natives from the various islands to labour at a minimum wage on the plantations in Fiji, Tahiti, and Samoa. No questions were asked by the planters as to how these "recruits" were obtained—all they wanted was labour, and they cared not how they obtained it. On the whole, even

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in its best form, it was a demoralising and degrading traffic. Still, there were many honourable exceptions, where not only the captains and the officers of the labour vessels obtained their "recruits" in a fair and honest manner, but indentured them for a fixed period to humane and honourable planters.

The vessel to which I was attached as "recruiter" (labour agent) was a large schooner of two hundred tons, and was employed almost exclusively in obtaining native labourers for a firm I shall call Golding Bros., the proprietors of a great cotton plantation on Tahiti. So far we had made three cruises among the Paumotu Archipelago—successful as far as the number of "recruits" I obtained went—but Messrs. Golding found that these Paumotuan natives were not good workers. They were too closely allied in language and by blood to the local Tahitians—who exercised a bad influence upon them. So the firm decided to despatch me to the Gilbert Islands (Equatorial Pacific), where I was confident of securing at least a hundred of the sturdy, stalwart natives of those islands to engage themselves to work on the great plantation for three years. For I was well acquainted with the people of the Gilbert Islands, and they, on their part, knew and trusted me, for I had taken many hundreds of them to the Hawaiian Islands to work upon the sugar plantations there, and in no instance had there been any case of bloodshed or violence in my "recruiting" transactions. This was a fact of which I was somewhat proud, and which, purely from a practical business

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point of view, led the owners of this plantation to give the vessel of which I was "recruiter" an extended charter.

Two years previously the king of Butaritari Islands and the head men of the island of Maiano had assured me that whenever I again visited them as "recruiter" I could rely upon their assisting me to obtain all the labourers I wanted; and I had borne this in mind.

I must here mention that on our last cruise in the Paumotu group we had run ashore on a reef, and the schooner had been so badly damaged that as soon as we arrived at Papeite we had to beach her for extensive repairs. Whilst these repairs were being carried out there arrived there from Valparaiso a large German brig, the *Kaspar*. She belonged to the great German firm whose island trading headquarters in the South Seas were at Apia, in Samoa, and was commanded by a Captain Georg Baum, a huge, hulking fellow, whom I, and every other Britisher who had met him, disliked intensely as a boastful, arrogant bully, who had a strong antipathy to everything English. The *Kaspar* was both a trading vessel and a labour vessel, and in the latter capacity she had brought many hundreds of natives to work on the cotton plantations of the German trading company in Samoa. Her supercargo and labour "recruiter" was an American—Jim Watkins—a reckless, dare-devil fellow, who, with many good traits in his character, would stick at nothing in the way of getting "recruits"—for

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every native obtained meant a bonus to him of \$20.

One afternoon, whilst the skipper of our schooner and I were spending a quiet hour at the principal hotel in Papeite, Watkins strolled in and joined us. He tried very hard to find out where we were going on our next cruise, but we frankly refused to tell him. He laughed, and dropped the subject. After a short chat with him the skipper and I went on board our vessel, and found there, waiting to see us, the steward of the *Kaspar*. He was a half-caste Samoan, and an old acquaintance and shipmate of mine, and I was naturally pleased to see him, for Joe King was a good, sterling fellow. But his visit was more than a friendly call—he had come to warn us that we had a traitor on board in the person of our second mate.

"I understand and can speak German pretty well, as you know," he said to me, "though I never do speak it. Captain Baum always speaks to me in English; he does not know that I understand any language but that and Samoan. Well, last night, your second mate came on board the *Kaspar* to see the captain. They had a long talk in the cabin. I heard all, or nearly all, that they said. They spoke in German."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mackenzie (the skipper) to me, "did I not tell you that Edwards was a German, though he pretends he is a Swede. Go on, King."

"Your second mate told Baum everything he knew about this coming cruise of yours to the Gilbert

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Islands, said that you were first going to Butaritari, and then to Maiana, and that the chiefs had promised you, two years ago, to collect all the best men they could find for you, and that the *Cyprus* would sail as soon as possible after her repairs were completed.

"I was in my pantry, but the door was ajar, and I heard Captain Baum ask your mate if he wanted to earn \$500 easily. The mate said, 'Yes.'

"'Well,' said Baum, 'I will give you half of it down, and for the other half I will give you an order on myself, payable by our manager in Samoa. You can get the money from him at any time—either when you go there, or by writing for it.' Then he went into his cabin, came out with a bag of money and counted out \$250 in gold to your mate, who gave him a receipt.

"Then Captain Baum told him that he (your mate) was to use all possible means to delay the *Cyprus* from getting to the Gilberts before the *Kaspar*. Mr. Watkins, he said, can speak the Gilbert Islands language like a native, and when the *Kaspar* arrives at Butaritari Watkins will tell the king and his chiefs that you, sir, are ill here in Papeite, and that Mr. Golding and his brother have sent him in your place to get two hundred strong men and women—married and single—to work on their cotton plantation for three years. Then the *Kaspar* will take them to Samoa instead, to work on the German cotton plantations.

"Your mate thought a little while, then he said to Baum, 'Make it a thousand dollars—half cash down

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—and I shall see that the *Cyprus* never gets to Butaritari, or any other of the Gilbert Islands. She will bump up against a reef somewhere one night, in my watch, and won't come off again."

"Without a word Baum gave him another \$250, then wrote out an order and read it to Edwards. It was simple enough: 'I promise to pay Hermann Joel the sum of \$500 on demand.'

"'Of course, if you don't do your work, that bit of paper will be no good to you,' said Baum.

"Edwards said he would not fail, and that finished the business. I could not get a chance of coming to tell you all this until now, and I had no possible chance of writing and sending you a letter. And so when I saw your second mate go into the town this afternoon, I slipped away."

The three of us then discussed the situation, and we arranged a certain plan, and Joe King returned to his ship, after receiving our warm thanks—and something else as well.

Early on the following morning the German brig sailed, ostensibly in continuation of her voyage to Samoa, and we went on with our repairs, the shipwrights working day and night, and getting double pay, and in eight days we were clear of Tahiti and spinning along to the north-west. The *Kaspar* had a long start of us, but we were not concerned, and had reasons for not hurrying.

Mackenzie and I had taken the chief mate into our confidence and the treacherous Edwards (or rather Joel) little dreamt that he was being]_carefully

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watched at night time, from the time we had left Papeite. After clearing the Leeward Isles of the Society group, we kept a direct course for the islands of the Tokelau group, and it was here that we felt pretty sure Mr. Edwards would attempt to run the ship ashore, for the islands are low, and situated among a series of detached reefs. But one morning watch, when he came on deck he received a surprise. The schooner was hove-to off the island of Pukapuka, and as soon as it was daylight, canoes came off to sell fruit, etc. We bought what we wanted, and then when all was ready, Mackenzie called to the second mate.

"Do you see that island, Mr. Edwards?" he asked.

The man stared. "Why, of course I see it, sir."

"How would you like to live there for a couple of months or so?"

"Shouldn't like it at all."

"Ah, but you must try and like it, my dear Mr. Edwards; for you are going on shore in one of these canoes in ten minutes. You'll find it lonely, but healthy, and you can't squander that \$500 you got from the German skipper to run this ship ashore. Go below, you treacherous dog of a Dutchman, and get your gear together, and be smart about it."

Edwards's face blanched, and he tried to speak, when the irate mate struck him a violent blow on the mouth, then dragged him to the companion, and almost threw him below. In ten minutes he and his chest and all his belongings were in a canoe, and the

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Cyprus filled away again on her course. The bo'sun was called aft, the crew told to remember that he was now second mate and "Mr. Kingston," and a native A.B. took his place as bo'sun.

* * * * *

A few days later we were at anchor at Mākin Island, twenty-five miles distant from the great atoll of Butaritari. And there for three days longer we remained. The *Kaspar* was inside the big atoll, and Jim Watkins was getting from five to ten "recruits" every day. We knew all that was going on, for every evening the king of Butaritari despatched a native boat to us, telling us the events of that day, and also bringing us a message from our trusty friend, Joe King. On the evening of the third day we received a letter from him:—

"Everything is working fine. The king and his chiefs think it a rattling good joke, though at first they were inclined to shoot Mr. Watkins and chase the brig out of the lagoon. There are now one hundred and seventy-five recruits on board, and we sail to-morrow an hour after sunrise—a full ship. Watkins has paid the king and chiefs \$1,000 cash, and \$750 in trade goods as an advance against the recruits' wages for three years. Over three hundred other natives—men, women and children, are coming on board 'to say good-bye to their relatives,' and as soon as the brig is clear of the passage the fun will begin. Baum has not the ghost of an idea that the *Cyprus* is at Mākin. He thinks that she is piled up somewhere in the Tokelau Group."

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That evening we left Mākin, and, under easy sail, stood across to the west side of Butaritari to the main ship passage, anchoring with a kedge under the lee of a small but well wooded island, where we could not be seen from the mainland. We had everything in readiness to receive a number of passengers—one hundred and seventy-five to wit; our boats were lowered, and although we did not anticipate any serious trouble, we kept our arms at hand in case they were wanted.

At daylight one of our crew climbed a cocoanut tree on the little island and scanned the lagoon. He returned and reported that the *Kaspar*, surrounded by a swarm of native boats, was heaving up, and with the light morning breeze and a strong ebb, ought to be in the passage in half-an-hour.

It seemed hours to us before we caught sight of her. With all canvas set she made a fine picture as she raced through the passage, dead before the wind, and a six-knot current roaring and racing with her. Then, once out of the passage, she brought to, so as to let the relatives and friends of the "recruits," that Watkins thought he had so cleverly obtained, get into their boats and go ashore.

And at the same moment the *Cyprus* slid out from the screen of the little island and stood over to the brig.

The instant the swarm of brown-skinned savages who thronged her decks and lower rigging saw us, a wild yell burst from them and an extraordinary scene occurred. A number of them rushed aft, and seized

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and held Baum, his officers and Watkins; others ran to the wheel and threw the brig back, and at the same time let go all the braces and tacks and sheets; the falls of her three boats were cut, and the boats let drop into the water with shouts of triumph. Then as the latter drifted away towards the surf thundering on the reef, every native on board—man, woman and child—leapt overboard, some getting into their own boats, others swimming for the little island, and others—the one hundred and seventy-five "recruits"—making for the *Cyprus*, whose boats met them, picking up some of the women, but letting the men swim to the schooner.

The whole affair was over in half-an-hour. Baum and his officers and crew were certainly roughly handled, especially Watkins, but no one of them was seriously injured, and the natives, on the whole, behaved very well, when it is remembered that Baum and Watkins had grossly deceived their "recruits." The brig's crew (Germans) were terrified out of their wits, but Baum was a good sailor man, and managed to save his ship from going on shore, though for some time she was in fearful confusion. But he lost all three boats, which were smashed to matchwood on the reef. Meanwhile, we on the *Cyprus* had received all our "recruits." Not a single one was missing—one hundred and seventeen men and fifty-eight women and children. They, although wildly excited at first, quickly calmed down once they found themselves on board, and the women and children at once went to their quarters in the "'tween decks,"

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where they found an ample supply of food awaiting them. The men we allowed to remain on the main deck—to jeer at and curse, in their vigorous Gilbert Island fashion, the skipper and “recruiter” of the German brig—the two men who would have taken them to the hated German plantations in Samoa instead of to Tahiti.

Among the first to reach the *Cyprus* was Joe King, and I had been highly amused at his coolness. When the natives obtained possession of the brig, he appeared on the poop carrying a large bundle tied up in his oilskin coat. This he quietly threw overboard, and then followed it. Nothing in it was wetted—much to his satisfaction.

The *Kaspar* presently signalled to us that she wished to speak. She was “in distress,” and Captain Baum was standing by the rail as we went about, and passed close under his ship’s stern. His bearded face was cut and bleeding, and his clothing hung about him in strips.

“What do you want?” asked Mackenzie, curtly.

“Send me back my steward,” he replied hoarsely; “some of my people are injured, and I must have that man back.”

“Then come and get him—if you can,” shouted Mackenzie fiercely. “Ah, you scoundrel! Do you know where my second mate is now? He is on Pukapuka Island, counting over his money! We have done very well with you, mein Herr Baum—got a nice lot of “recruits” without any trouble, and without spending a cent. And a pretty mess *you* are

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in! You can't go back into Butaritari lagoon, for the people swear that they will cut your head off if you ever show up again. Good-bye, my friend." Then he paused and called out an order :

"Let draw there, for'ard."

And then, as the *Cyprus* gathered way on her, we all, white men and brown, gave the cheer of the old *Bounty* mutineers when they set Bligh adrift.

"Hurrah for Tahiti!"

A STRANGE RENCONTRE

A STRANGE RENCONTRE

A SEVERE attack of malarial fever contracted in New Britain (North-Western Pacific) compelled me to throw up my employment and return to New South Wales to recover my shattered health. I was given four months' leave, and at the end of that time was to report myself at Sydney, to there join a vessel to be engaged in the Kanaka labour trade as "recruiter"—a position I much preferred, with all its risks and worries, to that of a trader. This was the second occasion on which I had to adopt this course.

After spending a week in Sydney I took passage in a steamer running to the northern rivers of the colony, where I had relatives and many friends living in the various townships—Grafton, Casino, Kempsey, etc. Here I spent two months very pleasantly, wandering about from place to place, meeting with unbounded hospitality, getting splendid fishing and shooting, and recovering my health rapidly.

At the end of ten weeks I found myself at Kempsey, a thriving country town on the Macleay River, where my youngest sister, who was married to a Government official, was living. But much as I should have liked to have remained with her for a couple of weeks, my visit had to be cut short, for the place

A Strange Rencontre

did not agree with me ; it was insufferably hot, and I had recurrent attacks of ague. So I decided to proceed to Port Macquarie on the Hastings River, a delightful old town of the early convict days, stay there for a week, and then take the steamer for Sydney. The only way of getting to Port Macquarie from Kempsey was by coach or horseback. Coaches I loathed, and riding through the monotonous bush I disliked almost as much, so I decided to "tramp" it—a distance of seventy miles—along the coast.

A river drogher took me from Kempsey to the Macleay River Heads, where I landed and began my first day's journey, which for the first ten miles was along a lovely hard beach—the shore of Trial Bay. I was in light marching order and good spirits, for the brisk sea-breeze seemed to put new life into me, and I felt that I could very easily do twenty miles by sunset, and reach my first camping place—a spot ten miles to the south of Smoky Cape—where there was a stream of fresh water and good fishing and shooting. For I was in no hurry, and meant to do my tramp leisurely. I had with me my gun and ammunition, a billy can, tea, sugar and salt, some ship biscuits, my fishing tackle, and a light water-proof overcoat. The weather was fine and warm, and I intended to make a four or five days' journey of it, camping out every night instead of staying at any of the few settlers' homesteads that were in the vicinity of my line of march. The whole of that part of the coast for more than a hundred miles was very familiar to me, for I was born in the district,

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and knew every mile—I was going to say yard—of it.

Arriving at my camping place an hour before sunset, I lit a fire and put the billy can on to boil for tea; then, going to the beach at the mouth of the stream, dug some pippies (cockles) out of the sand, baited my line, and in five minutes had caught two fine whiting for my supper. An hour later I was sound asleep, and did not awake till dawn.

After a bathe in the stream, and breakfast, I started off again, and, leaving the beach, made a *détour* inland through the scrub. I wanted to visit an old, abandoned selection, situated on what in years gone by had been the main coastal road between Kempsey and Port Macquarie. The slab-built house had long since fallen to ruin and the fencing been destroyed by a bush fire, but the orchard and vineyard had escaped, and, though now much overgrown with scrub, the orange, lemon, and other fruit trees and the grape vines still bore fruit plentifully, and now was the month (February) when the black "Isabella" grapes especially would be fully ripe. Then, too, quite near the deserted house was a swamp, or rather shallow lake, which afforded fine shooting. The place was very rarely visited, except by a few wandering aborigines, and as five years had passed since I had last seen it, and I liked its solitude and quiet, I determined to spend the day and night there, and enjoy myself—*solus*.

Two hours' walking through the bush — first through scrub and then under the silent, lofty gum

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tree forest—brought me to the lonely house, and throwing down my gun and swag and a brace of Wonga pigeons I had shot on the way, I was soon revelling amidst the grape vines, which were covered with heavy bunches of delicious fruit. Then, after picking some large bunches and a few rough-skinned sweet lemons, I was returning to the house for a short rest before sallying out again with my gun, when I saw something that, as the novelists say, “transfixed” me with astonishment: on the steps of the ruined house was seated a young and well-dressed woman.

As I raised my hat, she rose, and bade me “good morning” in a very pleasant voice, and then added:

“May I rest here a little while? I am very tired.”

“Oh, most certainly,” I replied quickly, and with sympathy, for she seemed exhausted with the heat, although it was not yet ten o'clock; “but will you not come inside out of the sun, and I will try and find you some kind of a seat?”

“Thank you, can you give me a drink of water—I am so dreadfully thirsty?”

“Not for a little while, I am sorry to say. There is a well here, but it may now be dry. However, if it is not, I can soon get you some cool water. Meanwhile, will you have some of these grapes? They are cool, for I picked them from underneath the vines, where the sun has not touched them.”

She took a bunch of grapes and ate eagerly, and I saw that her sun-tanned hands were trembling.

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“Will you have to go very far for the water?” she asked nervously.

“Oh, no,” I replied; “the well is just at the back, and all I have to do is to lower my billy can down with my fishing-line.”

There was some water in the well, and I soon gave her a drink. Then I asked her if she would like some tea, and also something to eat.

“It is very kind of you. I am certainly very hungry.”

Picking up a pigeon, I was beginning to pluck it, when she eagerly begged me to let her do it. Whilst she was thus engaged I made a fire to grill the birds and make the tea, studiously refraining from asking her any questions, though I was racking my brains, wondering who this extremely handsome, well-dressed young woman could be, and how she came to be in this lonely part of the coast. She was about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, and was not only handsome—as distinct from “pretty”—but looked and spoke like a lady by birth and education. Her dress was a grey tailor-made costume, and fitted her graceful figure perfectly, and altogether she was what women would call stylish. But what struck me as being peculiar was the way in which her face and hands were tanned by the sun—she looked like a gipsy.

Presently she asked me a question which astonished me :

“Where does this road lead?”

“To Kempsey—it is the old coast road, and

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leads into the new one about sixteen miles from here.”

“And how far is Kempsey?”

“Another sixteen or seventeen miles after you reach the junction of the old and new roads.

“Is it a large town?”

“Yes, it is the principal town of the district.”

“You will think it very strange of me asking you so many questions, but,” and her voice quavered, “I—I am in a very awkward position, and I am sure that—that you will not question me.”

“Most certainly not. But I shall be only too glad to be of any assistance to you.”

“Thank you. Now, will you tell me what to do? I want to get to this town, Kempsey, as quickly as possible. I have money, and can pay my way along the road. Of course I know I cannot get there to-day.”

“Quite impossible. But at the junction of the roads there is the house of a selector named Whelan, where you can stay for the night. He and his family are very nice, kind people, and will treat you well. I will give you a note to Whelan. He knows me very well, and will drive you into Kempsey. But do not offer him any money. And I will tell him to ask you no questions.”

Dropping the pigeon she was plucking, she pressed her hands to her bosom, and wept silently for a few minutes. Then she dried her eyes vigorously with her handkerchief, and asked me if I knew of a respectable and not too expensive hotel at Kempsey where she could stay.

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“Yes, ask Pat Whelan to take you to Mrs. Drew’s ‘River Hotel.’ Mrs. Drew is a motherly old woman, and will make you comfortable. Now, would you like me to accompany you as far as Whelan’s place?”

“Oh, no, no, thank you. I am not afraid. I can easily walk the sixteen miles. I have some biscuits here,” and she pointed to a small leather bag beside her, “so shall not want food; “is there water on the road?”

I told her that there were many swamps, but that the water would be hot and disagreeable, and suggested she should put some lemons in her bag. Then, the two birds being cooked, and the tea made, I had the pleasure of seeing her make a satisfactory meal. As she ate, I wrote a pencilled note to Whelan on a page of my note-book.

Then, seeing that she was nervously anxious to resume her journey, I got the lemons and some small, compact bunches of grapes, which she placed in her bag, and then she rose and extended her hand.

“You have been very good to me; I shall always remember your kindness with gratitude. May I ask another favour of you?”

“Certainly.”

“If you meet anyone—and I think you may—and—and if you are asked if you have seen me, will you say ‘No.’”

“Of course—you may depend on me.”

I walked with her through the abandoned orchard, and put her on the road, cautioning her on no

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account to take any turn-offs, but keep steadily on the wide road, which, though much overgrown with long grass, was wide and plainly defined. Then once more she gave me her hand, and we parted.

* * * * *

Ten days later I was in Sydney, and was at once plunged into work, for the vessel to which I was appointed was sailing immediately—a fortnight earlier than had been intended. I had scarcely time to get my own outfit together, and make a few hurried calls on friends, and on the third day after reaching Sydney we were at sea, bound for Levuka, the then capital of Fiji, where we were to get our “permit” to engage in the Polynesian labour trade.

But within a few hours after we were clear of Sydney Heads I had leisure to open my batch of newspapers, and my attention was at once drawn to a series of articles under the heading of “*The Sovereign of the Seas Tragedy*,” and in ten minutes I knew who it was whom I had met. And the strangest part of it all to me was that a second woman who was involved in the terrible drama was well known to me—Alice Taylor, the daughter of the head-keeper of the lighthouse on Great Barrier Island, on the east coast of New Zealand. Twice when returning to Auckland from cruises in the South Seas our vessel had anchored under the lee of Great Barrier Island, and the skipper and I had spent several evenings with the Taylor family, and I well remembered a pretty, fair-haired girl, who was then twelve or fourteen years of age—his daughter Alice.

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The *Sovereign of the Seas* was a well-known vessel on the east coast of New Zealand. She was a fine, handsome cutter of forty tons or so, was renowned for her speed, and was engaged in the coastal trade between Auckland and the various small ports in the Hauraki Gulf and the east coast. Her complement consisted of four men—captain, mate, and two A.B.'s.

At the time of the opening of the tragedy, the master and mate were two young men well known in Auckland maritime circles; their names were Caffrey and Penn. Both were excellent seamen and very familiar with the coast of New Zealand, but neither of them could navigate, and although they both had the reputation of being hot-tempered, reckless and daring, they were trusted by their employers, and no one imagined that either of them could so easily plunge himself into crime.

The cutter had several times been chartered by the Government to convey stores to the lighthouse on Great Barrier Island, and Caffrey—a passionate and susceptible Irishman—fell violently in love with the light-keeper's daughter. But the girl did not respond to his advances—she was then only nineteen years of age, and her father did not at all approve of him as a suitor, for stories had reached the old man of his wild doings in Auckland.

Time after time Caffrey pressed the girl vehemently to become his wife, declaring he could not live without her. Undaunted by her steady refusals, he one day swore that he would yet make her yield, and this

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so terrified her that a scene occurred between the young captain and the old light-keeper, and the former was forbidden ever to set foot in the house again. He left with the significant threat that he would come but once more and not leave unsatisfied. Possibly it was the fear of his returning that induced the girl to accept one of her father's under light-keepers for a husband—a young man who had known her from her infancy, and a few months later they were married.

Caffrey heard of it, and set his brain to work to devise a plan to obtain possession of the woman he loved by force. But he said nothing to anyone on the subject, except his shipmate Penn. Him he gradually took into his confidence, and Penn, over whom he had a great influence, swore to stand by his comrade. But nearly a year passed before the plan could be attempted, and by this time the young woman was the mother of an infant; and was happy, and felt secure under the protection of her husband.

Penn, who was a fine, handsome young man, had the more easily fallen under Caffrey's evil influence through his being deeply attached to a young woman of superior birth and attainments whom he had met casually in Auckland, and taken under his protection. Her surname does not matter—let me simply call her by her Christian name of "Grace." What her past may have been before she met Penn also does not matter. She suffered deeply for the man she loved, and, whatever her faults may have been, she was loyal and true to the source of her misery, and

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refused to betray him or his companion to the arm of the law, when slowly but surely she saw it stretching towards them, while she herself was in safety and unsuspected, and resolved to lead a straight and better life and bury her wretched past by living in obscurity as a domestic servant. But fate willed otherwise, and the poor creature was dragged into the fierce and relentless light of publicity as a "notorious and daring adventuress," and the "accomplice of two desperate pirates, one of whom was a cruel murderer."

This was the girl whom I had met at the old abandoned selection only a few days previously.

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Caffrey's was the master mind. Penn and "Grace" were merely his pawns; but still he could not do without them, for Penn insisted that wherever he went the girl must come with him—he would not be parted from her, nor she from him.

The time came when the *Sovereign of the Seas* had to take a valuable general cargo to Russell, the principal town of the Bay of Islands, on the east coast. Great Barrier Island lay midway between that place and Auckland, and now Caffrey unfolded his plan openly before Penn.

They were to get rid of the two A.B.'s on board at the island of Kawau, near Auckland, by sending them on shore to buy a sheep from Sir George Grey's estate there. Then, once free of the two seamen, Caffrey would make for Great Barrier Island, seize Taylor's daughter, and then set sail for the west

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coast of South America, where, he assured Penn, they could sell the vessel and cargo, and live happily ever afterwards without fear of future detection.

It was a wild, mad idea, either born of Caffrey's ignorance, or else from his resolve to fulfil his threat of carrying off the lighthouse-keeper's daughter at any cost. Anyway, the girl Grace, who believed the tales of her lover and Caffrey that they were the owners of the *Sovereign of the Seas*, became an innocent accomplice, and entered eagerly into the project.

Penn rowed the two sailors on shore at Kawai, and told them that he would return for them in a few hours, after they had brought down the sheep. Returning on board, the cutter made sail for Great Barrier Island.

It was a dark, rainy night, and blowing hard from the east, when the cutter silently anchored under the lee of the island, and Caffrey, accompanied by Grace (who was to wait in the boat) went on shore in the little dinghy.

Stealing past the lighthouse (where all three keepers were on duty) in the blinding rain, he made his way to the lighthouse-keepers' houses. He knew the particular dwelling in which the young wife lived, and soon discovered her, seated at the fire, nursing her baby. Without a feeling of pity he opened the door, and stood before her.

Snatching the child from her, he tossed it on a couch, and then seizing the terrified mother by her wrist, he bade her come with him.

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Scream after scream burst from her as she struggled fiercely with her would-be abductor, but no one heard her cries, owing to the noise of the wind and rain, and in a few moments more he would have carried her off.

It so happened, however, that at that moment her father came running along through the rain to get a cup of coffee, and saw his daughter struggling madly in the doorway with her persecutor. He sprang upon him, and seized him by the throat, and then Caffrey, releasing his hold of the girl, drew his revolver, and shot the old man through the heart, as the poor mother, frantic with terror, seized her baby, darted out by the back door, and fled for help to the lighthouse.

Foiled in his purpose, and recognising the futility of pursuit, the murderer ran back to the boat, pushed off, and gained the cutter. The girl Grace did not learn till long after of the tragedy—Caffrey merely telling her that he been “balked.”

The cutter at once put to sea, and then, for over a week, Caffrey and Penn tried to beat against a heavy easterly gale with the intention of carrying out their South American idea. But it was in vain, and ten days later the *Sovereign of the Seas* was sighted off the North Cape of New Zealand, and it was supposed that Caffrey was making for the South Sea Islands.

That was the news that, so far, had been cabled by the New Zealand to the Sydney press; and some months elapsed before I was able to get further details.

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For six weeks the cutter was subjected to a harassing experience. The elements seemed to conspire against her. Gale followed gale, and Caffrey, finding it impossible to reach any of the South Sea Islands, recklessly bore away for the Australian coast, intending to land at some lonely part where he and his companions could separate. But long before this the Australian and Fijian police were on the alert, and a keen watch was being kept.

Five weeks after the lighthouse tragedy the cutter was off the coast of New South Wales—between the Manning River Heads and Smoky Cape, but the continuous bad weather prevented her finding a refuge on a coast that was quite unknown to either of the men, and so Caffrey kept a long way off the land.

At last the south-easterly gale moderated, and the cutter was run in under the land during the night, and anchored in deep water in a small space surrounded by high rocks, near Crescent Head. From the land she could not be seen, but, to make sure, before she was scuttled, her topmast was struck. Previous to this, however, some provisions, firearms, etc., were taken on shore and hidden in dense scrub, where Grace was left, with a tent made from a sail. Then, after the cutter was sunk, as well as the dinghy, the two men joined her. And for some days they thus remained—not daring to show themselves, for early one morning Penn had seen two mounted troopers trotting along the beach. Both he and Caffrey were well armed, and had agreed never to allow themselves to be taken alive.

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One night the girl heard the two men quarrelling, and then learned of the murder of the old light-keeper. Horrified, she resolved to leave them at the first opportunity. That they had pirated the cutter she had known long before, and imagined it was for that offence alone they so feared capture.

On the following morning, when Penn was away, looking for fresh water, Caffrey boldly professed his affection for Grace, and said that Penn was in the way, and it would be better to put him out of the way by shooting him and burying his body in the scrub. The girl pleaded for time—"to think it over"—and promised the cruel wretch not to betray his designs to her lover. But that night she contrived to let Penn know of his deadly danger; and then they silently stole away from the sleeping Caffrey, and struck deep into the bush, walking till past daylight, when they came to a track—or rather a bush road.

Here the two, after a long conversation, resolved to part, and part they did—Penn going to the south, and the girl to the north.

Meanwhile, the Mounted Police, aided by black trackers, were scouring the district far and wide. Some wreckage had come on shore on the beaches in the vicinity of Smoky Cape and Crescent Head, and amongst other articles were a number of cases of kerosene oil. And it was known that, among other cargo, the cutter had fifty cases of this article on board. So, slowly but surely, the scattered cordon of police, guided by the searching eyes of the

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black tracker troopers, were drawing nearer to the coast, where they knew their quarry lay.

Long afterwards I received a letter from my sister at Kempsey in which she told me that the girl had reached that town :

“ She (Grace ——) arrived at one of the hotels in the evening, and on the following morning, hearing that Dr. Casement was in want of a housemaid, went to him and was engaged, as although she said she could show no ‘references’ she seemed such a quiet, respectable, and even lady-like girl . . . She was arrested after Penn was taken; but before Caffrey was captured at his ‘fort’.”

Abandoned by his companions, Caffrey evidently thought himself betrayed, and he removed all his belongings—provisions, an ample supply of firearms and ammunition, tools, etc., to a still denser scrub some miles distant. Here he set to work, dug out a huge pit, and set the face of it round with a most perfectly constructed *chevaux de frise* of sharp-pointed saplings so closely placed together that he, well-armed as he was, could withstand an attack for a considerable time.

But he had made one fatal mistake. His hiding place was a mile distant from the nearest water, and this led to his capture. A black tracker came across the waterhole from whence the murderer obtained his supply, followed his footsteps to within sight of his lair, and then silently went off and reported to the officer in command of the police. That night a close cordon was drawn around the

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“fort,” but the watchers were not within sight of it. To have attempted to rush the *chevaux de frise* meant useless bloodshed.

And so for two days and nights they waited.

Then, one morning, Caffrey, with a brace of revolvers in his belt, came out carrying an iron kettle for water. And suddenly, as he walked under the gloomy shade of the trees, a barefooted trooper sprang upon his back and bore him to the ground. Then the handcuffs clicked, and his liberty—and practically his life—were gone. For within two months he was tried at Wellington, in New Zealand, and went to the gallows—defiant and unrepentant to the last.

Penn was captured by a young member of the New South Wales Mounted Police, who, disguised as a “swagman” (*i.e.*, a bushman looking for work and carrying his swag of blanket, etc.), came across his quarry on a punt on the Hastings River, near Port Macquarie. Penn had found employment on the punt on account of his handiness as a “sailor man,” and when the pseudo-swagman presented a revolver at his head and told him to hold out his hands for the handcuffs, he quietly yielded.

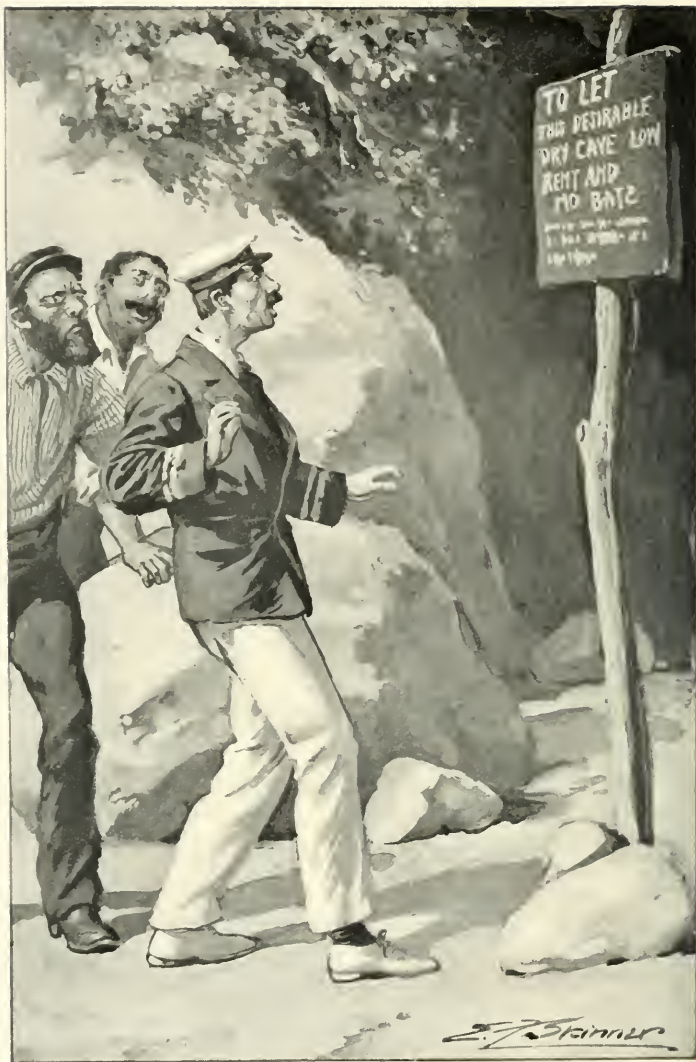
What Penn’s sentence was I cannot now remember—for all this happened so many years ago that I have to write largely from memory. But it was certainly a very heavy one of penal servitude for a long term of years for being concerned in the piracy of the *Sovereign of the Seas*.

What became of the girl Grace I do not know. Many offers of monetary assistance and even of

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marriage were made to her, both in Sydney and in New Zealand. She declined them all. After the trial of Caffrey and Penn she disappeared, and went—one dreads to think where. The glare and horror of the street may have been her fate.

“CROWLEY AND DRAKE, LIMITED



HE WAS SOON ABEAST OF THE CAVE; AND THEN STOOD
AND GASPED WITH OPEN MOUTH.

“CROWLEY AND DRAKE, LIMITED”

DRAKE, ex-supercargo of the island trading barque *Reconnaissance*, had been in Sydney for four months “down on his luck” when, early one Saturday morning, a letter that made him feel hopeful was delivered to him.

It was from a firm of merchants who had recently extended their Australian business to the South Sea Islands, and ran as follows:—“Dear Sir. Our Mr. James Twining will be glad to see you on Saturday, at 2.30 p.m. with regard to your undertaking the general managership of our recently established business at Nukualofa, Tonga Islands. Yours truly, Twining and Whasker.”

Mr. Thomas Drake sat down on his bed, lit his pipe, and meditated. Then he rose, went to the dressing-table, and counted all the money in his purse; it amounted to £14 10s. Then he examined the butt of his cheque book, and found that he had a balance of £17 in the bank.

“Thirty-one ten,” he said to himself as he walked to his bedroom window and gazed into sunlit George Street, “and I have my month’s bill to pay Mrs. Piper on Monday—that’ll be at least £16. Then

“Crowley and Drake, Limited”

there's Neild to pay. I must pay him—he's a good fellow, and not too flourishing. I can call that £20. That leaves me £4 10s. to leeward. If I don't get this berth from Twining and Whasker, I shall have to go to the three-ball shop with my watch and guns.”

Finishing dressing, he went downstairs to the hotel dining-room, ate his breakfast, and then scanned the shipping news in the *Herald*.

Presently the landlady, old Mrs. Piper, entered as usual for a chat with her lodger, whom she had known from his boyhood. She was a cheerful, kindly old soul, whose hotel was much resorted to by the skippers, supercargoes, and others concerned in the South Sea Islands trade, and when young Tom Drake returned to Sydney in the *Reconnaissance*, from a long cruise, ill with fever, and with two broken ribs, sustained by the capsizing of a boat on the reef at Ysabel Island, she nursed and tended him, as Dr. Neild said, like his own mother. He was now quite recovered, and for the past six weeks had been trying for another berth as supercargo in a trading vessel, or as “recruiter” in the Kanaka labour traffic. Then he one day heard that Twining and Whasker's manager at Nukualofa had resigned, and wrote to the firm, asking for an interview. The firm had not a good reputation for liberality to the captains and the traders in their employ, but Drake was tired of inactivity, and, his money being practically finished, he resolved to accept the position—if he could get it.

“Crowley and Drake, Limited”

“Good morning, Mrs. Piper; how are you? I say, look here at this note from T. and W.,” and he handed her the missive.

Mrs. Piper read it, and sniffed.

“They are a mean lot. Keep their office open and clerks at work on a Saturday afternoon. Be careful of what you do with them, Tom. They are sharks.”

“So I have heard, mother. But if they get a bite out of me, I’ll forgive them.”

A little before 2.30 p.m., as Drake was entering the firm’s office, he met a man coming out—a man he had not seen for two years—old Captain Crowley, one of the best-known men in the South Seas. His weather-beaten face was flushed with anger, and his short, stubbly beard seemed to bristle with indignation. But the moment he was accosted by the young man the steely grey eyes lit up with pleasure, and he shook his hand warmly.

“Well, Tom, my lad, how are you?” he bawled. “I’m mighty glad to see you again, my boy. I’m just back from the Solomons and New Hebrides with a cargo of copra for these sanctimonious thieves here,” and he jerked his thumb in the direction of a door on which was written, “Mr. James Twining: Private Office.”

The staff of busy clerks in the main office looked at one another, and exchanged smiles and winks, for as the door of the private office was open, and both Mr. Twining and Mr. Whasker were within, those gentlemen could not have failed to hear the old skipper’s remarks—as he intended they should.

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Drake smiled also—“Will you wait for me, captain? I don't think I'll be long. I have an appointment with Mr. Twining. As soon as I have seen him, you must come with me to Mrs. Piper's, and we can have a long yarn.”

“Right you are, my lad—I'll wait. My time is my own now. I've just got the 'run,' and have been giving those two bilks in there a bit of my mind. I wouldn't sail another ship for 'em if I had to go to sleep hungry for a month o' Sundays—the swabs,” and he glared at the clerks individually, and then collectively, as he pulled out and lit a huge cigar.

Drake tapped at Mr. Twining's door, and a thin rasping voice bade him come in.

Ten minutes later he, too, came out with a flushed face; then stopped suddenly, turned back, and gently but quickly pushed the door wide open, and addressed Mr. Twining.

“Mr. James Twining, I daresay that you heard the remarks made about you and your partner just now by Captain Crowley. He said that you were a pair of sanctimonious thieves. I have known him for ten years, and all his friends and I regard him as an exceedingly truthful man, and a remarkably keen judge of character. Good morning.”

Then he strode to the entrance door, where Crowley was waiting, linked his arm in his, and the two went down the marble steps into the street.

“What's wrong, Tom, my joker? You don't look as if you was full up to the chin of lovin'-kindness.”

The supercargo smiled grimly—“I'll be all right

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presently. I went to see Twining about taking charge of his Tonga business. He had a two years' agreement already drawn out, and began reading it out to me in a hurried, quacking sort of a mumble. I stopped him, and said I would read it myself. I did. It was a most one-sided affair, whereby I was to bind myself to all sorts of heavy responsibilities, and work like a nigger for the pay of a Chinaman. I tossed it back to him without a word, got up, and walked out. But I went back, and said a few words to him at the door.”

“I heard you, my boy; I heard you. Nothing like bein' outspoken at the proper time. Now, I've been with 'em for eighteen months—ever since they started trading, and they have done well by me. But I can never get the same crew to ship for a second voyage—the poor beggars never got enough food to eat, and what they did get was bad. This morning I went to draw my pay, and made a complaint. Twining snarled at me, and said he was not going to provide luxuries, then he added that he would have to dock my wages by £3 a month, as business was bad. This got my monkey up, and I let out at him, and he gave me the sack there and then. And now here I am without a ship again. But, Tom, my boy, I don't care a rap. I've got something up my sleeve that makes me chuckle when I think of it. Now, I'll take you into the secret, and what is more, you shall stand in with me, for you are of the right sort, and I can trust you. And you want a berth, don't you?”

“I do. I am broke.”

“Crowley and Drake, Limited”

“Well, Tom, you’ll soon be flush, and, all going well, we’ll be back in Sydney by Christmas worth a tidy sum of money. I know where we can honestly put our hands on a cargo of cut sandalwood, worth £5,000 at least. It is stowed neatly in one lump, and has been lying there, I daresay, for more than thirty years. The men who put it there must be dead long ago, or else it wouldn’t be there. Now all I want is to charter a vessel for three months, but the trouble is that I haven’t enough cash to do it. I did intend to lie low for another six months, and keep in with Twining and Whasker, which would have put another £180 into my pocket. I’ve got £300, and £200 more will be enough. There are plenty of vessels now offering for charter at low rates, and I can get one for £100 to £150 a month. You will come with me as mate, and five hands will be enough. I’ll give you £12 a month, and 10 per cent. of the value of the cargo, landed here in Sydney. Is it a deal?”

“There is my hand on it—‘Crowley and Drake, Limited’—very limited.”

“Right. Now, we’ll have a drink, and I’ll tell you the yarn, but first of all I must tell you that we must lose no time in trying to raise that £200, and get away quickly, because, to tell you the truth, I’m just a bit afraid that my mate—who is a crawling sneak, and a spy of Twining’s—has seen that sandalwood as well as myself. If he has, he is bound to have told Twining—who is his uncle. Now, Tom, where on earth are we to raise that two hundred quid? Do

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you know of anyone who would lend it to us on our bare word for security, and a promise to pay, say 5 per cent. on the value of the sandalwood when sold?”

Drake thought for a few moments. “Yes; there is one person, and one only whom I know, who would lend us the money on our I.O.U.’s alone—and that is old Mrs. Piper.”

“Good. I’ll tell her all about our plans presently. Now for my yarn. Six weeks ago I put into a bay on the south side of San Christoval, and anchored off a little island, marked Cone Rocks on the chart. It is pretty high, well wooded, surrounded by a reef, uninhabited, and about two miles from the mainland and six from Makira Bay, the nearest inhabited place on the mainland. Seeing some pigeons flying about the trees, I took my gun, and went on shore, shot some, and then had a look around. The interior is very rocky, full of caves, as dry as a bone, and hard to see on account of the thorny undergrowth growing in front of them. At the end of a rough narrow track I came to the largest one of all. It has a big overhanging ledge, about six feet from the ground, with a narrow entrance, blocked with thick thorny scrub. I broke a passage through and looked inside, but could see nothing, owing to it being so dark. Then I struck a match and went in, and nearly jumped out of my boots with astonishment—the whole cave from ground to roof was packed with sandalwood logs! I could only see the front face of the pile, which is forty feet long by eight feet high,

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and stowed as closely as you possibly can stow sandalwood. After some trouble, I managed to squeeze myself along for three or four yards between one end of the stack and the side of the cave, and clambered up until my head touched the roof. Then I struck another match, and saw that the wood reached right along to the back. It made my mouth water to look at it, Tom! There are certainly not less than three hundred tons—maybe four. How it came to be there I can only guess. In the ‘forties’ and ‘fifties’ there were a good many sandalwood ships lost—some cut off by the natives, and some wrecked. Perhaps one was lost on this island, and the crew stowed the wood in this cave for safety, and then took to the boats, went to the mainland, and were all killed and eaten by the natives. As far as I know, the first white man that came to live at Makira was old Jimmy Goff; that was in 1837 or 1847, and he is living there still, so it must have been put there before he came, or it wouldn’t be there now. And it is equally certain that the Makira natives don’t know anything about it—I’ve satisfied myself about that.

“I went off to the ship again, intending to sail right away, but in the afternoon it fell a dead calm, and continued all night. The next morning it was still calm, and the mate asked me if he could take the dinghy and go fishing near the reef. Of course I said Yes, and he went off with two hands. After he had gone I was annoyed to learn that he had taken his gun, and, sure enough, he landed on the island, and began shooting, leaving the crew to fish.

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At dinner time he came back with a few birds and some fish. I asked him casually if he had had a look round the island, and seen any caves. No, he said, he hadn't noticed any caves—he was too set on his shooting. Now, I can't help being a bit uneasy. All the way up to Sydney he was like a hen on a hot griddle, carrying on all the sail possible when it was his watch on deck, and sulking when I asked him if he wanted to take the sticks out of the ship. Then as soon as we anchored in port, he sent a letter on shore to his uncle by the health officer's boat. I saw the address.”

“It does look suspicious,” said Drake, thoughtfully, “and perhaps it may account for old Twining picking a quarrel with you, so as to get rid of you. Anyway, we must lose no time. Let us see Mrs. Piper.”

Mrs. Piper was in her sitting-room, and when the two men told her that they had come to speak to her on important business, she closed the door, and bade them be seated. Then Crowley told his story, and asked her if she would lend them £200. For answer she went to her desk, took out her cheque book, filled in a cheque, folded and enclosed it in an envelope, and handed it to them.

“There is the cheque,” she said, with a beaming smile, “and although you can't cash it until Monday, it may help you to do business this afternoon, in the way of getting a ship. But I've made it £400. Now get away . . . there, don't say any more, but come back to supper at seven o'clock, and tell me what luck you have had.”

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At six o'clock they returned to the hotel highly elated, having chartered an old timber brig, the *Maria*, of 400 tons. She was ready for sea, and her skipper, who was also owner, was to hand her over to them on Monday morning. During Sunday, Crowley picked up a crew of six good men, and by three o'clock on Monday afternoon they had signed articles and were at work on board under Drake, whilst the energetic Crowley was buying stores and provisions, which, by dusk, were on board. Crowley appeared during supper, bringing news of importance—his late command, the brigantine *Aurelia*, was getting ready for sea, and was taking in ballast. He had met his former second mate, who had told him that Willis (Twining's nephew) had been appointed captain, and that he and his uncle were rushing things to get the *Aurelia* away as quickly as possible, and that she was leaving in ballast.

“That settles it, Tom,” added Crowley. “Willis has seen that sandalwood. Else why should the firm send an island trading vessel away in ballast?”

Working all night, the brig was made ready for sea by the morning, and at ten o'clock Crowley went on shore to clear at the Customs, “in ballast, for Mercury Bay, N. Z.” And some hours later, when Captain Willis went there with a similar object, he was surprised to learn that the brig *Maria*, Peter Crowley, master, had cleared in the morning for Mercury Bay, and had sailed at noon. When he communicated this to Messrs Twining and Whasker, those astute

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gentlemen began to feel uneasy. Was it possible, they asked, that Crowley, too, had seen the hidden sandalwood, and that his clearing for Mercury Bay was only a blind? Captain Willis emphatically assured them that he was sure he had not. If he had, he asked, why was the old man so mad at being dismissed by the firm? Was it likely he would want to continue in their employ when there was a shipload of valuable sandalwood to be had for the taking? If he had seen it he would soon have got someone in Sydney to finance him in chartering a ship.

“And besides that,” Willis went on to say, “I met old Murphy, the owner of the *Maria*, at the Exchange, and pumped him. He told me that as he wanted a few months’ spell on shore, he had put Crowley in charge. So there is nothing to be frightened at.”

* * * * *

The race is not always to the swift, and although Captain Willis in the *Aurelia* was not racing the *Maria*, which he naturally imagined (if he thought of her at all) was steering in the very opposite direction to himself, he did his utmost to make a quick passage to San Christoval. But although the *Aurelia* was a fast vessel, and the *Maria* a slow one, Willis had not the experience of old Crowley, and made a fatal mistake—he stood too far to the eastward so as to catch the south-east “trades” off Norfolk Island, and passed east of the New Hebrides; whereas Crowley, knowing that the rainy season had set in, and that

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the south-east “trade” would be very fickle, whilst he could be certain of westerly weather, laid a straight course from Sydney of N.N.E., and reached San Christoval eleven days before the *Aurelia*.

Crowley anchored in seven fathoms on the east side of the little island, close in to the shore at a spot where access to the cave was much easier than on the west or ocean side, and where also the ship could not be seen except from the mainland. Work was at once begun, and for eight days everyone on board, except the ship's cook, toiled hard from dawn till dark shipping and stowing the sandalwood. Both Drake and Crowley had promised the hands a liberal bonus if the wood was got on board in quick time, and the men worked splendidly. Then, when their labours were completed, they were given two days' spell—with the exception of one man, who kept a look-out on the highest part of the island, and was relieved every four hours.

On the eleventh day the look-out fired two shots, the signal that a sail was in sight, and Drake at once went on shore, and got two of the grinning crew to carry up a great board painted black, with large white lettering thereon. This was taken to the cave and set up on a pole in front of the now gaping cave. Then, leaving the look-out man, the boat returned to the ship, which at once became very busy. The cable was hove short, sails hoisted and brailed up and stopped in, and everything made ready to sail at a few minutes' notice.

Three hours passed, and then the look-out man

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was seen descending to the beach as fast as his legs could carry him. The boat met him.

“It’s the *Aurelia*, Mr. Drake. She’s anchored, and has sent a boat on shore.”

* * * * *

Another two hours passed, and the expectant crew of the *Maria* stood about the deck eyeing the skipper and Drake as they walked the after-deck in high good humour.

“He won’t come, Tom,” observed the skipper, “so we’ll heave up and just run past him, and ask him how he feels.” Then he faced for’ard, and bawled out:

“Man the windlass, lads; and give us a rousing good chanty to it.”

With a cheer the crew sprang for’ard, and in a few seconds the cheerful click of the windlass pawls were drowned in the roaring chorus of “Homeward Bound.” Ten minutes later, with her anchor still underfoot, the old brig lumbered round the point, and the spars of the *Aurelia* became visible over the tree tops.

* * * * *

When Captain Willis had hurried gleefully on shore, he took the same way to the cave that he had chanced upon on his former visit. The way was rough, rocky and beset with thorny bushes, which he and his men hacked away with scrub-hooks as they passed along. Hot and perspiring, but jubilant, he was soon abreast of the cave; and then stood

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and gasped with open mouth. A huge signboard faced the cave :

“TO LET
THIS DESIRABLE DRY CAVE
LOW RENT AND NO BATS

**Apply round the corner, to Captain Peter Crowley,
on board the brig ‘Maria’.**”

With a strange feeling of numbness he stared first at the empty cave, then at a broad lane that had been cut through the jungle to the beach, and the rough ground made level. Beyond he saw the sea, and the green forest-clad mountains of San Christoval. He was too benumbed to curse, and when he heard the faint sound of—

“Hurrah, my lads, we’re homeward bound,”

he put his hands to his forehead, and thought he must be mad or dreaming.

Staggering and stumbling, his crew led him back to the boat, and pulled on board. He sat down on the skylight shivering like a man with ague.

“Bring me some brandy, steward! Quick, or I’ll brain you, you mongrel Dago.”

Round the point, under full sail, came the *Maria*, heading direct for the *Aurelia*. Then she sheered a little, so as to pass almost within touch. Crowley came to the rail.

“Good-day, Captain Willis. S’prised to see you here. You look mighty light. Seeking for a cargo, I suppose, eh? Well, you’ll have plenty of time. I

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have had a bit of luck. I've got three hundred and sixty tons of fine sandalwood under hatches—a matter of £5,000 or £6,000. Good-bye. Kind regards to Uncle James.”

Drake pulled him away from the rail, and motioned to the man at the wheel to put the helm up, for Willis had tumbled off the skylight in a fit.

“That's enough, captain. We have had our revenge. Don't rub it in too hard.”

NERIDA, THE MAID OF SUWARROW

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NERIDA was proud of the English blood in her veins. Her father was an Englishman—Captain Harry Rivers—her mother a Portuguese half-caste. The latter I never saw, but I had heard much of her as having been a very beautiful woman. She died in Samoa when Nerida was five years of age, and then for the next thirteen years Rivers wandered about the North and South Pacific from isle to isle, trading and pearl shelling, and with him went Nerida. He was a fairly wealthy man, and in addition to the brig *Sidonie*, which he sailed himself, he owned another but smaller vessel, a topsail schooner, which, like the *Sidonie*, was engaged in the South Sea trade. Samoa was his headquarters, and it was at Apia, in Samoa, that I first met him and Nerida. He had just returned from a voyage to the islands of the North-western Pacific, and I had also just arrived in Samoa from New Zealand in the barque *Metaris*, of which vessel I was supercargo. Rivers and I knew each other very well by confidential correspondence.

A few days after my arrival at Apia I severed my connection with the *Metaris*, and was looking for

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another berth. Knowing that Captain Rivers was staying at "D'Acosta's Hotel" in the German quarter of Apia, thither I went, and asked to see him, and presently I was shaking hands with him and his daughter, who were having afternoon tea on the hotel balcony. They pressed me to join them, and in a few minutes we were chatting together as if we had known one another for years.

Nerida Rivers was about eighteen years of age, and was certainly one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen. What especially struck me was her calm, self-possessed manner, and her steady, resolute eyes, which sought mine in a way that slightly disconcerted me. She noticed this and laughed.

"I am very rude, am I not? I cannot help staring at strangers. But I am sure I shall like you."

This put me at my ease, and I at once made known to Rivers the object of my visit.

"I am very glad you have come to see me," he said. "You are just the man I want, and I am sure we shall pull together. Now, what I am telling you is in strict confidence.

"Three years ago a schooner which had been pearling in the Paumotu group for over a year, left Manga Reva for Singapore with a hundred tons of golden-edged pearl on board, together with pearls worth £10,000. She sailed from Manga Reva early in May, two years ago, and was never again heard of—it was supposed that she had 'turned turtle' and foundered, for she was heavily overmasted, and her

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skipper was a reckless, dare-devil Belgian who always persisted in carrying a press of canvas.

“ Now, she did not founder at sea. The Belgian took her into Suwarrow Lagoon, 500 miles east from Samoa. The islands of the lagoon are uninhabited, and the Belgian evidently soon found out that the lagoon was full of pearl shell, and he must have meant to set his native crew to work at diving, for trace of their occupation on one of the thirteen islets are still visible.

“ What happened subsequently I do not know, but what I surmise is this: the schooner, which although quite new was leaky, sank at her anchors in sixteen fathoms of water, and every soul on board was drowned. I daresay it occurred in the night, when everyone on board was asleep. And those who tried to swim on shore would never escape the swarms of sharks which infest Suwarrow Lagoon.”

I nodded assent, for I knew Suwarrow Lagoon very well.

“ Well, that schooner is lying there at the bottom of the lagoon, with pearls and pearl shell worth £15,000 to £20,000. I discovered her in a very simple manner.

“ I put into Suwarrow Lagoon ten months ago to heave down the *Sidonie*, and in pulling across the lagoon one day, came across her. She is lying on her bilge in clear water on a sandy bottom, and her fore and main hatches and companion are open. One of my native crew dived down into the hold, and saw the pearl shell, which is stowed in sacks of

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coir cinnet ; then he went into the cabin, found the remains of three bodies, and brought me up the cabin clock, on which was an ivory plate bearing the words ' *Hirondelle*, Nantes.' Then I knew that I had found the missing pearling schooner.

"I could do nothing further at the time to recover the shell, as I had only one native who was a good diver. But he was of good service to me in showing me that the bottom of Suwarrow Lagoon is studded with beds of pearl shell worth from £100 to £150 a ton. And I am going to work those beds—after I have raised the shell in the schooner's hold, and got the pearls that are somewhere in her cabin."

I was deeply interested in this recital.

"Now," resumed Rivers, "this is what I intend to do. You are well acquainted with the Magalogalo (Penrhyn Island) natives, are you not?"

"Very well indeed," I said, "and they all know me—from the oldest baldhead down to the little children."

"Well, my other vessel, the *Katafa*, will be here in a week or so, from Tonga. By that time I shall be on my way to Suwarrow. I will slip away quietly and will clear at the Consulate for Fiji. No one but Nerida and I will know our destination. If it leaked out, there are half a dozen men here in Apia who would try to get there before me. But I have had to take one man partly into my confidence, as he and his partner are coming with me. They are both expert divers, and I have hired them, and all their diving gear, for two months at £200 a month. All

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they know so far is that I have engaged them to try and repair a sunken vessel, so that I can raise her. If I can't raise her, they are to get her cargo out of the hold. Later on I shall perhaps have to tell them about the pearls in the cabin."

"Who are the men?" I asked.

"Musgrave and Fillis."

I started—"They are two of the greatest scoundrels in the Pacific! Good divers they are, certainly; but do you know that they are strongly believed to have murdered the skipper and crew of a Torres Straits pearling lugger some years ago?"

"I do."

"And they both served a three years' sentence in Queensland for stealing pearls?"

"Yes, I know that, too. But they won't try on any monkey tricks with me—they will be too well watched."

I said that it was very risky having two such men; but Rivers pointed out that his crew of eight Polynesians were tried and trusty men; furthermore, that he meant to make both the divers sleep on shore every night; so I raised no further objections.

Then Rivers gave me my instructions in detail. As soon as the *Katafa* arrived I was to board her, armed with his power of attorney, take charge of the vessel, and instruct the skipper to sail with all haste for Penrhyn Island, where I was to engage a party of ten of the best divers procurable, and then make for Suwarrow Lagoon, where I should find Rivers awaiting me. (The natives of Penrhyn Island are

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the best divers in the world, and will dive continuously in ten to twelve fathoms of water without diving suits, and the men I was to hire were to work the as yet untouched shell in the lagoon.)

Three days later the *Sidonie* sailed. I went on board to bid good-bye to Rivers and his daughter, and saw Musgrave and Fillis lounging about the deck, smoking cigars. Both were big, powerful men, flashily dressed in white ducks with scarlet-and-yellow cummerbunds; each wore a heavy gold watch chain and much jewellery. On the fore-deck I also noticed two Manila men, who, Rivers said, were Musgrave's and Fillis's pump men.

With a warm hand-grasp to father and daughter, I said good-bye, expressing the hope that they would see the *Katafa* sailing into Suwarrow Lagoon within a fortnight.

* * * * *

The *Katafa* was a smart little vessel, and when, a week after the *Sidonie* had sailed, we spun out of Apia harbour between the roaring lines of surf upon the reef, I expected to reach Penrhyn Island in fifty or sixty hours. But misfortune dogged us from the start. The first night out, and during the middle watch, when the schooner was making ten knots, we crashed into a huge floating tree, which tore a hole in her bows between wind and water. Only that we were able to "fother" it quickly with a spare top-sail, we should have gone to the bottom in a few minutes, as the water was pouring in at an alarming rate. Then, whilst one watch kept the pumps going,

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the other lightened the vessel forward, and by daylight we had the water under control, and the fothering sail kept well in place by sheets of copper nailed up and down on the outside timbers across the hole. Then I bore up for Quiros Island, put the schooner on the reef, and repaired the damage. This took us four days, owing to the tides. Refloating the schooner over the reef, we had not lost sight of the little island when the wind died away, and for a whole week we drifted round and round it. At last a series of light, baffling airs carried us to the N.W., but it took us just twenty days to get into Penrhyn Lagoon. The village seemed strangely quiet when we dropped anchor, and no canoes or boats came off to us. Hurriedly going on shore, I found that the population had been visited with a severe outbreak of influenza, and numbers of the older natives had died. Only after waiting five weeks did I succeed in inducing seven young men and three young women to come as divers at a very high rate of pay—£10 per month and all found. Then three of our crew of six men contracted the complaint badly, and I was obliged to leave them behind, for by this time I was beginning to feel worn out, mentally and physically, and was fretting to join Rivers, who, I knew, was wondering what had happened to the *Katafa*.

With some members of my crew suffering from the disease, I left Penrhyn at last, and again we were afflicted by calms and light, baffling airs, and it took us sixteen long, sweltering days before we sighted the low line of palm trees, apparently rising out of

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the placid ocean, that denoted our destination—over eighty days from Samoa!

With feverish expectancy I went aloft on the top-sail yard as we entered the south-west passage of Suwarrow Lagoon, and soon saw the *Sidonie*. She was lying about two cable lengths off the snow-white beach of a little cocoa-palm-clad islet. Her topmasts were struck, and she was housed in with awnings, fore and aft. But a keen feeling of anxiety overpowered me when I saw no signs of anyone being on board, neither were there any signs of human life visible on the encircling islets. A strange, oppressive silence, broken only by the hoarse cries of the wheeling sea-birds, brooded over all, and the smooth surface of the broad lagoon, as it shimmered under the rays of a sinking sun, was unbroken by either a boat or canoe. As we drew nearer to the silent vessel, I noticed that all her boats were gone; but presently the captain, who had now joined me, pointed to a second islet a mile away, and there we saw a newly-built thatched house, standing amidst a grove of jack-fruit trees. But we could see no one about.

Greatly agitated at the strange silence, I brought the vessel to, close to the *Sidonie*, and telling the mate to anchor, the skipper and I had a boat lowered, and were pulled to the brig. Clambering over the rail, we found her deserted. Her decks were covered with coarse cocoanut-leaf matting, evidently to protect them from blistering under the fierce tropic sun; the hatches were on and secured, and the cabin companion was padlocked from the outside.

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“What in God’s name has happened?” I began, when Cass (the skipper) uttered an exclamation, and silently pointed to a board which was lashed to the brass rods protecting the glass on the port side of the skylight. It was painted white, and on it was an inscription in large letters :

“In urgent need of assistance. Make for the house on the second island from the passage.

“NERIDA RIVERS.”

For some seconds we stared at it, and then at each other in silence ; then our wits came to us.

Jumping on the brig’s rail, I hailed the mate of the schooner, and told him to clear away and load one of our two three-pounder guns with a blank charge ; then the skipper and I tumbled into our boat, and in a few minutes were on board again. The gun was ready as we stepped on deck.

“Fire the gun, Mr. Dole,” I said to the wondering mate ; “then watch that hut on the islet. If anyone appears, dip our colours and fire the gun again. Then the captain and I dived below for our arms, just as the loud report of the gun thundered out across the lagoon.

Scarcely had the sound died away, and we were coming on deck again, carrying arms for ourselves and the boat’s crew, when the mate gave a loud shout, and came running aft, glasses in hand.

“Miss Rivers is there, sir. I saw her quite plainly ; she ran out of the house, and then went inside again.”

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“All right. Dip the colours and fire again. I fear that something has happened to Captain Rivers.”

Manned by four sturdy native seamen, the boat was soon dashing across the lagoon, and ten minutes after the second gun was fired, we ran her bows on to the sandy beach and met Miss Rivers half-way up the path. She ran to us with outstretched hands, and for some minutes was unable to speak, for an outburst of sobbing choked her utterance of any words.

“Thank God, you have come,” she said, after she had recovered herself a little. “My father is here, very ill, and, I fear, dying. He was shot in the chest six weeks ago, and since then has had a sunstroke. For the past three days he has been delirious. I will tell you all that has happened by and bye; but, first, for the love of Heaven, come to him.”

We asked her no questions, but quickly followed her to the hut.

Lying on a couch of mats was what looked like the ghost of the once stalwart Harry Rivers. His hair and beard had been cut off, and his bronzed features were sunken and emaciated. As we entered he slightly raised himself, held out his hand, and then sank back with closed eyes, but still holding my hand in his feeble grasp.

“Thank God, he is conscious again,” said Nerida with a sob of joy, as she knelt beside him and placed her hand gently on his forehead, and as if to confirm her words the sick man raised his left hand feebly

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and touched her face. And then in a hoarse whisper he said :

“ Nerida . . . water.”

Gently raising him, we placed a cup of weak lime-juice and water to his lips. He drank it eagerly, then tried to speak.

“ Captain Rivers,” I said, “ your life depends upon your keeping quiet. Do not try to speak.”

A gentle pressure of my hand told me he understood, and then his eyes met mine and lit up.

On a table was the *Sidonic's* medicine chest, and beside it was a thermometer. In a whisper Nerida told us that she had taken his temperature every hour, and would now take it again. He knew what she was doing, and when at the end of five minutes she removed the glass, it showed two points lower than it had done an hour previously.

As night fell, a cool breeze stirred the tree tops overhead, and Rivers slept. The turning point was passed, and I knew that with care he would recover. For two hours he slumbered, and his tortured brain rested. When he awoke he was perfectly conscious, his temperature was down to 98, and as Nerida, with streaming eyes, bent down and kissed him, he muttered feebly :

“ I'll pull through, my girl.”

“ Yes, father, of course you will now. But you must *not* talk.”

His lips parted in an attempt to smile as he nodded ; then he beckoned to Cass and me to come near, and gave us his hand again.

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“Nerida will tell you,” he said.

Nerida *had* told us ; and this was her story.

* * * * *

“Like you in the *Katafa*, we had a trying voyage—light winds and calms alternating, so that it took us fourteen days to get to Suwarrow. We anchored near the sunken *Hirondelle*, and on the following day my father went on shore with some of our crew and began building two houses—this one where we now are, and another on the next island. The latter was for Musgrave and Fillis to live in ; this one was for my father and myself to occupy whenever we felt inclined to sleep on shore. Musgrave and his comrade at first very strongly objected to having to sleep on shore, but my father was resolute and told them bluntly that the brig’s cabin was too small for seven people—the two divers, two mates, the steward, and he and I. They consented at last, but with an ill grace.

“Work was soon begun on the *Hirondelle*. First, Musgrave and Fillis raised all the pearl shell from the hold. This took only ten days, for they worked well, and seemed anxious to get their task over as quickly as possible. When they had finished getting up the last of the shell, and it was safely stowed on board the *Sidonie*, my father spoke to them about making an attempt to lift the sunken vessel off the bottom, by means of empty casks, and get her into shallow water, where the leak could be found and the schooner raised to the surface and pumped out. They declared it was quite impossible, as the *Sidonie*

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was not large enough for the purpose, and could not stand the strain of even partially lifting the *Hirondelle*. My father, after some days, satisfied himself that they were right, and abandoned the idea.

“ I must mention that, unknown to Musgrave and Fillis, he had several times sent one of his native crew—the same man who had previously dived into the cabin and found the human remains—down into the cabin to endeavour to find the box or chest containing the pearls. But the man searched in vain ; and finally my father had to take Musgrave into his confidence, and tell him that he knew that there was a box of valuable pearls somewhere in the cabin of the sunken schooner. He did this with great misgivings, for the native diver had told him that the cabin had certainly been visited by the two white divers, for many of its contents were disarranged.

“ Musgrave and Fillis pretended to make a thorough search, and sent up all the sea chests and boxes they found in the cabin. These were all carefully opened, but not a single pearl was found. But the truth was that the villains had discovered the pearls soon after they began operations, had quickly secreted them with the aid of their two Manila men, and had buried them under the ground in their hut. Of course, they naturally surmised that a schooner carrying a cargo of pearl shell would also have pearls on board as well. And I have no doubt but that from that day their dreadful plan of cruel and wholesale murder took possession of their souls.

“ Every day, after work was over, Musgrave,

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Fillis and the two evil-faced Manila men went on shore to sleep in their hut, and every night a good watch was kept on board the *Sidonie*, for my father now greatly mistrusted them. Sometimes my father and I would also sleep here in this house, on account of the cool sea breeze which came from the weather side of the islets.

“ One dull, rainy evening, six weeks ago, my father and I were on shore, to stay the night. Before dark we had seen the boat from the *Sidonie*, manned by four native sailors, taking Musgrave, Fillis and the two Manila men on shore to sleep as usual. About an hour afterwards, when it was quite dark, I thought I heard the dulled report of firearms—five or six shots—in the direction of Musgrave’s house. I told my father; he said that most likely the men were shooting the flying foxes, which infest the trees on Musgrave’s islet. But about midnight, as my father was standing at the door here, he caught a glimpse of the boat going back to the brig. Four men were in her, and all were using native canoe paddles instead of oars, and he clearly recognised the burly figures of Musgrave and Fillis, and the slighter ones of the two Manila men.

“ In an instant his suspicions were aroused, and calling me, he told me to keep awake until he returned. Then, taking his revolver, he hurriedly pushed off in the dinghy, which we always keep afloat near the beach, and followed the boat, little thinking that our four poor native sailors had been treacherously shot down in cold blood by Musgrave and his

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party, who were then on their way to massacre the rest of the ship's company.

“The boat reached the brig far in advance of my father, and the horrid work of murder began quickly, for he heard the repeated sounds of Winchester and revolver shots. In their eagerness to surprise the crew, Musgrave and his comrades did not make the boat fast to the brig, and my father saw her being rapidly swept away by the current towards the passage. Rowing as hard as he could, he was within a hundred yards of the brig, when the four murderers gathered on the quarter-deck, and began firing at him. Almost the first shot struck him on the breast bone, glanced aside, and then travelled round to his back. He fell, and then other bullets penetrated the boat's planking, and she began to fill, and he lay unconscious as the dinghy was rapidly swirled out through the passage into the open sea.

“I had heard the shooting, and, in an agony of suspense, I waited for the dawn. Twice I ran down to the beach with the intention of swimming off to the brig, but it would have been madness for me to attempt it—the sharks would have had me in five minutes.”

She paused, and wept a little at the bare memory of that night.

“At dawn, with my father's glasses, I looked at the brig. She was lying broadside on, and I could see no boats alongside, or veered astern, and wondered why. The brig, as you know, is moored fore and aft, just alongside the sunken schooner, and the divers' pumps were worked from the brig's deck.

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“ Presently I saw Musgrave and Fillis come on deck, and each of them, in turn, looked at this house through the ship’s glasses. I suppose they were trying to see if I was awake and about. Then I saw the two Manila men join them, and all four appeared to be talking.

Distracted as I was with the almost certain knowledge that my poor father was murdered, I had no immediate fear for myself; for there was clearly no boat for his murderers to reach the shore, and then I had not only my own Winchester eleven-shot carbine, but my father’s Winchester rifle as well.

“ Undecided as to what I should do, I continued to watch the brig, unseen by those on board, for I got up in this jack-fruit tree here, and about eight o’clock I saw that they were very busy on deck, and were handling spare timbers and planking. In an instant I knew that they were building a raft.

I came into the house, and carefully examined the two Winchesters, and then as I was taking a drink of water, I heard a faint cry at the back of the house, and saw my father staggering along between the cocoanut trees. He was naked to the waist, almost exhausted, and maddened with thirst and the pain of his wound.

“ I am very strong. I carried him inside, and after I had given him some water and then some brandy, I dressed his wound in the chest as well as I could; then I cut out the bullet, which had lodged just over the shoulder blade, and during this time he told me what had happened since he left.

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“After he recovered consciousness, he found himself nearly a mile outside the passage. The sea was smooth, and the dinghy was being rapidly carried along the western side of the island, but close in to the reef. After some hours’ hard work, and using one of the bottom boards of the dinghy for a paddle, he succeeded in getting on to the reef, just as the tide began to fall. Here he rested for a while, for although he had not lost much blood, he was suffering intense pain.

“From there he walked along the reef to the nearest island, then crossed the narrow channel to the next, and so on, till he finally reached Musgrave and Fillis’s house, which he found deserted and in great disorder, with pools of blood on the matted floor; and outside the house he discovered the bodies of the four poor native sailors, roughly covered with leaves. They had all been shot through the head or chest. After getting a drink, he started off, keeping out of sight of the brig until he reached me.

“Half an hour after my father returned I made him lie down and sleep, telling him I would arouse him the instant I thought necessary. Then I took the two Winchesters, placed them by the door, and watched the *Sidonie*. There was no need for me to use glasses, for it was a fine, bright morning, and I could see everything clearly.

“The water about the brig was literally alive with sharks—the feast that the cruel murderers had given them in the night, of the bodies of the poor officers

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and crew of the brig, had brought them about in swarms, and when the tackle was rigged and the raft hoisted over the side, I saw the two Manila men get on to it with whaling lances, and kill a number. Then Musgrave and Fillis got on to the raft and cast off, and all four began to paddle it towards the shore, using canoe paddles; and, as they came, the swarms of sharks swam beside them. All four had their arms—Winchesters and revolvers.

“I went in and looked at my father. He was asleep, and I resolved not to disturb him, for I had no fear.

“The raft came steadily on till it was within two hundred yards of this doorway; then Musgrave stood up and called out:

“‘Miss Rivers!’

“I made no answer, but crouched down behind the door, and again the raft moved nearer.

“When within fifty yards of the beach, Musgrave again stood up, and as he did so, I fired and shot him through the stomach; then I quickly shot the three others in succession. Fillis twice fired his pistol at me, and then fell into the water, and I saw the sharks tear him asunder. The noise of the firing awakened my father, and he crawled to the door and watched me empty the two Winchesters into the bodies of the three men lying on the raft, until they were riddled through and through.

“The raft drifted on to the beach, and after putting some heavy coral stones on it, I let it lie

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there for the flood tide. The sharks waited, and as the water rose, they came in and dragged the dead men off, and devoured them. I shut the door and did not look, but I heard the splashing of the water and knew what it was.

“My father soon recovered from his wounds, and we went on board the brig. It was a dreadful sight, for the decks were black with dried blood. My father thinks that Musgrave and Fillis drugged the supper coffee, and when they came on board they shot everyone on the brig in their sleep, for the two mates were careful men, and always kept a good watch at night.

“We searched the hut in which Musgrave and Fillis had lived, and found the pearls; they were in two chamois-leather bags, and were buried under the earth inside the hut.

“We brought all our things on shore from the brig, but went off to her every day to wash down decks. Then my father set to work to build a boat, and it was whilst he was doing this that he was smitten with sunstroke about a week ago. . . . But now, thank God, all our troubles and misery are over.”

* * * * *

Two months later, the *Sidonie* and *Katafa* sailed in company for Singapore, where we arrived safely. Rivers sold his cargo of pearl shell and the two vessels as well, and I bade farewell to him and “The Maid of Suwarrow,” as Cass and I called Nerida. They

Nerida, the Maid of Suwarrow

went to California to live, and a few years later I heard that Nerida had married an English settler at Los Angeles, in that State.

Six years after, I again had occasion to visit Suwarrow, and, looking down into the crystal waters of the lagoon, saw the weed-covered hulk of the ill-fated *Hirondelle*.

MY SOUTH SEA GARDENS

MY SOUTH SEA GARDENS

IT has always been a source of wonder to me that so many English families who, for business or other reasons have to spend many years in tropical climes, so seldom attempt to grow the vegetables they have been accustomed to eat and the absence of which they so frequently deplore. Taking the Pacific Islands for instance, where nearly one-half of the ordinary "common garden" vegetables familiar to English people at home can be grown with ease, it is surprising that most English residents never attempt to cultivate them; and so make their bitter moan about having to eat the eternal yam, taro or sweet potato. Perhaps my own experiences may be of interest to those of my readers who live under torrid skies and who long to see European vegetables upon their tables in place of the tropical products of which they are so weary. Whilst I achieved nothing extraordinary I was yet very successful with my European vegetable growing, and my example inspired many of my fellow-traders to do likewise, especially in such places as the low-lying Equatorial islands and the sandy islands of Micronesia, where nothing in the way of vegetable food can be obtained except cocoanuts, pandanus fruit, arrowroot, and the

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coarse gigantic *taro*, known as *puraka*, although on some of the Marshall and Caroline Islands the jack-fruit tree flourishes and the sweet fruit can be eaten, either cooked as a vegetable when green, or as dessert when fully ripe. Wherever a grove of jack-fruit trees is to be found, there is always a deep stratum of rich vegetable mould, and this, mixed with sand, rolled cocoanut husks and such other matter, makes excellent garden soil that will grow bananas, maize, melons, cucumbers, pumpkins, onions, etc. Many years ago I was shipwrecked on Peru (Francis Island) one of the Gilbert group, and with some seeds brought from New Zealand the local trader and I produced vegetables that had never before been seen in the Equatorial islands, and our garden became famous. We did not, like a notorious "amazing man" whose adventures were made known to the world a few years ago in a popular magazine, grow a crop of cereals in the carapaces of turtles, mixed with sand and turtles' blood, but we did, on that hot, low-lying sandy island (lat. 1° 30' S., long. 176° E.) successfully grow beans, onions, radishes, turnips and huge pumpkins and water-melons. Our *modus operandi* I shall describe later on, first telling of my experiences as a gardener on Niué, more generally known as Savage Island, an isolated spot four hundred miles east of the Tonga group, and annexed by Great Britain a few years ago. The island, although it is only thirty miles or so in circumference, has a population of five thousand natives who speak a bastard Maori-Samoan dialect, and who

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are known all over the Pacific for their independence, self-assertion, and also for their capabilities as sailor men. Niué is what is known geologically as an island of "upheaved coral." Its coast line starts sheer-up from the sea, and the island presents a repellent appearance at first sight, but in reality it is of wondrous fertility, for behind the grim and forbidding cliffs of grey coral, worn into fantastic shapes by the fury of the sea (there is no encompassing reef) there are rich groves of cocoa-palms, and the interior, although covered in most part with guava and other scrub and broken up by ragged coral rocks, has a reddish soil of such peculiar richness that almost every tropical fruit or vegetable thrives in it. In some parts Niué is heavily timbered, and among its exportable products, in addition to copra, are cotton (Sea Island) fungus and yams. Although there is no running water, the frequent rains keep the island in an ever-verdant condition, and I know of no other in the Pacific which, with such a broken-up and rugged interior, possesses such remarkable fertility. The natives' plantations are among this broken coral, which has to be cleared away to make a space of even a few yards, but the yam crop is enormous, and huge pumpkins may be seen ripening in the sun on the tops of jagged boulders over which the vines have been allowed to climb. Patches of sugar cane abound and orange trees bearing splendid fruit seem to grow out of masses of coral *débris*, and pawpaws and sour-sop grow together. The guava, introduced from Samoa, has become a pest, although

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the fruit is of large size and excellent quality. The natives will not eat it, but the white residents give it to their horses and cattle together with pawpaws. The animals like such food, but it is much too fattening. For this reason, too, the Savage Island pork, which is pawpaw fed, is so sweet and so fat as to be unpleasant to the taste.

When I arrived at the island to remain for a twelvemonth as the agent of a trading firm, I brought with me a box of garden seeds (flower and vegetable) which I had bought in Sydney. Speaking about them to my nearest white neighbour, he laughed and said, "Why, you can get all the vegetables and fruit you want : yams, pumpkins, cabbages up to five pounds, and cucumbers a yard long. What more do you want?" Now, although I had heard of the Niué "tree-cabbages," I had doubts about the yard-long cucumbers, and remarked that if they were in season I would like to see one. And I did see one within a few minutes. It was fully eighteen inches long, proportionately thick and quite straight. The native who brought it said it was not by any means full grown. As for the tree-cabbages, I was shown these on the following day, and confess I was startled. On a stout, leafless and corrugated stalk about five inches in circumference, and six or seven feet high, were growing large oval-shaped cabbages, not one of which was less than four pounds in weight, and on one tree there was one that could not have weighed less than seven pounds. Both the cucumbers and cabbages I found later on

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were of excellent flavour; not to be surpassed by those grown in a colder or more temperate climate. Who introduced these tree-cabbages to the island the natives did not know, or at least did not remember, but they believed cuttings of the stalks were brought to Niué by a sandalwood ship some time about 1850. As for the cucumbers, they were the result of ordinary seed planted on the island by a trader a few years previously.

Determined to introduce some new European vegetables on Niué, I, in a weak moment, distributed about a quarter of the contents of my box of seeds amongst the people of the four principal villages—Avatele, Tamakautoga, Alofé and Hākupu. I was too busy to attempt any gardening myself, and told the natives that although my household was but a small one, I would certainly buy the new vegetables from them occasionally—that is, sufficient for my own use. Of course I meant well, and thought I was benefiting the natives generally as well as the half a dozen white residents. Little did I dream of the trouble I was bringing upon myself through those wretched seeds. They were to prove to be veritable dragons' teeth. In less than ten or at most eleven weeks natives—men, women, and children—came trooping along to my trading station carrying baskets of all manner of half-grown vegetables and insisted upon my buying them. The quantity and variety appalled me. Carrots, turnips, radishes, onions, eschalots, French beans, butter-beans, young broad beans, small immature cobs of maize, bloated

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gherkins, and parsnips that with scarcely any body had leaves of extraordinary length. It was in vain that I protested I had no possible use for such a quantity of vegetables. I was assailed with reproaches. Had they wasted their time for nothing? *They* did not want any of these new vegetables; to them—if I would not buy them—they were only so much *pupu kolea* (worthless weeds), etc. Day after day the same thing occurred. I was compelled to buy ten times the quantity of vegetables that were required and give most of them to my horse and the pigs. At the same time, the cost was almost nothing—for a stick of twist tobacco worth twopence I could get eight pounds to ten pounds of beans, or a couple of huge cabbages. Among the seeds given out were some of a climbing bean known in Australia as the poor man's bean. One vine will completely cover an ordinary bush bumpy, and the beans are produced in clumps of twenty to thirty. But although those planted on Niué grew splendidly they did not yield a single bean. English potatoes were also a failure; they ran to vine and the tubers were hardly larger than marbles. Before concluding my remarks on this interesting and solitary island it may interest my readers to know what was our usual breakfast at seven o'clock. Tinned meats we avoided, and, as fish are scarce at Niué, we had to fall back on eggs and grilled chickens, which are cheap; but fruit constituted most of our breakfast, and we had a fairly large choice—bananas, custard apples, grenadillas and sour-sop were always in evidence; and, in

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season, delicious oranges. Then, of course, tea coffee, or cocoanut milk.

I left Niué with some regret, for although the natives are a noisy, ill-mannered lot, they have many good qualities and are very hardworking; but I loathed the island for one thing—its pest of flies. The moment you leave the house, in daylight, a black swarm of flies settles upon you, and although you may succeed in brushing them out of your eyes and ears they alight in a compact mass on your back and there remain. Another curse of Niué is its grass seed. It is impossible to wear tweed lower garments—duck or coarse linen is the only material to which the needle-pointed seeds will not adhere.

The garden made on Peru Island was similar to one which I made on Providence Island (Ujilong). This island—or rather islands—forms one of the largest atolls in the North Pacific (it is in 10° N.) and until 1866 was supposed to be uninhabited, but in that year it was taken possession of by the notorious Captain "Bully" Hayes, who found on it eighteen natives—the survivors of a once large population which had been swept away by some unknown disease (probably small-pox) about twenty years previously. All the many islets are densely covered with cocoanut trees and at the present time Providence Atoll yields a rich revenue in copra to its now German proprietors. All the encircling islands are very low, though here and there are elevated spots, and in addition to the cocoa-palms there are trees of the *figus*, *Barringtonia*, etc., which are the breeding

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places of millions of two or three kinds of tern and other sea-birds. The lagoon swarms with fish and sharks. Of the fish none are poisonous, although the atoll is midway between the Marshall and Caroline Islands Archipelagos, where poisonous fish are all too common. Robber crabs of great size were in profusion on all the islets; they fed principally upon cocoanuts, the drupes of the pandanus fruit, and also on turtle eggs, which they were remarkably smart at discovering by rooting up the sand; and during my stay on Providence *birgus latro* afforded my companions and myself very many satisfactory meals—for their flesh is delicious. And although the robber-crab will eat foul matter such as rotten fish, or indeed anything, he prefers cocoanut or fruit, and can be kept in captivity for months and fed upon whatever best pleases his gaoler. But a wooden box is no prison to him. With his powerful nippers he can tear a hole through an inch pine plank in a few hours. A tin box—such as a fifty-pound biscuit tin—makes a good prison from which he cannot escape unless he descries a broken corner, or perhaps a nail hole. Then he will tear the tin as easily as if it were paper and make his escape.

Some years after the notorious “Bully” Hayes had taken possession of Providence Atoll, I was sent there in charge of a party of natives primarily to catch sharks and dry their fins and tails for the China market, and secondly, to make cocoanut oil. And this brings me to the subject of the garden I made.

The provisions that were given to me and my

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party of fourteen natives were of the poorest quality—"salt horse," rusty pork, and old and very dry New Zealand tinned meats—in fact, the only decent food was biscuit and flour in fifty-pound air-tight tins. On our way to the atoll I called at the rich and fertile island of Ponapé in the Carolines and there took on board some pigs and poultry, some tons of yams, and also a few pineapples, banana shoots, etc.; and the captain of the American mission ship *Morning Star* gave me the remainder of a small box of Californian garden seeds. During the voyage I had all the yams (many of them over sixty pounds) washed in fresh water, then dried, and afterwards given a thick coating of coral limewash. At the end of four months those that remained uneaten were as fresh and juicy as if just taken from the ground.

On one of the islands of the atoll I discovered, to my delight, the site of an old *puraka* plantation, made perhaps a quarter of a century before, and here I made my garden in a soil composed of decayed coral and vegetable mould formed by leaves and rotted timber. My under-gardeners were the wives of two of my native labourers, and they worked like Trojans. Not only did we first clear the undergrowth and turn over the soil with canoe paddles for spades, but we top-dressed with a foot of rich black mould taken from a densely-wooded islet half a mile away. In three weeks our little garden—about the eighth of an acre—was ready, for after a while the men came to assist.

Within four months we had grown and eaten

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beans, onions, peas and many other vegetables; and pumpkins, squashes, rock melon and cucumbers trailed their vines everywhere and yielded so prolifically that I was swollen up with pride. During one week, from three tomato bushes, the women picked eighty pounds' weight of large fruit, and the small yellow variety, pear-shaped, grew in bunches, literally like grapes. The crabs, however—both the big robber crabs and the smaller hermit crabs, were a great nuisance, and at night time wrought havoc. Then one of my shark-catchers hit upon a happy device. We split open a number of old cocoanuts—leaving the husks on—and spread them out all round the garden. At night all hands would sally forth, each carrying a torch of dried cocoanut leaves, and short lengths of coir cinnet. The big robber crabs were deftly caught and bound and reserved for the pot or ground-oven and the little “hermits” left to feed on the cocoanuts.

A year after we left the atoll I was told by the master of a trading vessel who called there that the only things he found were a few large pumpkins—the crabs had destroyed nearly every other plant or vine.

A PROSPECTING PARTY IN NORTH
QUEENSLAND

A PROSPECTING PARTY IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

A PARTY of three of us were prospecting in the vicinity of Scarr's (or Carr's) Creek, a tributary of the Upper Burdekin River. It was in June, and the nights were very cold, and so we were pleased to come across a well-sheltered little pocket a few hundred yards from the creek, which at this part of its course ran very swiftly between high walls of granite. Timber was abundant, and as we intended to prospect the creek thoroughly up to its head we decided to camp at the pocket for two or three weeks, and put up a bark hut, instead of shivering at night under a tent without a fire. The first day we spent in stripping bark, piling it up, and then weighing it down heavily with logs. During the next few days, whilst my mates were building the hut, I had to scour the country in search of game, for our supply of meat had run out, and although there were plenty of cattle running in the vicinity we did not care to shoot a beast, although we were pretty sure that the owner of the cattle, C——, of Ravenswood Station, would cheerfully have given us permission to do so had we been able to have

A Prospecting Party

communicated with him. But as his station was forty miles away, and all our horses were in poor condition from overwork, we had to content ourselves with a chance kangaroo, rock wallaby, and such birds as we could shoot, which latter were few and far between. The country was very rough, and although the granite ranges and boulder-covered spurs held plenty of fat rock wallabies, it was heart-breaking work to get within shot. Still, we managed to turn in at nights feeling satisfied with our supper, for we always managed to shoot something, and, fortunately, had plenty of flour, tea, sugar, and tobacco, and were very hopeful we should get on to something good by careful prospecting.

On the day that we arrived at the pocket I went down the steep bank of the creek to get water, and was highly pleased to see that it contained fish. At the foot of a waterfall there was a deep pool, and in it I saw numbers of fish very like grayling—in fact, some Queenslanders call them grayling. Hurrying back to the camp with the water, I got out my fishing tackle (last used on the Burdekin for bream), and then arose the question of bait. Taking my gun, I was starting off to look for a bird of some sort when one of my mates told me that a bit of wallaby was as good as anything, and cut me off a piece from the ham of one I had shot the previous day. The flesh was of a very dark red hue and looked right enough, and as I had often caught fish in both the Upper and Lower Burdekin with raw beef I was very hopeful of getting a nice change of diet for our

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supper. I was not disappointed, for the fish literally jumped at the bait, and I had a delightful half-hour, catching enough in that time to provide us with breakfast as well as supper. None of my catch were over half-a-pound, many not half that weight, but hungry men are not particular about the size of fish. My mates were pleased enough, and whilst we were enjoying our supper before a blazing fire—for night was coming on—we heard a loud *coo-coo* from down the creek, and presently C——, the owner of Ravenswood Cattle Station, and two of his stockmen with a black boy, rode up and joined us. They had come to muster cattle in the ranges at the head of the creek, and had come to our “pocket” to camp for the night. C—— told us that we need never have hesitated about killing a beast. “It is to my interest to give prospecting parties all the beef they want,” he said; “a payable goldfield about here would suit me very well—the more diggers that come the more cattle I can sell instead of sending them to Charters Towers and Townsville. So when you run short of meat knock over a beast. I won’t grumble. I’ll round up the first mob we come across to-morrow, and get you one and bring it here for you to kill, as your horses are knocked up.”

The night turned out very cold, and although we were in a sheltered place, the wind was blowing half a gale and so keen that we felt it through our blankets. However, it soon died away, and we were just going comfortably to sleep when a dingo began to howl near us, and was quickly answered by

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another somewhere down the creek. Although there were but two of them, they howled enough for a whole pack, and the detestable creatures kept us awake for the greater part of the night. As there was a cattle camp quite near in a sandal wood scrub, and the cattle were very wild, we did not like to alarm them by firing a shot or two, which would have scared them as well as the dingoes. The latter, C—— told us, were a great nuisance in this part of the run, would not take a poisoned bait, and had an unpleasant trick of biting off the tails of very young calves, especially if the mother was separated with her calf from a mob of cattle.

At daylight I rose to boil a billy of tea. My feet were icy cold and I saw that there had been a black frost in the night. I also discovered that my string of fish for breakfast were gone. I had hung them up to a low branch not thirty yards from where I had slept. C——'s black boy told me with a grin that the dogs had taken them, and showed me the tracks of three or four through the frosty grass. He had slept like a pig all night, and all the dingoes in Australia would not awaken a blackfellow with a full stomach of beef, damper and tea. C—— laughed at my chagrin, and told me that native dogs, when game is scarce, will catch fish if they are hungry and can get nothing else. He had once seen, he told me, two native dogs acting in a very curious manner in a water-hole on the Etheridge River. There had been a rather long drought, and for miles the bed of the river was dry, except for intermittent water-holes.

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These were all full of fish, many of which had died owing to the water in the shallower pools becoming too hot for them to exist. Dismounting, he laid himself down on the bank and soon saw that the dogs were catching fish, which they chased on to the edge of the pool, then seized them and carried them up on the sand to devour. They made a full meal; after which the pair trotted across the river-bed and lay down under a Leichhardt tree to sleep it off. The Etheridge and Gilbert River aboriginals also assured C—— that their own dogs—bred from dingoes—were very keen on catching fish, and sometimes were badly wounded in their mouth by the serrated spur or back fin of catfish.

C—— and his party went off after breakfast, and returned in the afternoon with a small mob of cattle, and my mates, picking out an eighteen-months-old heifer, shot her and set to work, and we soon had the animal skinned, cleaned, and hung up ready for cutting up and salting early on the following morning. We carefully burned the offal, hide, and head on account of the dingoes, and finished up a good day's work by a necessary bathe in the clear, but too cold, water of the creek. We turned in early, tired out, and scarcely had we rolled ourselves in our blankets when a dismal howl made us "say things," and in half an hour all the dingoes in North Queensland seemed to have gathered round the camp to distract us. The noise they made was something diabolical, coming from both sides of the creek and from the ranges. In reality there were

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not more than five or six at the outside, but anyone would have imagined that there were droves of them. Not liking to discharge our guns on account of C——'s mustering, we could only curse our tormentors throughout the night. On the following evening, however, knowing that C—— had finished mustering in our vicinity, we hung a leg-bone of the heifer from the branch of a tree on the opposite side of the creek, where we could see it plainly by daylight from our bank, about sixty yards distant. Again we had a harrowing night, but stood it without firing a shot, though one brute came within a few yards of our camp fire, attracted by the smell of the salted meat, but he was off before anyone of us could cover him. However, in the morning we were rewarded.

Creeping to the bank of the creek at daylight, we looked across and saw three dogs sitting under the leg-bone, which was purposely slung out of reach. We fired together, and the biggest of the three dropped; the other two vanished like a streak of lightning. The one we killed was a male, and had a good coat, a rather unusual thing for a dingo, as the skin is often covered with sores. From that time till we broke up camp we were not often troubled by their howling near us. A gun-shot would quickly silence their infernally dismal howls.

During July we got a little gold fifteen miles from the head of the creek, but not enough to pay us for our time and labour. However, it was a fine, healthy occupation, and our little bark hut in the

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lonely ranges was a very comfortable home, especially during wet weather and on cold nights. A good many birds came about towards the end of the month, and we twice rode to the Burdekin and had a couple of days among the bream, filling our pack bags with salted fish, which cured well in the dry air of the ranges. Although Scarr's Creek was full of "grayling," they were too small for salting, but were delicious eating when fried. During our stay we got enough opossum skins to make a fine eight-foot-square rug. Then early one morning we said good-bye to the pocket, and, mounting our horses, set our faces towards Cleveland Bay, where, with many regrets, we had to part.

A QUICK VENGEANCE

A QUICK VENGEANCE

BETWEEN Cape Flattery and Cape Tribulation on the coast of the far north of Queensland, there is a stretch of desolate beach some thirty miles in length. Above high-water mark the fine, soft sand is densely covered with a green carpet of the beautiful but poisonous vinca plant, the bright pink-and-white flowers of which give forth a strong, sickly odour; lower down on the beach and on the banks of the sluggish tidal streams which debouch through it to the Pacific, hideous alligators lie basking in the sun; eastward, across the ten miles of pale green water that intervenes is the curving, foam-capped line of the Great Barrier reef; westward the rugged, wild and fantastic shapes of the coastal range, the haunt of hordes of ferocious cannibal blacks, and the store-house of as yet almost untouched millions of pounds worth of virgin gold. In many a silent gully and under the towering trees of the primeval forest lie the bleaching bones of scores of hardy prospectors, who in their thirst for gold have fallen victims to the treacherous savages who have crept upon them and speared them to death, as they slept or worked at

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their claims in some unknown creek or rock-encompassed gully. 'Tis a wild and forbidding country indeed.

One blazingly hot day in the month of January, a small schooner, belonging to the firm by whom I was employed, cast anchor under the north side of frowning Cape Tribulation near the southern end of the long beach which I have described. We were bound, with a cargo of stores, for several parties of men engaged in gathering and curing *bêche-de-mer* on the islands of Torres Straits, and were making the passage inside the Great Barrier reef, and had anchored under the Cape for the purpose of examining the wreck of a coal-laden Swedish barque which had run ashore there some months previously, to see if there was anything about her worth salving.

A boat was lowered, manned and armed—for the whole coast line was frequented by savage tribes of cannibal blacks, and the captain and I went on shore and inspected the wrecked barque. She was lying on a ledge of reef just under the lee of the Cape; and we soon found that the blacks had been before us, taken nearly everything of value, and partly burnt the hull. Her copper, however, was valuable, and this we at once set to work to strip.

Whilst our boat's crew was engaged at this, the captain and I ascended a rocky spur of the Cape and looked at some native waterholes situated in a deep cleft. The waterholes were well known to the few hardy and adventurous diggers and prospectors who

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were then making their way northwards from the newly-founded town of Townsville, on Cleveland Bay, to the recently discovered rich gold-fields of the Palmer River, and these aboriginal reservoirs made a welcome camping place on that wild and desolate coast.

As the skipper and I were drinking copiously of the cool, sweet water, we heard the sound of horses' feet, and presently two horsemen appeared, leading a packhorse. They drew up at the waterholes—or rather at the end of the track above them—and giving us a cheerful “Good-day” dismounted, and then joined us. They were diggers—fine, stalwart fellows, with hands and faces tanned the hue of dark leather by Queensland's torrid sun. They were, they told us, making their way to the township of Cardwell to sell their gold (500 ounces) to the Bank of New South Wales there, buy horses and supplies, and then return to a small but rich gold-field they and their party were working on an—as yet—unnamed stream near the Endeavour River.

After giving their horses a drink and smoking a pipe with us they bade us good-bye, telling us that they intended to press on to some other native wells, five miles distant, where there was good grass for their horses and where they would camp for the night. We walked with them to the top of the spur, which was a plateau about a hundred yards in circumference and crowned by one solitary silvery-leaved iron-bark tree, gnarled and rugged, yet sufficiently lofty to form a striking landmark,

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looking at it either from the coast line or from the sea.

At sunset our boat's crew ceased stripping the copper, and we returned to the ship for supper; but as it was full moon I decided to bring all hands on shore and work throughout the night, for the copper of that barque meant a considerable sum of money.

Just as we came alongside we saw two other horsemen trotting along the beach track through the vinca. They turned off at the foot of the spur of the Cape, and ascended to the waterholes. Here they stayed but a short time; for, whilst we were at supper, some of our crew noticed them riding along the beach on the south side of Cape Tribulation.

Leaving one man only on board to keep watch, we lowered both boats, and were soon at work again on the copper. The bright moon made it as clear as day, and we toiled at the wreck very merry-heartedly, till within two hours of midnight, when we were disturbed by a loud "Hallo, there!"

Seven mounted men had drawn rein on the beach within a hundred yards of the wreck, and presently one of them, the leader, dismounted and came to us.

"Have you seen any travellers at the waterholes to-day?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, and then I told him in detail of our meeting with the two diggers and also of the two other horsemen we had seen.

He was a slenderly-built young man, of about five-and-twenty years of age, and regarded me intently for a few seconds before he spoke again. He and

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his companions all carried revolvers and Snider carbines, and I could see that they had ridden hard.

"I don't know who you are, mister, and you don't know who I am; but I can tell you this much—there ain't no law in this part of Queensland. Savee?"

I said that I had heard so.

"Well, those two coves you met are Peter Dempsey and his mate, Frank Todd; the other two men are Chris Duke and a black fellow called 'Moses.' Duke is one of the biggest scoundrels goin'—a sneak gold robber and old gaol-bird—and Moses is an absconded native policeman. They are following Dempsey and Todd to get their gold, and won't stop at murder."

He paused a moment, then added abruptly,

"We got wind that Duke an' the nigger had started out, follerin' Dempsey and Todd, and now we are a-follerin' them," and his white, even teeth gleamed in the moonlight under his dark, heavy moustache in a grim smile.

Ten minutes later, after they had given their horses a drink, they rode off, taking the hard sand of the beach (it was low tide) in preference to that of the vinca, above high-water mark.

At two o'clock in the morning, as we were loading the copper into the boats, we saw them returning. In their midst were two men, whose hands were tied behind their backs; and in the clear moonlight I saw that one—a black man—had also his feet tied

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under the belly of the horse on which he rode. They all, except their leader, ascended the track leading up the spur. He came to us on foot.

“You chaps had better get into your boats and get away,” he said, with a rough politeness. “My mates an’ me is goin’ to do a hangin’, an’ it ain’t no concern o’ yours to be ‘partly-slep’ criminals,’ as the lawyers say, so you’d best clear out.”

“What has happened?” asked the captain of the schooner.

“Murder, boss, murder—the cruellest murder as you ever heard of. Duke an’ the nigger, Moses, shot Dempsey an’ Todd in their sleep at the water-holes five miles beyond. We caught ’em red-handed, so to speak, for they were making up a pile of driftwood to burn the poor coves’ bodies—thinkin’ the murder would be put down to the wild blacks. We rushed ’em, and had ’em tied hand an’ foot afore they knew where they were. Now, gents, you’d better clear out. Good-night.”

We obeyed the suggestion with alacrity. Neither the skipper nor myself wanted to be spectators of an act of rough justice that might involve us being called to the Supreme Court at Brisbane as witnesses.

We pushed off in the boats, and when half-way to the schooner stopped and waited. We did not wait long.

In the clear moonlight we saw the group of men clustered together under the solitary tree on the bluff. Then they opened out, and two bodies were

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hanging from a branch. The white murderer and the black had met their doom.

Standing on the deck of the schooner, we looked at the two pendent figures hanging from the lonely tree, and then watched the seven horsemen riding slowly along the moonlit beach.

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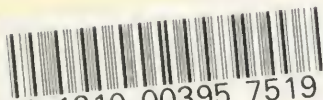
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