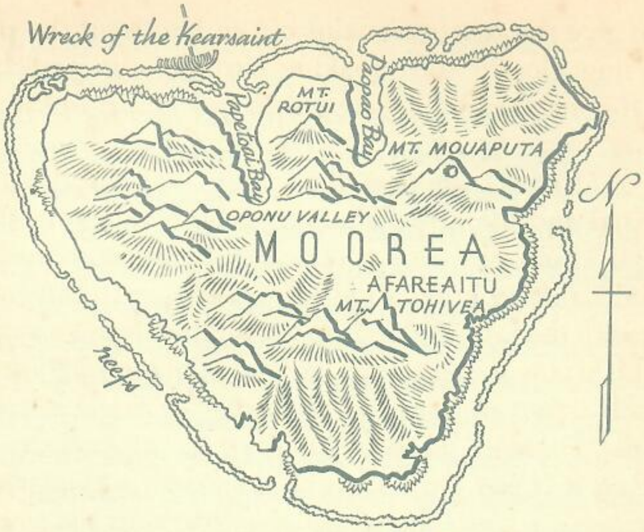
The Second Island—MOOREA



SEEN from Tahiti, Moorea had always been a purple shape on a backdrop of sea and sky. Now it was emerging in its true colors. If anything, it seemed greener than its sister island. It was certainly more rugged. It rose out of the sea with Gibraltarlike abruptness, and its peaks outsawtoothed the Sierra Nevadas.

In an hour and a half the spanking breeze had put us around the northeast tip of the island; we relaxed in the certainty of making our anchorage well before dusk. As we glided closer to the reef-tossed surf, we were able to pick out landmarks from the charts which indicated that Papetoai Bay was not more than another hour's sail ahead. The *Pilot Book* told us more:

> The island is almost an equilateral triangle in shape, each side being 8 miles in length, and the northern side taking about an east and west direction; it is surrounded by a barrier reef through which are several passes to the basins between it and the shore. On the northern side are two deep harbors named Papetoai and Paopao Bays, which afford snug and safe anchorages. These two are scarcely two miles apart, but between them rises Mt. Rotui, with several peaks, the highest of which is 2,884 feet.
> *Papetoai Bay. Directions:*—The wreck of the French Cruiser Kearsaint, on the west side of the entrance, is a good navigational mark for entering but should be given a berth of not less than 200 yds.

Once past Paopao Bay and Mount Rotui, we found an extra-blue gap in the reef, took down the fisherman, and headed abruptly toward the pass. To give the rusted remains of the *Kearsaint* the proper berth, we had to hug closely the breaking surf on our port hand; Harry climbed to the masthead and our pulses quickened to the sensation of coral piloting.

In spite of Moorea's position as the only land within sight of Tahiti, it is an isolated and forgotten island. It is hard to realize that less than a century ago, as one of the seats of residence of Tahiti's royal Pomares, it boasted a flourishing population and maintained a busy sailing-canoe intercourse with the larger island. In those days, foreign shipping called frequently at Moorea—mainly to engage in the court intrigues which were so much a part of the early struggles for trade advantage. After the fall of the Pomares, Moorea declined in importance, even to the French; today, it is just part of a Tahiti sunset—nothing more. A small semiweekly launch runs over from Papeete with supplies; a French official is in residence at Afareaitu on the east coast, but aside from his family and a handful of natives and whites, it is a deserted isle.

What a rare experience it must have been to saunter into the royal enclosure, as Melville did in 1843, and steal a peek at the Moorea palace of Queen Pomare IV. In *Omoo,* the sequel volume to *Typee,* Melville manages to strike up an acquaintance with a pretty little lady-in-waiting, who takes him into the 150-foot-long pandanus-thatched throne room of her majesty. He is quickly shooed out by the queen, but not before he has noted everything in great detail:

> The queen was a barefoot, matronly-looking woman dressed in a loose gown of blue silk, with two rich shawls, one of red and one of yellow, tied about her neck. Her features were not too handsome. Her facial expression was care-worn, her mouth voluptuous. She seemed about forty; but she is not so old.
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> The whole scene was a strange one; but most surprising was the incongruous assemblage of the most costly objects from all quarters of the globe. Cheek by jowl they lay beside the rudest native articles, without the slightest attempt at order. Superb writing-desks of rosewood, inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl; decanters and goblets of cut glass; embossed volumes of plates; gilded candelabras; sets of globes and mathematical instruments; the finest porcelain; richly mounted sabers and fowling-pieces; laced hats and sumptuous garments of all sorts, with numerous other matters of European manufacture, were strewn about among greasy calabashes half-filled with *poee,* rolls of old tappa and matting, paddles and fish spears, and the ordinary furniture of a Tahitian dwelling.

> All the articles first mentioned were, doubtless, presents from foreign powers. They were more or less injured: the fowling-pieces and swords were rusted; the finest woods were scratched; and a folio volume of Hogarth lay open, with a coconut shell of some musty preparation capsized among the miscellaneous furniture of the Rake's apartment, where that inconsiderate young gentleman is being measured for a coat.

The first Pomare, the most prominent chief of Tahiti, was known to Captain Cook as Otoo. Otoo was destined to become to the pagan world of the South Pacific what Constantine the Great was to pagan Europe. Otoo welcomed the first English missionaries to Tahiti in 1797, became their leading convert, and with their help acquired such an ascendancy over the other chiefs that he was soon declared king of all the Society Islands and their dependencies. Otoo changed his name to Pomare I, and by the time of his death in 1803 he had brought his entire kingdom of island subjects into the Church.

The rest of the Pomares were not quite so celebrated as their illustrious forbear. Pomare II fought a series of religious wars before death came in 1821. Pomare III was still a small boy when death took him. He was succeeded by his elder sister Aimata, who became Pomare IV and reigned from 1827 until her death in 1877. Because of conjugal infidelity, she was excluded from the communion of the Church. The back-sliding queen was succeeded by her son Pomare V, last king of the islands, whose reign ended three short years after his coronation. In 1880 his kingdom was formally annexed to France by a fleet of warships.

Papetoai Bay was as exclusive to the *Viator* as though we had sailed onto the waters of a mountain lake. Once at anchor, we gazed at the high surrounding volcanic peaks and in our solitude felt quite the owners of all we surveyed. By nightfall Harry and I had made everything shipshape, and Hazel was ready with our first cruising meal—creamed tuna and peas on toast, lettuce-and-watercress salad, and hot canned brown bread and jam for dessert. We ate with the appetites of young stevedores and were so exhausted from the excitement that no one thought to remark on the incongruity of opening canned tuna in the greatest tuna waters in the world!

Papetoai Bay isn't always quite the deserted spot we found it. Three mainland families, the Kellums, Wessels, and Philips, were usually in residence but we happened to call at a time when they were vacationing abroad. The bay was in the hands of a committee of one, the priceless Turia, *pareu*-clad and barefoot. At dawn of our first day she paddled out to bid us welcome and offer us the courtesy of showers and bedrooms ashore. At her suggestion we raised our anchor and lay ourselves alongside the Philips' dock — a much more convenient arrangement than shuttling back and forth in our little punt.

Turia had been to New York, London, and Paris many times and had always returned gladly to the peace and security of her native soil — without the bobbed hair or French heels she could so easily have acquired.

We had heard something of her before we came: of her Pomare blood, her command of French and English, and her sparkling personality. But she was attractive beyond anything we had pictured.

After she had shown us the three bungalows of the landed gentry—her friends, all of them, who had asked her to be caretaker in their absence—we paddled around the bay shore to see her home. She and her brother had built all of it themselves, and it was the ultimate in pure native design. The house was in three units, kitchen, living room, and bedrooms, each with its floor of waxed maroon cement. The walls were of woven bamboo, the roofs of pandanus fastened by coconut-fiber thongs to the supporting *purau*-bough rafters. Matted bamboo blinds, swinging outward to the eaves, sufficed for windows. The furniture, each piece fashioned from native woods, was also their handiwork. Hand-dipped cushion covers in pastel shades harmonized with the floors and furniture.

When we admired a hundred soft hibiscus blossoms radiating from an end-table vase, Turia explained that the stems were twigs of the orange tree, and fresh flowers were carefully gathered each morning and stuck one by one upon the tiny orange thorns. As we chatted, she leafed carefully through a copy of *Vogue* we had brought her, and stopped at a full-page portrait of Lady Mountbatten.

"I guess the world is truly a small place after all," she said, reaching to a side table for an autographed picture in a silver frame. "Lady Mountbatten gave me this when I was in England two years ago."

Turia not only excelled as a housekeeper; she also was assistant breadwinner. While her brother worked back on the hillside with their breadfruit and coconut trees, she stalked fish in the front yard. Her routine was simple. First she went down the beach with a throw net, casting over schools of omas until a dozen or so were caught and transferred into a little floating bamboo cage. This, the live bait, she then towed behind her canoe to a favorite submerged coral ledge about 25 yards from shore. Making her boat fast with a stone anchor, she would then light a cigarette, and lower away the baited hooks. She told us she had yet to report a catchless expedition.

The following morning Harry and I put *Okay*, our little Marquesan outrigger canoe, in the water, and paddled to the head of the bay and up a lovely winding stream, the Oponu, that drains the verdant d'Oponu valley. The stream was so jungle-looking, so overhung with green branches and trailing vines, that we might have been in deepest Africa. Paddling slowly we passed a continuous floating procession of yellow and pink *purau* blossoms. At last we found a deep pool about a mile above the mouth, tossed our clothes over an abruptly leaning coconut tree, and had a swim—a refreshing change from the salt lagoons. Harry topped it off by walking, monkey fashion, up our clothesrack and hurling down drinking nuts—which tasted exceptionally good, either because of the primitive way they were obtained or the effort we had opening them with a pocket knife.

We felt so invigorated after our swim we decided not to return to the *Viator* direct but instead to paddle around to the pass and proceed along inside the reef to Paopao Bay. We had read of a deep cave that could be entered high up the face of one of Paopao's cliffs, and this was our sketchy excuse for going.

By the time we reached the head of the bay, we began to doubt whether we would make our destination by canoe. Outside the reef the seas were running much higher than usual, and the wind was so strong that quantities of spray were carried over into the lagoon, hitting our faces like hail. We found out later it was the first day of the *maraamu*, the cold wind that blows for a week every month. Gradually, as we worked around the land's end, the lagoon assumed a chop too steep for our little boat to ride, and we had to take turns bailing. This so slowed us that in an hour's paddling we had scarcely covered half the distance to Paopao; we therefore beached the boat and decided to proceed afoot.

One never reads anything about the abrupt changes of temperature which accompany the *maraamu*. Even the *hupi*, or night breeze, which comes down from the mountains each evening, making sweaters a necessity, has been kept secret by the sunny South Sea writers. It was fortunate that Harry and I had polo shirts along, for the farther we walked the more the cool wind bit us. Then, just as we came upon the bay, a replica of Papetoai, a warm rain commenced and we quickened our steps to find shelter.

A few native huts dot the beach at the head of Paopao Bay, and to serve them there is a ramshackle shed housing the inevitable Chinese store. By the time we reached it, the rain was coming down in the unreal manner of movie storms, and shelter was a necessity. We tried to make some inquiries about our mysterious cave, but the Chinaman gave every evidence of not having been outside the "store" since the day it opened — sometime in the '90s, to judge from the labels on the canned goods. By the time we had wrung out our clothes the rain had ceased, and we proceeded to find what the far side of the bay had to offer.

The sun reappeared and brought out the land crabs. We passed over thousands of their holes and played a sort of game, trying to overtake them before they could vanish at our approach. The faster we walked the faster wave after wave of crabs scurried to their retreats, where they paused for a second and slid slowly out of sight. At last, running as fast as we could, we managed to corner one. He was about as large as a saucer but an exceedingly fearless little fellow. Since he saw no chance to get past us to his home, he decided to fight it out, putting both claws up in boxing fashion. He snipped through good-sized twigs that we offered him as though they were straws.

While we were experimenting, a small native lad came up, put his bare foot on the crab's back and, grasping him just behind the claws, dropped him into a tin pail he was carrying. The lad had a long bamboo pole with a bunch of young palm leaves dangling on a string, and he set about showing us a more sporting method of catching land crabs. No fly fisherman at home ever cast a trout lure with greater accuracy than our lad exhibited with his bundle of greens. He would cast to a particularly large hole and move the lure slightly until a brown claw was firmly imbedded in it, then whip his pole up in the air, landing a crab at his feet. The meat of the land crab is a favorite native bait for lagoon fishing, and to the youth of Moorea falls the chore of keeping each family well supplied.

At the head of the bay we came across the Tahitian equivalent of a colonial quilting bee. The women and children of several families were gathered on the beach, putting the last touches on the weaving of a great coconut-leaf strip, four feet wide and fully a hundred feet long. The only man in sight sat on a stump by the road, a gray gull perched on his shoulder. Everyone called "iorana" (hello) to us, and the man laughed and made signs that we should sit down and watch the fun.

Soon a dozen buxom females trailed the primitive net out into the waist-deep water in a half circle. Then the children formed ranks between the beach and the ends of the net and sang and danced and splashed and screamed to drive the fish to the center. Pulling the tightly meshed matting closer and closer shoreward was no easy task, and the women strained like Volga boatmen against the weight of the water. At the finish of the haul they all joined—all but the lone male—in tossing their heterogeneous catch onto the bank.

At this point the gull left the man's shoulder and circled above the coconut tops, creeing and scolding until his master went to the catch and returned with a handful of small fish. The bird had evidently enjoyed the sport many times before, for he zoomed and snapped rhythmically as each morsel was extended to him. As we waved goodbye and started on our way, the women were tugging seaward to repeat their performance and our friend was rummaging in the community food for more morsels to appease his scolding bird.

Our efforts to find out anything about the cave were futile; we could make no one understand us. But walking back to the canoe without facing the downpour that had dogged us on the way over, we did considerable looking. One cliff behind the point of the bay nearest home looked likely and we resolved to return next day and try again.

That night, Turia was much interested in our exploits and we read to her a passage from Mulhauser, the renowned English deep-water yachtsman, which began: "On June 11, 1924, I sailed on to Moorea — one of the most beautiful islands, if not the most beautiful island, I have ever seen." And Mulhauser went on to tell of a tunnel that was supposed to run two miles under Mount Rotui, connecting Papetoai and Paopao

Bays. It had been dug in ancient times for use in case of hostile attack. He had found an entrance on the Papetoai side, a small opening through which he crawled. When he had proceeded several hundred yards into the mountainside he was stopped for lack of air and had to come out. The opening on the Paopao side was said to be taboo ground, for it contained a burial canoe in its entranceway.

Turia explained that the shaft on her side had been closed by cave-ins, but she thought we might find the entrance on the other bay. She offered to send with us a little neighbor boy, Timi (this was Timi II), if we really wanted to track it down. Timi could do two things, she explained: act as interpreter and warn us about landslides. The landslide matter was no joke; there had been so many heavy rains in recent weeks, especially on the Paopao side of Rotui, that we would be lucky not to run into a shower or two of falling rock.

Turia, in her musical voice, told us many things about her island. She spoke of the peak, Monaputa, which has a hole through it near the summit. According to legend the hole was made when the spear of a wrathful Tahitian god passed through, hurled from far-away Papeete. She spoke of Tohivea, the cathedral mountain, whose 4,000-foot spire looms like a skyscraper above the flooded craters of the two volcanoes that make up Moorea. Looking upward through the night to the grotesque peaks surrounding us, we could almost believe the tale about the god O-tu-one-iti. He was one of the youthful gods of ancient Polynesian lore. A builder god, he busied himself each night digging valleys and pushing up mountains. But he was also a highly vulnerable god, for he lived under a curse whereby, if at any time he should fail to cease his work before dawn, he would be forthwith changed into a *maoa.** This condition accounted, of course, for the unexpected landscapes on all sides. Often, of an early-morning hour, O-tu-one-iti would just be in the middle of rearranging a number of peaks, streams, and valleys. Then when dawn-time approached, catching him with an armful of mighty rocks ready to dump into the sea, he would drop everything where he stood and disappear into space until the following night. Of course, as he always arrived in the dark, it was impossible to pick up where he had left off, and his uncompleted efforts resulted in the higgledy-piggledy terrain.

**A small shellfish.*

On the flora and fauna side, Turia told us the natives used a special drug to stupefy certain kinds of fish and make for easy catching. When the nut of the barringtonia was grated and spread on top of the water, fish the size of mullets were rendered slow-moving and easy to capture. This fish narcotic was one of many herb and tree drugs that were used widely in olden times.

Turia spoke of one very unwelcome guest who had put in an appearance every day or so in her bay. This was a giant ray, that had somehow come in from the deep sea. This great flat fish, which she had nicknamed "Oscar," measured more than 20 feet across its back. Often it curved out of the depths of the bay in the dead of night, to shimmer a moment in midair, before crashing to the surface in an enormous belly-whopper, loud enough to wake everyone within hailing distance.

The bay was flat and black and still as we three paddled *Okay* back to *Viator* from Turia's beachfront. With only an inch of freeboard showing at our gunwales we were in no mood for anything that might disturb our trim. As we climbed aboard we opined that "Oscar" must have been preoccupied munching mollusks somewhere on the bottom shallows and we were glad of it.

The following noon Harry and I started our second conquest of Paopao, accompanied by young Timi, who proved to be a likable little fellow as well as a player of the harmonica. He knew two tunes: "Lafayette," a current Papeete hit, and "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum." But as guide, Timi was somewhat of a disappointment. After talking to some natives dwelling near the area where we thought the trail to the cave should start, in a gesture of despair he turned the lead over to us, or to Harry. Harry was one of those hikers who thrive on uphill work, and he forged ahead so fast that Timi and I soon lost sight of him in the jungle above. As there were no trails, we two simply kept climbing in the general direction of the foot of the cliffs.

After pushing through a layer of wet, low bush, interspersed with the usual thick growth of coconut, we came onto a slope of slippery rock and wet black topsoil. It was so steep that we fell down every few steps. A few hundred feet further on the smell of putrid fruit was added to our discomforts. We slipped and skidded upward through an area of rotted breadfruit that seemed never ending. There must have been enough squashed breadfruit on the ground to feed all of Moorea. The last lap was mostly jagged, crumbling rock, straight up and down in places, with *purau* growing everywhere, as well as some mango and a bearing wild papaya, of which we partook. At the foot of the cliff the trees were horribly mutilated and made one think of the trees on picnic grounds at home. But there were no initials or hearts carved on these: the butchering was all the result of rock falling from above. The limbs had been hacked off one side of a large *purau*, and a sharp rock the size of an anvil was buried in the trunk. I am sure this recalled to Timi's mind his responsibility to us in the matter of slides, for he studied the tree a long time before sitting down to mouth a chorus of "Lafayette."

Timi's air finished, we commenced working slowly around the base of the volcanic wall and eventually caught up with Harry. He had climbed a tall tree and seen a ledge which appeared to have something upon it. My ascent of the tree only confirmed my feeling that the sooner we got out from under the cliff the better. I *did* see what looked like the prow of a canoe protruding from the darkness of a recess in the rock, but looking higher I realized that it was just a question of time until the whole face of the cliff slid down. A ledge 500 feet above us looked as though it was only waiting for the laying of a sea bird's egg to start the avalanche. Just as I was scanning the skies for birds, Timi gave a shout and emerged from the recess, holding the so-called canoe out for our inspection. He had walked spider fashion from a point farther along, which was hidden from my line of vision, and had lost no time getting at the bottom of the mystery. The "canoe" was a crude box containing bones and fragments of tapa. We motioned to him to replace it and made haste to beat the darkness back to Papetoai.

Nightfall caught up with us halfway to Turia's. Timi and I began to drag our feet, but Harry forged ahead on the double quick. We had stopped and were listening to his pattering feet as they hit the puddles in the gloom ahead, when suddenly there was an extra-loud splash and all sound ceased. Harry had missed a bridge by ten feet and trotted into a neck-deep stream. We approached as he was pouring water out of his camera, but he quickly quashed any sympathy we might have had for him by trotting off again like a shot. If Harry hadn't set such a sterling example, I would have imagined we had been through a strenuous time. Timi and I were a mass of scratches from head to foot, and I had walked the tops out of a pair of tennis shoes.

Our last days in Moorea were spent in fishing with Turia, wild-chicken hunting, and designing a suit of sails for our outrigger, which Timi had begged us to rig for sailing. The sewing of the sails we turned over to a dear old soul near the village of Papetoai who had the only sewing machine for miles around. On the day Harry, Timi, and I called for the completed job, we found her seated upon the floor of her hut, her black Mother Hubbard in striking contrast to the white of the sails; she was reinforcing everything by hand as though her life depended upon it. Indicating we would be back in an hour, we strolled down toward the village, which turned out to be a few thatched huts and a small school.

As we looked upon the neat pile of salvaged *Kearsaint* cannon which the school children play upon in lieu of swings and acting bars, Timi sang a new song for us. It was a derisive bit of Tahitian jingle which kidded the French for running the *Kearsaint* on the reef in good weather and in broad daylight. A native composer had put the song together in a mood of pique after several weeks of hauling heavy cannon off the reef. The first verse translated into something like this:

Tane he sails a boat of wood,
François an iron canoe;
François he proudly hits the reef
Tane goes safely through. . . .

When we had returned to the little lady and her improvised sail loft, the sail was ready and she presented it to us with a large smile. She spoke no English but wanted us to know that we were welcome. She sent a grandson up a tree for drinking nuts, and while we were waiting she rummaged in an old sea chest and gave us each a stone adze—very old ones that had been picked up on her place in the course of years. After we had paid her a few francs for the sails, which she seemed sincerely reluctant to accept, she followed us out into the yard. Here a number of decayed canoes served as flower boxes, and she picked us a little bouquet to take along.

The afternoon we chose to leave Moorea turned suddenly dark and ominous. The surrounding peaks which we had admired on so many occasions were cloaked in mist; a great bank of black clouds closed in from the west as though to smother our attempt to reach deep water in daylight. (It didn't occur to us that with months at our disposal there was no need to sail off in a squall.) We had promised Turia to fly the blue peter when the boat was ready for sea and give her time to paddle across the bay and come aboard for a last farewell. It was 6:30 before we had put the deck in order, stowed everything below with extra care as a precaution against the weather outside, and gone over the charts and sailing directions for Huahine,* 97 miles distant. By 6:35 a sound as of two express trains racing in from the pass warned that a tropical deluge was pelting the palm fronds ten minutes away and would soon be upon us. We donned oilskins, kicked on the motor, and headed out, not pausing to do anything about the flag. Hazel made our farewell to Turia by semaphoring a flashlight from the companionway, and just as the heavens opened up, an answering light shone from the inky pocket to starboard.

Giving respectful sea room to the low bits of the *Kearsaint* faintly silhouetted against the murk, we slowly churned out into the wind, which by now was sweeping the valley in awesome gusts. This was a time when the little motor literally stood between us and trouble. Its throb couldn't be heard above the whine of the wind, so it felt as though some invisible force was carrying us through the pass. Once outside the reef, Harry and I jumped to putting the sails on as Hazel rounded the boat up into the wind. There was quite a little sea piling up, and as the sails thrashed and slatted and a couple of combers rolled aboard, I cursed the luck that I hadn't better memorized where everything was before this first night off soundings. I slid and ricocheted around on the water-slick decks in very lubberly fashion, admiring Harry's smooth know-how as we trimmed her down to the rail breeze that would put us off Huahine at dawn.

We traded watches through the night, and by 6:00 a.m., with Harry at the helm, all was peaceful and quiet in our bunks below. The skylight had been removed and the cabin was bathed in bright morning sunlight. The boat was riding smoothly now and flecks of clouds framed in the rectangle of sky above were torn bits of tissue paper that someone had tried to put together again. I looked across at Hazel's placid face, almost smiling in her sleep, and felt that if there were a Congressional medal for adaptability she should have one.

"On the road to Mandelay-ay-ay" floated softly down the com-

**Hoo-ah-heeny.*

panionway, calling me to the tiller. While Harry nimbly ascended the foremast, singing the rest of the song, squadron after squadron of flying fish hedge-hopped the blue waves to right and left. Huahine appeared at 8:00 a.m. as scheduled, but with a falling wind we still had several hours' sail to the entrance of the lagoon off Fare. Through our glasses we could plainly see the trees growing horizontally from the peak of Mount Paeo—as cryptically described in the *Pilot Book*.

Another climb up the mast had revealed a generous opening in the reef—a fairly straight passage across the lagoon to a tumble-down wooden dock, but as we swung to go in, the wind dropped to force zero and it seemed to take forever to ghost across the remaining half mile.

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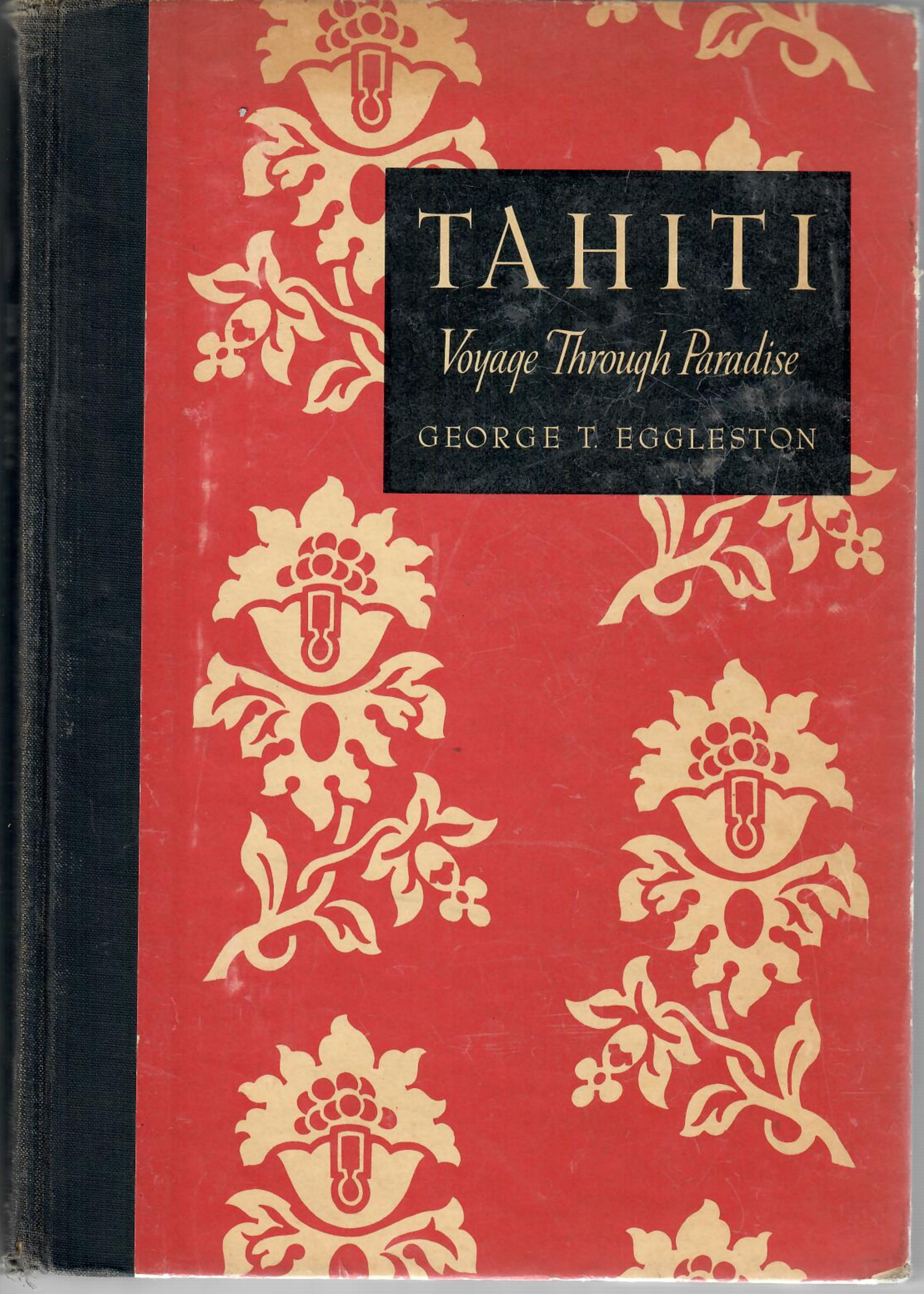

TAHITI

Voyage Through Paradise

GEORGE T. EGGLESTON