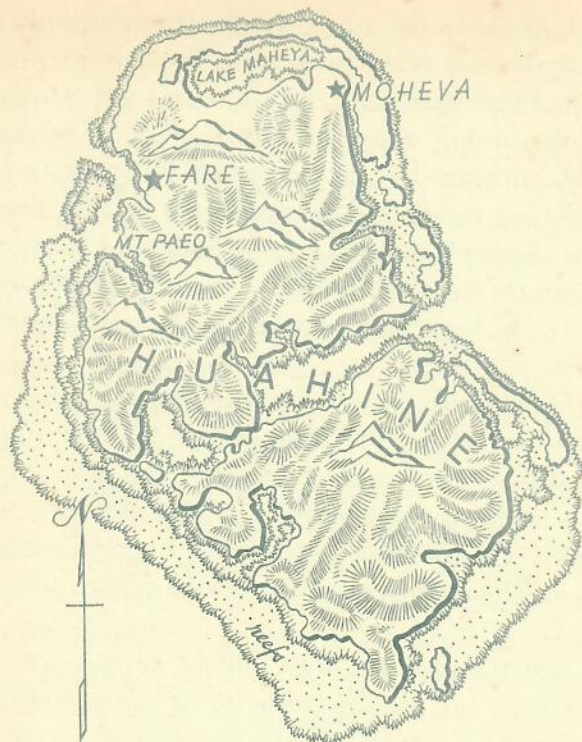


## The Third Island—HUAHINE



**B**Y THE time we had closed with the Fare dock a hundred or so natives, mostly children, were waiting to meet us and lend a hand with bumpers, lines, and sail covers. Some of the children lay on their stomachs opposite the stern trying to read our name.

“Vee-ate-or, Vee-ah-tor.”

“Sahn-frahn-kisco.”

All general talk was Tahitian but occasionally the words “yatch marite” could be heard. Any boat from the United States, regardless of size or cargo, is a “yatch marite” (American yacht) in French Oceania, and since Huahine hadn't seen one in over a year, we were a real curiosity.

At length a tall native with gray hair and regular features—the only human in sight wearing shoes—stepped aboard.

“Welcome to Huahine, my friends. My name is Chave, but everybody in Frisco called me ‘Sonny.’ I was two years a salad boy at the Clift Hotel. I am at your service.”

“Can we buy some oranges and papayas?”

"No sooner said than done," and Sonny elbowed his way back through the crowd just as a European with a white waxed mustache appeared from nowhere and called to us in French suggesting we take the boat's papers around to the *préfet de police* for inspection. He vanished as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving us to figure out just where the *préfet de police* might hold forth. By the time we had our papers together, Sonny was back with a basket of oranges and said the papayas were on the way. There were exactly 100 oranges in the lot, and a native would be around sometime the next morning to collect five francs.

Following Sonny's directions to the *préfet de police*, we walked along the village path to a creek and on the other side brought up at a little building that seemed to be a combination school and sanctum of officialdom. Inside we were greeted by a lone official—the man with the waxed mustache. He shuffled through our papers without pausing to read anything and bowed us out—the whole operation not taking thirty seconds.

The Frenchman's attitude was that of an all-but-extinct type of colonial officialdom, but the friendliness of the natives on every hand was as genuine as the day the island was first claimed in the name of his Britannic Majesty George III. It was on July 15, 1769, that Lieutenant Cook had anchored his *Endeavour* a few yards from where we lay. The *Endeavour's* anchor had barely gripped bottom before the ship was boarded by a horde of enthusiastic, gift-bearing natives.

Probably no diplomatic conquest in British history was so easily concluded as was Cook's deal with King Oree. The Great Navigator simply stepped ashore and gifted the king with "a handkerchief, a black silk neckcloth and some beads . . . these ceremonies being considered a kind of ratification of a treaty between the English and the king of Huahine." To clinch the arrangement, the king gave Cook a hog and two bunches of feathers, and as far as the Lords of the Admiralty were concerned, the island was thenceforward British.

After a good night's rest we were early roused by Sonny and his *vahine* (wife), inviting us to join them in a visit to Moheva, ten miles north along the shore. It was Sunday and they had been asked to dinner at the chief's, who they said would be very happy to include us. They had arranged to go as far as the end of the road in a Chinaman's truck

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(the island boasted three automobiles) and the remaining few miles by canoe.

Our ride to the road's end was a memorable one for two reasons: it was the bumpiest we had ever experienced; and a severe case of elephantiasis rode with us. The unfortunate victim was a woman of about 50 and such was her condition that three natives had to lift her into the truck. Her trouble was concentrated in the right leg, which bulged at the ankle to the size of a wastebasket, hiding all the toes of her bare foot. To Hazel, Harry, and me, this spectacle was a jarring preliminary to a native feast, but everyone else took it for granted. Huahine was noted for fey-fey (elephantiasis), Sonny told us, and we might expect to see much worse. We had seen some elephantiasis in Tahiti, but nothing like this. According to one native theory, it came from eating over-ripe breadfruit at certain times of year. Only recently has it been confirmed medically that the disease is transmitted by the mosquito *Culex fatigans*. Sonny told us he had heard of tourists contracting fey-fey and losing it promptly upon their return to a temperate climate, but this sounded too simple to be true. We were glad when we parted company with our passenger at the canoe landing.

A half hour's canoe ride landed us at our destination, a thatched native village on stilts over the water, each house having its little thatched privy alongside.

The lagoon at this point is more in the nature of a salt-water lake: the barrier reef, two hundred yards to seaward, has in the course of centuries become what hydrographers called a "fringing reef"—solid land, heavily wooded. Because of this circumstance, Moheva is sheltered and very hot.

We caught the villagers just as they were returning from church in some very new-looking store clothes, and Sonny explained to us that the island was in the midst of booming vanilla prices and the natives were comparatively rich. The last schooner from Papeete had called but a few weeks before and brought bicycles, bureaus, bedsteads, and other badges of affluence which the natives readily purchased with the money paid them by the local Chinese vanilla magnates. The natives are particularly adept at growing and hand-pollinating the vanilla, which the Chinese buy and cure, and are all busy during a vanilla market.

There was but half a mile of path suitable for bicycling in Moheva,

but every house had its shining vehicle out in front, and many of the churchgoers passed us rolling theirs along by hand.

The villagers' Sunday dress was fantastic. Bare feet protruded from under new suits and dresses, and shoes, dangling by the laces, were carried over arms. The women seemed partial to large straw picture hats, while many of the men wore felt berets of red or green. Although on week days *pareu* cloth reigned supreme, on Sundays during a vanilla boom the comfortable loin covering was considered out of order.

As we walked by the bamboo *himine*\* house and looked in, we saw a few natives sitting upon mats on the dirt floor. The native preacher stood talking to some stragglers and pointing repeatedly to the book in his hand. His was the only complete ensemble in evidence—a white suit surmounted by a black bow tie. Huahine was one of the principal stations of London Missionary Society work in the early 19th century, and although there are at present no resident missionaries, the islanders still devoutly embrace the faith.

The chief's house was new—a wooden box twenty feet square, roofed with shining tin. It looked incongruous in the row of bamboo and thatch, but he was proud of it and there was no question but that it excited the envy of his subjects.

The chief and his brother were younger than we expected and were conservatively dressed for a Sunday in Moheva in khaki trousers and shirts. They were introduced to us, Sonny acting as interpreter, and immediately they set about showering us with hospitality.

Chairs and table were sent for and as we crowded into a little room over the water the chief appeared with a pitcher of punch. It tasted of rum together with fruit juices but the predominating flavor was vanilla, a vanilla pod being immersed in it. With the seven of us seated around the table and the punch poured, a dignified thanks offering was said and the meal started. The chief and his brother sat at the head, Hazel at the foot and Harry, I and the Chaves along the sides. Our hosts' women folk were never in evidence. They stayed in the cook house across the road and sent the food to the door by children from whom it was received and distributed by the chief.

There was cubed raw fish in coconut sauce, taro, yams, fei, hot bananas, breadfruit and suckling pig. Hazel and I were amused as we

\*Himine, pronounced him-in-ee (derived from English "hymn" singing).

eagerly ate the raw fish to recall the things we had read concerning this Tahitian dainty. It has often been described as a shocking dish that one grows accustomed to gradually. If Sonny hadn't told us it was raw fish we would have thought it just an exceptionally tasty sea-food cocktail. Since the uncooked fish is soaked in lime juice and dipped in coconut cream before eating, it is not unlike a delicious marinated herring in cream. We ate all that was put before us and passed our plates for more.

We from the *Viator* ate with forks of very thin aluminum which promptly broke, one after the other, much to our embarrassment. Our friends ate with their fingers and saturated everything in bowls of coconut sauce before sucking it into their mouths. The sucking is an important part of native etiquette and signifies satisfaction. We were eating so silently amid the swish-swishing on all sides that at length Sonny announced that the chief's feelings were hurt. He thought we weren't enjoying things, and disappointment was written all over his crestfallen face. Sonny said if we couldn't suck we should say "maitai" (fine), every so often and thus raise the host's spirits. This we did, and soon the chief and his brother were beaming.

We were also advised to try to finish all the pork. Hot fish had not been served, being considered beneath our dignity, thus the young pig was a delicacy which we must relish. Everything was beautifully cooked by the old Tahitian method, modern stoves never having caught the fancy of the Huahinians. Only the ground oven, with leaf-wrapped food lying for hours under a pile of hot volcanic stone, can impart the flavor that permeated our perfect repast. We ate to the bursting point and even indulged in some finger swishing before we repaired to the porch and lay down for siestas on the sleeping mats.

After a suitable rest we were taken out to the "backyard," where the chief, through Sonny, explained the workings of the village fish traps. Centuries ago, in an era of civic planning, a maze of coral walls was built between Moheva and the fringing reef, so that transient fish might be diverted to shallow pools and scooped up at leisure. Succeeding generations have kept the project in working order, and today it is as much part of the community life as it ever was. The only improvement has been in the scoop nets, which now are often made of twine rather than woven bark. The abundance of easily netted food naturally ex-

plains the tendency to place fish well below pork on the bill of fare.

Moheva is rich in archeological remains, and on no other island were we to see so many of the great stone platforms, called *maraes*. Fifty yards from the chief's house stood one in a fair state of preservation. It was a rectangular wall of upright coral slabs, five and six feet high. In the center, over an area about 20 feet wide and 30 feet long, tons of coral lay loosely piled. Here, in ancient times, priests held important religious ceremonies, and occasionally human sacrifices were made to placate the gods of war and peace. Not far from this *marae* were the remains of a smaller one. It was almost completely grown over with brush, and a great *purau* tree rose majestically from its center, the green leaves and yellow blossoms striking a lively contrast to the gray of the stone. On one of the slabs were the faint tracery of several spiral figures and the outlines of a canoe. Since the old Polynesians had no written language, these engravings were particularly rare.

Near the church, a stone marked the resting place of Huahine's last king. A bottle embedded in its surface contained, for the sight of future generations, two of the king's teeth. To judge from the poor native teeth in evidence all around us, the old man must have been something of a specimen.

Across the lagoon and deep in the jungle growth of the fringing reef was a *marae* rarely visited by natives and scarcely ever seen by white men. As a special favor, the chief offered to take us to it. It proved to be well worth the hot walk. The structure was about 200 feet long and 15 feet high in places. Waist-high stone portals led into an antechamber. The interior of the *marae* proper contained literally thousands of large coral stones that, ages before, had been quarried from the reef. There were also many fragments of human remains. One skull particularly interested us because of the plain evidence of its owner's violent death. Some ancient stone cleaver had sliced away the bone so cleanly there was not a crack or a rough edge around the hole. Had we been on an unconduted tour, we would have lifted aside fragments of the rock and investigated further, but the chief was plainly uneasy and a touch superstitious of possible *tupaupaus* (ghosts) lurking in the vicinity; so we went back.

Around four we started for Fare, choosing to walk the shore rather than canoe to our Chinese taxi. It was a lovely walk over many good-

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sized streams, and at two of these we came on picturesque bathing parties. One was a very beautiful stream of swirling green water, in the middle of which a pair of smiling native girls sat on rocks and cheerfully greeted us. When we stopped for a picture, they laughingly struck poses and sang a song.

At the other stream, a more densely wooded one, two grandmas were sitting in the water and carefully drying a pair of tiny tots after having administered the daily fresh-water scrubbing. One of the children was white, and Sonny mentioned an American yachtsman as the father. He said there were several children on the island whose ancestry could be traced to American yachts, and the natives were rather proud of the fact. Extra children are always readily looked after by their grandparents, and white ones are highly prized in all families.

We shot some pictures here and so pleased the grandmother of the white child that she took us to her hut and gave us two pairs of mammoth blue crabs freshly caught in the lagoon. They were quite alive but so cleverly trussed up with bark thongs that only their eyes moved. When we parted with Sonny and his wife for the evening we cooked our crabs and sat down for the first time in our lives to more crab than we could possibly eat. The pieces of meat from the large claws were of the size of pork chops.

The days the *Viator* lay at Fare dock, with the exception of our visit in Moheva, were rather unpleasant. Our surroundings were far from beautiful after Papetoai Bay, and the crowds of children climbing around the deck and peering at us through the skylight became a decided nuisance. Had there been a way to anchor at Moheva we would have eagerly made the shift, but coral-glutted intervening shallows prevented it. We occupied the island's only practical mooring, and being dissatisfied there was but one thing to do—sail on. This we did, but not before a rather weird last night.

Just as we were preparing to turn in, a great wailing issued from a house not 20 paces from the dock. It was so loud, shrill, and persistent that we knew without being told that a death had occurred. Sonny appeared in a few minutes with the news that the oldest woman on the island had just passed away and natives would come for miles around to join the wake. Her death had been expected for some weeks, and relatives had even completed a sturdy coffin of native woods so there

would be no delay after the spark of life had left the aged body. From our dock we could witness the whole proceeding, and since everybody appeared to be participating, we felt no qualms about looking on.

The one-room house was soon ablaze with coal-oil lamps, and against the blackness of the rest of the village it looked from where we sat like a stage set. Lamps lined the porch, and as more people arrived more lamps appeared. Through the large door and window could be seen the corpse propped up in a high bed with candles on either side. A tall preacher in white was gesticulating and shouting, but he could not be heard over the wailing.

Soon every inch of space on porch and steps was filled with squatting mourners, and groups began to collect in the yard. Of a sudden, as by previous arrangement, all wailing ceased and the preacher's voice rang out in a solo of musical Tahitian that lasted about half an hour. When he stopped, a multitude of women's voices filled the air in a very shrill chant that must have carried far out to sea. The sound could only be compared to bagpipes — a sound from human throats never to be forgotten.

The long sermon of the preacher apparently was the signal for a predetermined routine, because thenceforth through the night his talks and the chanting alternated at regular intervals. According to Sonny, some of the songs were Bible stories set to native music, and some were recently rehearsed songs concerning the deceased. All had been practiced at the *himines*, the weekly religious song fests of the church. He said he wished we had heard the singing at the *himine* house—it was considerably better and not characterized by the agonizing tones of the wake.

At 6:00 a.m. we sailed, and picking up the 15-knot trade outside the reef we soon put *Viator* beyond earshot of the Huahine funeral party.

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The book cover is a vibrant red color, adorned with a repeating gold floral pattern. The pattern consists of stylized flowers with multiple petals and clusters of small berries or buds, interspersed with scrolling vines and leaves. A central black rectangular label is positioned on the upper half of the cover, containing the title and author's name in gold lettering. The spine of the book, visible on the left, is a dark, textured material.

TAHITI

*Voyage Through Paradise*

GEORGE T. EGGLESTON