CLIFFORD GESSLER

ROAD MY BODY GOES

a JOHN DAY book

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TO ALL who long to know what life really is on a South Sea island, this book will come like a fresh breeze across a lagoon. It is the honest, vivid account of months spent among an unspoiled people who had never known white men before, written by one who has both the newspaper reporter's passion for facts and the poet's perception of beauty.

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ROAD MY BODY GOES

by Clifford Gessler

THIS BOOK comes out of the fo'c'sle of a sampan in the wide-spaced waters beneath the Line, and from the coral-ringed lagoons of atolls that lie like wreaths upon the sea.

Clifford Gessler left a telegraph news desk on a Honolulu newspaper to accompany an expedition for the Bishop Museum on a cruise to some of the most remote and primitive islands in the southeastern Pacific, aboard one of the strangest ships that ever carried scientific men. He and K. P. Emory, the Museum ethnologist, lived for three months on the atoll of Tepuka, in the Tuamotu archipelago, where the natives follow their ancient customs and primitive life, and where white men are virtually unknown. Cut off from the outside world, the two Americans had to meet injury, illness or any emergency with only their meager resources and the magic incantations and traditional herb practice of the native medicine-men. "I Walked Too Near a Grave" is the title of one chapter which rises to a climax of danger softened by the friendly aid of a Tuamotuan sorcerer.

On a forty-foot sailing cutter, Gessler voyaged to other of the Dangerous Islands, and to Tahiti, where, almost penniless, he waited through weeks of hardship for the belated and unreported sampan to arrive to take him home.

This bare sketch of his experiences can do no more than suggest the richness of the material in *Road My Body Goes*. The feel of the real South Seas is in this book, written not by a professional world-tramp but by an amateur with an informed approach to native life and the sympathy and insight to record it in its simple beauty.

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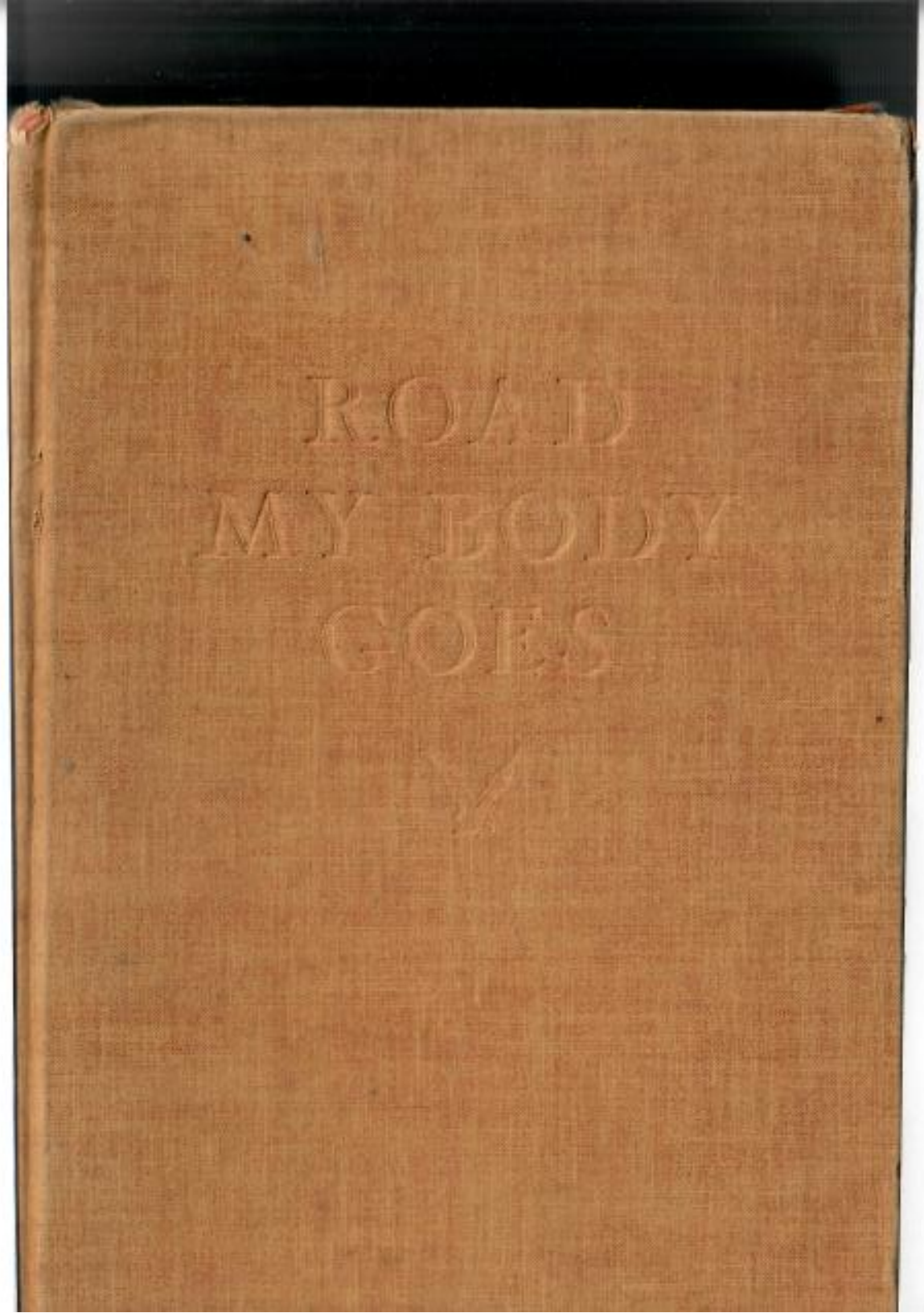
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ROAD MY BODY GOES

8 GRAINS OF COARSE CORAL SAND COLLECTED AT TE PUKA MARUIA BY George Bal 225 NOVEMBER 2019

B. P. Bishop Museum Photo by K. P. Emory

In the shade of tall palms stands the village well of Tepuka Maruia.

ROAD MY BODY GOES

CLIFFORD GESSLER

Illustrated

A JOHN DAY BOOK

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This is the road my body goes:
lost in the foaming sea.
Alas, alas, alas indeed!
Beneath the burning heat of day,
alas indeed!

—Tahitian Song.

TEI KOA HOKI

HEREWITH thanks to persons and organizations that contributed to the experience recorded in this book: among them the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum for permission to accompany its expedition and (though the Museum is not to be held responsible for any error or for any expression of personal opinion herein) for use of its records and photographs; to the editors of *Asia Magazine*, *Pacific Geographic*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Five Star Weekly*, *Diesel Progress*, the Gernsback publications and others in which parts of this material have appeared; to Polynesian friends in remote islands, who cannot read this note of gratitude; to Kenneth P. Emory, faithful friend and companion of my sojourn there, and my shipmates aboard the *Islander* and the *Tiare Tahiti;* most of all to Margaret Gessler, whose courage and understanding persuaded me to go to the seas wherein I found the Isles of Peace.

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LANGUAGE NOTE

Since this is an account of a voyage and sojourn in the South Seas, several Polynesian names inevitably occur, as well as a very few other Polynesian words —reduced to a minimum—whose meaning is clear from the context. Pronunciation is simple, if one may be permitted to ignore fine distinctions. Vowels have, roughly, the following qualities:

A as in father.
E as in vein.
I as in machine.
O as in bone.
U as double *o* in boot.

Every vowel is sounded; there are no silent letters. To make it easier for the unaccustomed reader, however, I have made two departures from accepted spelling: rendering the name of my companion Kenete, to preserve its three syllables, as "Keneti," and the Polynesian nasal "g" as "ng"—pronounced always as in "singer" and never as in "finger."

Consonants, with this exception, are sounded as in English.

Further elaboration, in the interest of complete accuracy, would interest only students of language, who are referred to the studies of J. Frank Stimson, known in these pages as Ua, and other publications of the Bishop Museum.

Where and When

It Is Already becoming difficult for me to believe that such a place as Tepuka Maruia really exists. Just as from that island the complex and somewhat feverish world we know recedes and becomes unreal, so now, in the midst of this world again, Tepuka in turn fades into unreality, even as from the deck of a departing schooner its red-rimmed shores and green and golden palms sink beneath the horizon of the Pacific.

Yet I know that unless in the last few months some convulsion of nature has hurled it back into the surrounding depths, that broken ring of coral islets still encloses that lagoon dotted with mounds of shells, and its two hundred brown and sturdy inhabitants are going about their simple business of obtaining the day's food from sea and land, very much as if no other world existed but their own.

In that part of the South Sea eastward of Tahiti, flung across it in a long ragged line like a band of nebulæ across the sky, stretching from northwest to southeast for more than nine hundred miles, lie the eighty or more low coral islands known officially as the Tuamotu, to their inhabitants as Paumotu or Poumotu, and to the navigators who explored these seas as the Dangerous Islands.

Farthest north of these, and eight degrees farther east than Tahiti, or about midway of the east and west length of the archipelago, are two atolls close together but separated rather widely from others of the chain. To the nautically minded, they are about fourteen degrees south of the equator and one hundred and forty-one west of Greenwich, and more than a hundred miles from that other island of the Tuamotu that is the nearest land.

The official name of the larger of the two islands, Napuka, is, its people say, a foreign name, having no meaning in their language. Perhaps it is a mistaken collectivization for "Pukarua," a name sometimes applied to these, as to other pairs of islands, as "the two lands of the puka trees."

Now they are a district of that scattered empire known as Les Établissements Français de l'Océanie, and the local chief bears the title of Président du Conseil de District de Napuka. No Frenchman lives there; the administration of the Tuamotu, at Fakarava, is many days' sailing over dangerous seas; the colonial government of French Oceania, at Papeete, is farther still, and life goes on, affected a little by missionary activity and the copra trade, but in most of its essentials still the life of a primitive Polynesian people, saved by poverty from the fate that has overtaken their kindred in many isles of the Tuamotu.

Throughout the days of sail, the Tuamotu were avoided. It was for good reason that the early navigators called them the Dangerous Islands. Low lying, visible for only a few miles at sea; encircled with reefs off which deep water often affords no secure anchorage; beset with rapid currents that change without warning; imperfectly charted, and subject to violent hurricanes, they are still a death-trap for ships. Only the copra trade and pearl fishing swung them into the routes of the schooners that ply in and out of Papeete. The temporary prosperity that these things brought has been the ruin of many of those islands. But Tepuka and Tepoto have comparatively little copra and few if any pearls; they are relatively remote, and the prevailing winds make them difficult to reach. They are sighted occasionally from French steamships passing between the Panama Canal and Tahiti on the line that runs from France to New Caledonia. Once in three months or so, a schooner calls for a few hours to pick up the small quantity of copra which is their sole article of export.

They are small islands, unimportant to a world whose main

concern is commercial and industrial profit. Tepuka is about four and a half miles long and two miles wide. The mean width of the land partly enclosing the lagoon is perhaps a quarter of a mile. Tepoto, though it is a solid island, all of one piece, its interior lagoon having dried up, is smaller. But they suffice. They have been, and can be again, independent of the rest of the world. Even today, many of the changes have been but surface matters. Essentially, much of the old life still remains.

They are happy in that coral land. There are song and laughter in their streets, and dancing in the clean-swept dooryards at night. The young folk dance beneath the moon, and make love afterward on the mats under the coconut trees, and there is none to censure them or think of shame. There are many children at Tepuka and Tepoto—sturdy, laughing, lustrous-eyed children, who swim in the warm lagoon and catch fish with their quick hands in the shallows, and play merry games up and down the sanded streets. The world outside may be shattered with economic distress, may face starvation in lands that produce such plenty as the Tuamotuan cannot even imagine. But Tepuka and Tepoto know nothing of these things. In a country free from the stress and burden of our complex and topheavy civilization, its profit motive geared down to five dollars a year—in such a land there can be no "depression."

It is questionable whether the life of Tepuka would satisfy, permanently, a person of Western race and upbringing. But the first influence of such an environment upon a stranger fresh from the turmoil of American civilization is amazing. Instead of boredom with the supposed monotony of existence in a restricted sphere, one feels only a deep sense of peace. It is as if a burden had been lifted; as if one had been viewing the world through lenses that distorted one's vision, and now saw clearly for the first time.

It was there that I went, in the course of an expedition

from the Bernice P. Bishop Museum of Honolulu, and in company with Kenneth P. Emory, ethnologist of the museum staff—known in these pages by his island name "Keneti."

I hope no reader will acquire from these pages mistaken notions of an easeful and idyllic life among our Tuamotuan friends as being available to everybody. In the experience herein recorded I was singularly fortunate in having the aid of the facilities of a great American research institution and of a companion who already had an entrée into the confidence of the people, and I entered that experience with a background of thirteen years' residence in Hawaii and some accompanying acquaintance with Polynesian language and customs. Visitors not so equipped would find life in the Tuamotu more difficult.

These are my friends, the people of that land; in whose houses we lived, whose simple food we ate and on whose mats we slept; whose ancient chants we learned in the hours after midnight by the dim light in the houses woven of leaves, and whose dances we danced with them on the sea-worn pebbles under the moon; in whose language I learned to speak, if but haltingly, and, in that language, dream.

I tell of them and of their life, and of our life among them, honestly, as befits an honest people, and simply, as they would have it told.

I

The Dangerous Islands

1. At Home in the Dangerous Islands

TEPUKA MARUIA lies like a wreath upon the sea. Its coral islets curve in a broken oval around its variously colored lagoon; above them its thousands of coconut palms write an unintelligible fantastic message in the sky.

It was but the outer rim of the wreath that we saw that morning, a speck of precarious bloom in the vast unfrequented meadows of the sea. It was at first only a low dark line against the dawn—hardly more than the serrated crest of a wave. One often sights a low island first at dawn. The ship lies off at a safe distance overnight, and in the morning approaches cautiously the dangerous shore. At some islands—Anaa, for instance, in the western Tuamotu, and at Tapuaerangi in the Line Isles—one sees a green glow in the sky long before the land itself becomes visible. These are atolls with great shallow lagoons, whose green or yellow reflection on the clouds identifies them from afar. The lagoon of Tepuka is deep, and lights no warning signal in the sky.

Gradually the low land lifted into view: a curve of reef, lightly feathered with the tips of palms. It solidified and took shape: the palms thrust higher, a white coral church, distinguishing landmark for miles at sea, rising out of the yellow and green of tumbled fronds.

The island was a fresh and beautiful sight as we approached: its outer reef, the color of weathered red brick, slanting sharply into deep blue and green water, and spreading landward in an expanse of flat border-reef, with tide pools standing in its crevices and depressions. Behind it rose the gray-white, jagged, raised slabs of old broken beaches; farther inland, a broad white glare of sand, blindingly brilliant

in the tropic light, till our eyes rested with relief on the coconut trees that waved green and tawny fronds as far as sight could reach.

Fishermen in tiny dugout canoes were plying their lines offshore. Younger men, stripped to loincloths, their powerful bodies gleaming darkly in the water, were diving with spears near the reef. The lean, clean, silent black dogs of the chief's household loped up and down the coral flats, hunting their sea-food in the morning tide.

A crowd had gathered at the landing place to view the infrequent arrival of a ship. Most of them were children, in faded red loincloths or in tiny strips of old flour-sacking, the smaller ones naked, their brown bodies standing out darkly against the white of sand. A few of their elders stood about: men in blue dungarees cut off at the knee, and tattered white singlets; women in bright or faded knee-length print dresses, or in *pareu* that made vivid splashes of red under the morning sun. A huge French flag was run up on a pole planted in the beach sand, in honor of our arrival.

They watched us curiously as we anchored in the beautiful water. Canoes drew alongside, paddled swiftly by brown, mustached Tuamotuans in tall hats. Children swam out, holding chickens under one arm. One lad carried a crude ukulele fashioned from a sardine tin. A small, wiry Polynesian of the Caucasian type of features, with formidable black mustaches, came aboard. By his blue cap, trimmed with red braid, the symbol of French colonial authority in these outlying districts of Oceania (and worn only on state occasions), we knew him for the island equivalent of chief of police.

He examined the ship's papers—an empty formality, since he could neither read nor speak French or English—and signaled with his arms for drinking-coconuts to be brought to the ship.

This official went ashore with the mail for the island—a single sack containing, as we saw later, nothing but one copy

of an ecclesiastical publication in the Tahitian language—and returned with the chief, a handsome, stalwart man, with even more impressive mustaches. The chief wore once-white trousers with blue stripes, tucked up around the knees for wading in and out of canoes, the remains of a white undershirt, and a soiled sun-helmet. Maono Maetiu Arai, president of the council of the district, and Tehau, his gendarme, were dressed up for the occasion.

Landing at low islands usually is accomplished in whaleboats, and is an uncertain process. Trusting rather to the seamanship of the natives and the seaworthiness of their canoes, Keneti and I accepted Maono's invitation to accompany him ashore. We clambered down into the narrow canoe, balancing our typewriters precariously on our knees as the paddlers drove the tiny craft toward the reef. Waves spilled over the low sides with every stroke; a boy bailed them out with a coconut shell. The paddlers watched their chance; the canoe rose on an incoming wave and hung poised; they drove it skillfully into the shallow depression in the reef which is the "harbor."

We waded through the shallows on the smooth pink coral and clambered over the piled-up slabs of uprooted beach. Other canoes followed with our luggage and supplies. Islanders stood regarding us curiously, some eagerly turning over the soaked pages of old magazines which spilled from a broken bundle on the rock.

The chief, quite democratically picking up a suitcase in either hand, led us down a broad street, laid out as straight as with a ruler, curbed with blocks of coral and neatly sanded, between thatched palm-leaf houses, irregularly spaced, to which little paths wound over the coral, beneath the leaning palms.

Half a dozen young men followed us with the remainder of our belongings, as Maono showed us into the house that had been set aside for—contrary to what one reads of the

South Seas—a sizeable consideration in Banque d'Indo-Chine notes.

"There are not really enough houses in the village," he explained. "The people have increased. But I have arranged with Kararo to let you stay in this one. His son Tangihia will move into the house next door, with Kararo's family."

It was a fine house, for these parts: oblong, with walls stoutly woven of coconut leaves; a high roof of the stronger pandanus, heavily thatched with leaves of one or both trees; the whole building set nearly a yard from the ground, out of reach of pigs, on a foundation of large blocks of coral, filled in with a floor of small white pebbles upon which had been laid a large mat.

Two irregular stone steps led up to an entrance at the seaward end. Another entrance, opposite, and one on the side of the house toward the street, were without such approaches. All these openings were fitted with rude doors nailed together from bits of boxes and hung on leather hinges. There were no windows, but the woven sides admitted the breeze.

A few odds and ends lay about the single room: a chest in one corner, an empty box and some bottles in another; coils of cured pandanus leaf hung from nails driven into the frame of poles.

The doorways filled with curious villagers as we moved in. An elderly man in a red waistcloth, with walrus mustaches, graying hair, and a face that suggested strongly the features of a certain prominent American financier and former secretary of the treasury, appeared, smelling slightly of fish.

"I am Kararo. You are welcome in my house."

This was our landlord, a capitalist in his way and, as we had already discovered, the most acquisitive and inquisitive resident of the community.

He produced a key and pointed out, with evident pride, an ancient and rusted padlock of French construction which secured the street door. The other doors could be fastened

from the inside, one with a loop of wire and the other with a wooden latch, which fell off at the slightest pressure.

"This," the owner informed us, "is the only house on the island that can be locked up."

"You must," he stipulated, "save your garbage for my pigs. If you drive any nails in the walls, you must leave them there and not take them with you when you go. And save for me all your tin cans."

Tins with removable tight covers are valuable, in the Tuamotu, as containers, but it was a long time before we found out why he wanted the ordinary small cans, useless for that purpose and jagged with the cut of the opener. Weeks afterward, it came out.

"He takes them to his land at the other end of the island," his wife Tangia revealed, when she came to know us better, "and buries them around the roots of his coconut trees. He believes the iron, as it rusts away, will give strength to the trees."

Young men moved in our supplies and remained to stare. Others crowded into the room and blocked the doorways. They were a healthy-looking lot, mostly of medium stature, but strongly built; with smooth skins of varying degrees of brown, luxuriant dark or reddish hair, and white, even teeth. The number of children was impressive—beautiful, brown, sturdy children, whose great dark eyes followed our every movement, picking out this or that article of wonderment as it was unpacked.

"There, look at that!" they whispered.

Teuri, the secondary chief, came to help. He was a stocky, curly-haired chap, whose appearance was somewhat marred by salt-water sores on his legs, which he kept stamping alternately to shake off the flies. Teuri, we learned, was a naturalized citizen of Tepuka, a native of the Society Islands, who had come to the atoll as a sailor, formed an association

with a Tepuka girl, and remained, to enjoy a certain prestige because of his smattering of knowledge of foreign ways.

"My father," he revealed, "was killed in the fighting on Raiatea"—in the last century, before the islands had been pacified as now.

"Any foreigner," he explained, "can become a member of the community after he has been here six months. After that time, he has to do his share of the community work, but he cannot acquire land, since all the land is held by the families who are already here."

The latter prohibition is, however, no hardship; one merely exercises, as does Teuri, the land rights of one's native wife.

Our captain meanwhile was bargaining with the villagers for supplies, acquiring several ducks and chickens and a quantity of coconuts in consideration of tobacco and empty oil tins. A group of men were trying to sell him a pig.

"I don't want a whole pig," he was protesting. "It would spoil before we could eat it."

"That is no difficulty," responded one of the men. "Invite us aboard to help eat it!"

Among the visitors in our doorways we noticed an unusually blond little girl who had attracted our attention even before our landing.

"Who is she?"

Old one-eyed Herako, who had just rescued a roll of excelsior from the rubbish and was braiding it into a garland for her hat, replied:

"She is Maruia, the daughter of Ruruhau and Teroro-tu-iti, who have gone to Fakahina. She lives in the house of her grandfather, Kararo."

"We had thought, from her appearance, that she might be a white man's daughter."

"She is indeed white of skin, and her hair is very blond, but Maruia's parents are known to us all, and the genealogy of her family has been kept for thirty-five generations."

"Are there any children of white blood in the island?"

"There are none. No white men have lived on the island, save the missionary who was here, who kept the rule of his priesthood, and took no woman."

"It is a strange custom," commented Rangina, the henpecked husband of the community, who was standing by, "but doubtless it saves him much trouble."

"Do not white men come sometimes in the ships?"

"Sometimes they do. But the schooners stop here for only a few hours to load copra. They don't stay overnight."

"You will see many blonds among our people," said Maono the chief. "It has been so from the beginning.

"Little Maruia is named for the First Ancestor who came from Mahina-te-tahora, which is now called Pukapuka, and who was chiefess of that island and this and Tepoto. It is because of her that the land is called Tepuka Maruia."

"And what was the ancestry of that Maruia?"

"She was 'born of the Sea that Moans and of the Bones of Chiefs.' She was one of the Four Ancestors. One came from Tahiti and one from Nukuhiva, and one from a land unknown to us. But from the earliest times there have been blonds among our people."

Looking about among those gathered in the house, I could distinguish here and there traces of the Caucasian features and reddish-brown hair that Wallis observed at his discovery of Tahiti, as did the sixteenth-century Spaniards in the Marquesas, and which are dispersed widely among the Polynesian people. Here was a man East Indian in appearance; here one who, had he been clad in blanket and feathers, might have passed for an American aborigine; here the rounded comfortable outlines of the Tahitian and Hawaiian; here the tilted eyelids of the Mongol; a suggestion of the Malay; even a hint of the curly-haired, dark and wide-nosed Melanesian. The Polynesians, in their wanderings, have touched many lands since, as is surmised, the first tribe of them was crowded out

of southern Asia by famine or flood or invasion and moved in a scattered migratory horde into the chains of islands that sparsely dot the Pacific. Wave after wave they came; till one land after another became crowded, and the younger and more adventurous or those defeated in war moved on, led by their priests whose visions told of lands beyond the horizon.

How many fleets were lost, none can know. Yet, in dugout canoes, or in boats sewn together of planks, by paddle and by sail they voyaged throughout the Pacific—the chants of their oarsmen ringing thinly and bravely down the wind.

To Hawaii in the north, New Zealand in the south; to Samoa and Tonga; to the Austral Isles and Rapa and Mangareva, they spread, leaving scattered groups in their wake. Ongtong-Java and Rennell, in the midst of the Melanesian lands, bear witness. There are apparent traces of them among the Micronesians; in the far Philippines the Malaysian tribes tell stories of Maui, the Polynesian hero whose name is known in all the Maori lands. The mutineers of the *Bounty*, landing at remote Pitcairn, found the temple-stones of the Polynesians and the images of their gods. Deserted Malden, unfertile and inhospitable land of sand and guano, bears the ruins of their burial places. The colossal sculptures of Easter Island record the aspirations of that far scattered race. It has been surmised that the Incas knew them and traded with them the sweet potato, which is still known throughout the South Pacific by its Peruvian name. Daring imaginations have suggested that perhaps the Incas themselves were Polynesians.

And here, on one of the most remote atolls of the Tuamotu, were these hauntingly Caucasian faces, this red-gold hair, mingled with the high cheek bones that spoke of Asia, the dark curls of Melanesia, and the lineaments of who knows what vanished races that may have occupied these far islets before the conquerors came.

Such were my thoughts as I sat in that house of leaves, listening to the conversation, which in itself betrayed mixed

linguistic origins—words from the old Polynesian, recalling memories of days like and unlike this in Hawaii; the worn syllables of Tahitian, and strange dark words from that imperfectly explained tongue that bears the name among them of "the root speech."

Dismissing the staring visitors, with the help of Teuri, we closed the rude doors and walked out to explore. As we passed through the village, I was surprised by the cleanness of its streets. They are far broader than is demanded by any traffic they have to carry, in a land whose people go afoot. Their rigid straightness is probably a foreign notion; they look out of place, until one becomes accustomed to them, in a country whose natural outlines are curves.

"Are the streets of Tahiti as fine as those of Tepuka?" a resident asked.

Evidently the spirit of "civic pride" had penetrated to the Tuamotu.

Along the four highways the houses—built, like the one we occupied, of coconut leaves, or in the older Tuamotuan manner of pandanus—are arranged in pleasing irregularity, according to the old system of land rights which took no account of straight lines. Around them lies the broken coral which is the soil of this part of the island since a hurricane some years ago washed away most of the sand. The sand on the streets and in some of the dooryards had been transported from the beach; we were to see the children hauling it, by ropes of coconut sheath, in turtle shells.

A group of women and children were gathered around the well—for Tepuka draws its water from the ground, unlike many of the Tuamotu lands, where rain is caught from roofs. The roofs of Tepuka are of thatch.

They were drawing water from the shallow pool at the bottom of the square stone enclosure, with small containers lowered by a cord. Some had the old-fashioned dipper of coconut shell; others a narrow rectangular tin with the top

cut off. From this they poured into larger containers—here and there a bucket, more often a five-gallon oil tin, for which a chicken had been traded to some ship. They lingered to gossip, then shouldered the carrying-stick, balancing the buckets suspended from its two ends, and started home. Now and then one of the women would stop to chat with a neighbor, without setting down her load.

As we passed through the streets, people everywhere greeted us, holding out the hand in what they conceived to be the white man's fashion and saying pleasantly, as in Tahiti, "Let there be life!" Everywhere were children—the healthiest, happiest children I had seen in the South Seas—skipping rope with strands of twisted coconut-leaf sheath, playing a throwing and running game with a ball woven of coconut leaves and weighted with pebbles; here two boys were going toward the lagoon with toy boats ingeniously fashioned of coconuts. We followed them.

There are other lagoons like it, but this was the first of its kind I had known—a long oval of vari-colored water, shading from light green and almost yellow over sand in the shallows to blues and purples in deeper water or over coral, and dotted with what appeared to be tiny islets, low and rounded, gleaming bone-white under the sun. The effect of these white islets, set in the glow of color of the water, and of looking past them to the distant shores, feathery with coconut fronds, and the white plumes of surf curling over the shallow passes between the segments of the outer ring of land, was that of a fantastic landscape, as if a glimpse of another planet.

The coconut trees come down to the end of the street and a little beyond. A beach of fine sand and sediment, softer than that of the outer shore, slopes to a tide-flat of similar material, partly submerged. Beyond it, the flashing shallows stretch to where they merge with the deeper lagoon, mottled with coral.

Clad only in shorts as we were, we waded out, stepping

carefully to avoid the sharp-edged tridacna shells half buried in the sand, dived where the bottom slanted off steeply, and swam toward the nearest "islet."

The water was warm, with streaks of cold. Below could be distinguished the fantastic branched and mushroom shapes of submarine forest—the coral that had built the atoll, and the strange cold flowers of the sea. As we approached the white islet, its composition, had we not already known it, became apparent—a pile of old tridacna shells, hurled on the shallows in the course of centuries by the people of Tepuka as they opened the clam-like bivalve and ate it on the spot or carried the meat home in baskets.

Setting feet carefully on the ridged backs of shells that lay thickly in the shallow, we climbed up on the rounded heap. All around the shores and far out into the lagoon, these shell mounds lay, the clean refuse of centuries, a monument to hunger. Far off to the east, the bent forms of women were outlined against the glare of light that beat upon the lagoon as they gathered these shellfish and threw the shells on the heap, building new islets. Beyond them, a canoe skimmed the surface, running under a mat sail.

Children playing in the shallows watched us with interest as we swam. It was the first time they had seen the "Hawaiian crawl."

"Swift!" they marveled.

They dog-paddled at a little distance; they were shy, in those first days. As we walked back toward the houses, a tiny blond-haired boy ran, screaming, to hide. Probably we were the first white men he had seen. We asked a woman who was standing by the well, "Why is the child frightened?"

She laughed. "The older children tell the younger ones that the white men eat children."

The house was full of people that afternoon, some trying to sell relics such as shell adzes and scrapers, shell or bone fishhooks, a spade of turtle bone, or such modern and useful

works as baskets of pandanus or coconut leaf; or to trade them for covered tins.

Among these relics appeared one rare treasure—a low four-legged stool, roughly hewn of wood—the ancient ceremonial seat of a chief. A murmuring arose: this was community property, some said, and the man who brought it to us had no right to sell it. Keneti spoke briefly:

"We don't want to buy it, or deprive you of it. We wish only to preserve it for you. Has it not been forgotten and neglected? It was dragged out of a rubbish-heap. See—one leg already has been broken off. In a few more years here, it would go to pieces. Let us take it to the great house in Hawaii where such things are kept, and it will be safe."

"The white man is right," said the chief. "Let him have it. It is true that the old things now are neglected here. Let him keep it for us in that great house in his country, and perhaps in future times our descendants will turn again to the ancient ways, and will go there to see this treasure of our people's past."

Most of our visitors, however, came to gaze. Teuri again rescued us.

"Go, all of you! The white men are going to eat."

Apparently it is a breach of etiquette in Tepuka to watch others at mealtime. Kararo lingered to remind us again that we had promised him the used tins and garbage. Teuri picked up an orange, the last of a net of them that we had brought from Tahiti, and ate it, carefully preserving the skin. This he fastened to his hat, in the shape of a star-like ornament; then went out, wearing it with visible pride. Oranges do not grow on the low islands. Not only was the orange skin an unusual decoration, but it announced to all the people that he, Teuri the son of Teave, had eaten an orange!

Evening nestled down over Tepuka; there was singing in the street. We sat on the low wall in front of Teuri's house to watch and listen. A tall slender girl stood in the center,

her hair piled on her head and fastened with a comb, from which a great reddish tuft arose like the plume of some strange bird. She laid a mouth-organ to her lips, and played three chords over and over in a quick, strong rhythm. A young man kept time by blowing across the mouth of a bottle, producing a hollow sound not unlike that of the conch shell which undoubtedly was used for that purpose in the days before bottles became available. It is a lot of trouble to bore a hole in the end of a conch shell.

Around the musicians, the dancers grouped in pairs, forming a circle, and stepped around them: four half-running strides, in a segment of the circle; then the girl, in the lead, turned and faced her partner, shaking her hips as in the Hawaiian hula, but more rapidly, while he responded ad lib. It was a vigorous dance, and they seldom kept at it long at a time. It would end abruptly, with some excited swain bending his knees, shaking them inward and outward rapidly and crouching gradually, his partner meanwhile descending opposite him, until one or the other was unable to get down any lower and still keep balance—when one would run away, laughing.

Hour after hour, however, in these short segments, the dance went on.

"They dance sometimes half the night," said Teuri, "and make love the rest of the night, on the mats under the coconut trees."

"What do their parents think of that?"

"The parents do not concern themselves about it. Why should they? If they think of it at all, they are pleased. Without love in youth, the young men and the young women would not develop normally. Is not the custom the same in the white man's country?"

"We have our tabus, Teuri, many of them. You also have tabus. But our tabus differ from yours."

Teuri wanted to know all about our customs, and we

talked late. At length, yawning frankly, for he had been up since daybreak, he rose to go.

"The ways of the white man indeed are strange," he said.

The dancing and singing died away, as couple after couple slipped off to the houses or to their mats under the trees. The breeze from the lagoon blew cool and soothingly through the woven walls of the house. I fell asleep to the low clashing of palm fronds and the distant thrumming of surf on the coral.

II

Flashback: How We Came to the Land of the Puka Trees

2. *The Sampan*

THE TELEPHONE BELL stabbed into the confused shuffle of noises of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* news room.

"This is Bill Anderson—captain of the *Islander*. Do you want to go with me to the South Seas?"

I couldn't afford to leave my job that long. But after working as telegraph editor by day and literary and arts editor by night for more than ten years under increasingly difficult conditions, I needed a rest.

"It's your chance," Margaret advised. "Take it."

I called back Captain Anderson.

"Save a bunk for me, Captain Bill. I'll go."

Bill's ninety-foot fishing sampan *Islander*, still bearing her original name *Myojin Maru*, lay in drydock, undergoing alterations to accommodate a long-planned expedition from the Bishop Museum.

"*Ia ora na!*" he greeted me in anticipatory Tahitian, as I walked up the swaying plank. "How do you like my ship?"

A cabin had been built, amidships, with a mess table down the center and two tiers of bunks along the sides, for the scientists. In this cabin, eleven by fourteen feet, from four to six of them were to eat, sleep and, with additional volunteer helpers from the crew, work often sixteen to eighteen hours a day over a period of almost seven months, in which they covered more than nine thousand miles of the South Pacific.

Captain Anderson had a room of his own, forward, with a spare bunk for the mate; a galley had been installed between this and the after cabin, and a drying-house for botanical specimens had been attached, aft, like a large wart on the

starboard-after corner of the cabin. The ship looked otherwise much like any other large sampan—long, relatively narrow, with a high sharp bow from which the sides curved away steeply to a flattened shallow V of bottom and a square low stern. A mast was being rigged for wireless communication and the two hundred horsepower Diesel was making a great racket as it was being tuned up in the hot smelly engine room below.

"You can have your choice of these bunks," said Bill, pointing down the hatch into the fo'c'sle. There were six, built into the wedge-shaped peak of the bow, among massive timbers, coils of rope, and bundles of canvas. From the engine room, fumes of burning oil sifted dustily into the narrow space where scarcely more than one man at a time could stand between the wooden bunks.

"That boat will never get farther than Molokai. . . . It will turn over when a sea hits it. . . . It won't stay afloat in a blow. . . ."

So the wiseacres of Honolulu, including not a few experienced haunters of the waterfront, predicted as they viewed the oddly remodeled craft.

"A sampan isn't built to carry all that superstructure," they pointed out. "You'll be lucky if any of you get home alive."

"I'll back my ship, for seaworthiness and comfort," Bill insisted, "against any boat of her size in the world."

Some formalities remained: permission from the Bishop Museum; "leave of absence" from the *Star-Bulletin;* defrayment of my share of Bill's expenses; registration as, like the scientists, a member of the crew. Delays clutched at us to the last. The two thousand or more people who assembled that Sunday afternoon in mid-April to see us off were worn out with waiting while a new crystal was ground for the wireless set and the mate adjusted some legal difficulty. Looking at the splintered wharf thronged with bon-voyagers, it seemed as if half Honolulu were there. They melted away before the

Pan-Pacific Press Photo by N. Forbman

The sampan *Islander,* née *Myojin Maru,* lay at dock in her American home port, Honolulu, ready for the voyage to the Dangerous Islands.

Sampan *Islander* at Papeete, still bearing her old name *Myojin Maru.*

B. P. Bishop Museum Photo by K. P. Emory

The puka (Pisonia grandis) has given its name to many islands in the South Seas, among them Napuka, called by its inhabitants Tepuka Maruia: Maruia's Puka Trees. The puka was a sacred tree: its leaves, tied to the end of a carved stick, consecrated the turtle when that sacrificial reptile was slain on the sacred place.

afternoon was over; but a sizeable handful remained: museum folk, divided between envy of our voyaging to far islands and self-congratulation that they were to escape its hardships; wives and relatives and sweethearts, anxious at heart but bravely laughing to the world; even some of the merely curious lingered to the last.

A luxurious yacht, sleek and black of hull, shining white of sail, departed just ahead of us from the adjoining pier.

"I wish you were going on *that* boat," murmured plaintively the wife of Dr. Cooke, leader of our expedition.

"*I* don't," replied that forthright man of science. "Because that boat can't go anywhere that I want to go."

Men swarmed over her yards, shaking out the great sails. A band played. Our low-lying, uncleansable fishing-boat looked very small and shabby beside that floating palace. But not a man aboard envied her. We were bound for ports where she would never venture.

The *Islander* quivered with the throb of her powerful engine. Last good-bys were said over again, a little wearily; and there were those who clung, for more than half of our leavetakers scarcely expected us to return.

Alec, Captain Bill's brother, danced an island step on the roof of the pilot house, chanting a Tahitian song, as the sampan slid swiftly out of Honolulu harbor, bound south with a following sea.

"Turn, turn the turtle . . ." the words blew away down the wind, as the misty mountains of Oahu faded in the gathering dusk. For more than half a year this little craft and the coral or lava earth of far, strange islands were to be our home. The northern summer would be gone and the sun turned again before our feet would retread the ruddy volcanic soil of that justly celebrated integral part of the United States.

Captain Bill looked up from the wheel into the descending night, where a bird flapped wearily across our bow.

"There's a good sight: a booby going home. . . . That's how we used to find Fanning Island, and Washington Island, after dark—follow the booby birds in from their fishing."

"It's an old Polynesian method," confirmed Emory the ethnologist. "Bruce Cartwright thinks the Polynesians reached Hawaii from Tahiti by following the golden plover. It's a jump of more than 2,400 miles, with few bits of land between, and he argues that's the only way they could have known there was land here—from the birds.

"He may be right; the Tuamotuans even today know where they are at sea by the flight of the birds, and by the currents, and the color of the sea. They even know by the winds, for every wind has a name."

And so the conversation ran, on our predecessors in this voyaging. Our own ship was little if any larger than the double outrigger dugout canoes or plank-sewn masted *pahi* in which those adventurous seamen, whose path we were retracing, sailed the wide empty spaces of the Pacific.

We were an oddly enough assorted ship's company: men of at least three racial ancestries, and of widely varying backgrounds, but bound together by a common interest, from our different points of view, in the islands south that were linked by so many elusive and puzzling strands with the islands we were leaving.

The scientists: senior of all, and leader of the expedition, Dr. C. Montague Cooke Jr., whose modesty will deprecate being mentioned at all; an heir to one of the greater fortunes of Hawaii, whose lifetime of research had made him one of the world's foremost in his field—that of malacology, or the study of living land-shells, known to the layman as "snails." He was the core and soul of the expedition; he had planned it before some of us were born; he had created it by his urge to find what was hidden in those far islands of southeastern Polynesia, before the things to be found were gone. Kindly and genial, with a jest to meet every hardship and a solution

for every problem, he kept the spirits of his little company toned and in harmony through those sometimes weary months. We used to say, meaning no disrespect, that Dr. Cooke was the "toughest" of us all. He apparently thrived on hardship. If it sometimes bore heavily on his years, he never let us guess it. A stout heart, and a great one, with the quality of leadership that inspires loyalty and affection—and withal as democratic as any occupant of the fo'c'sle, though none but Sam Wight, who, being his nephew, called him "Monty," ever referred to him otherwise than as "Dr. Cooke."

Donald Anderson, his assistant, cheerful and full of help and stories. Harold St. John, botanist, and perhaps the only Doctor of Science ever written down on a ship's papers as bos'n's mate. Raymond Fosberg, St. John's assistant, tall and handsome and quiet, who had more hard luck than any of us and met it with a smile. Kenneth P. Emory, ethnologist, who had been before us to the islands where we were going, who spoke their language and knew more about them than any other of our company. In the months that followed, we were to know him by the name he bore with affection in a host of islands: "Keneti."

The sailors proper:

Captain Anderson, blond Viking of the equatorial Pacific; grandson of a Scottish pioneer and a Manihiki princess, with the blood of Norse and Polynesian sea rovers in his veins. Square-hewn and quiet-spoken, quick-moving and of superb mental and physical co-ordination, he would have stood out among any crowd as one accustomed to command. Bill Anderson combined scientific navigation with the Polynesian instinct for the sea; we used to say he could smell an island farther than most navigators could reckon it.

Alec, his brother, who had sailed the lagoons of equatorial atolls with him in their boyhood, staying out weeks at a time. He had a vast repertoire of Tahitian dances and songs from

his service with Father Rougier in the copra groves of Christmas Island, and Gilbertese from his direction of laborers at Fanning.

Yoshio Kondo, a young veteran of the fishing boats, as much at home on a sampan as ashore. Lean and hard, accustomed to the harsh life of a deep-sea fisherman, he seemed naturally designed for the job of nursing the Diesel engine, which he shared with Enos Lyons, usually addressed as "Enoka," but by Dr. Cooke as "Doctor" Lyons, the big Hawaiian sailor. Enoka, one of the handiest and most resourceful seamen it has been my privilege to encounter, was the joy of the party with his kindly humor. Long hours at the wheel, when the volunteer "A.B.'s" were unable to report for duty, and more hours of tinkering with parts in the hot, smelly engine room, never wore down Enoka's unfailing good temper. And, like most Hawaiians, he played the guitar and sang.

Sam Wight, member of an old Hawaii family, shared Captain Bill's cabin and practiced navigation in a persistent attempt to make his calculations square with those of Bill. Sam, a volunteer mate, functioned as steward, and few could make a meager sheaf of paper francs go as far in island marketplaces as he.

Ernest, the cook, one must regard in retrospect with mixed feelings. He was a late acquisition, the cook earlier engaged having failed to report. When we were well out of port, we discovered that he had never cooked, or been at sea, before. It was harder for Ernest than for us. A landsman, irrevocably planted on the deck of a plunging sampan, with the inevitable consequences to his interior mechanism, he had to struggle with a sometimes balky stove in a galley that bucked under his feet like a wild pony. Sometimes waves crashed through, drowning his fire and sending his pots and pans, with their contents, sloshing and banging into the scuppers. His bewilderment, those first days, was pathetic. But he didn't com-

plain. Meeting our frank comments with a gentle smile, he set to work to learn his job, in the face of disheartening difficulties, and often with appalling results. We became fond of Ernest. His cooking was nearly always a surprise, and sometimes it was good. He was always ready to help with anybody else's job. We had no harder worker aboard, though his efforts often were misdirected.

Two of us were neither scientists nor sailors, though we were down on the ship's papers as "A.B.'s." The other was Alexander MacDonald, a young newspaperman. A rugged New England lad, he had the sea in his blood and the call of far islands in his heart.

In Tahiti there awaited us Elwood Zimmerman, a young entomologist, and J. Frank Stimson, an ethnologist whose quarter century of study of Polynesian dialects had given him a wider knowledge of island speech—scientifically, at least—than was possessed by the natives themselves, and the name, on islands high and low, of "Ua." Joining us there later would be Dr. Peter Buck, brilliant ethnologist descended from a line of Maori chiefs from whom he derives the distinguished name Te Rangi Hiroa—the Sky Lit by Long Rays of the Sun.

With us was Bubbles, Captain Bill's dog. Bubbles had trotted down the plank at Honolulu and adopted the ship. An unknown mixture of breeds, among which we could identify tentatively Scotty and Hawaiian poi-dog, with a suspicion of poodle, had given her a barrel-like longish body, covered with white curly hair, slung low within the supports of absurdly short legs. "A dachshund gone wrong," Mac called her, and Sam, who nevertheless was fond of the wistful-looking creature, nominated her "the dumbest dog in the Pacific."

This, then, was the population of our little world afloat. Diverse as we were, and sharing a life that had inevitably its daily privations, in the cramped quarters of the sampan, a spirit of comradeship prevailed. To the last, I never heard a

really harsh word among our company. Even our aspersions on Ernest's efforts in the galley were softened with good-natured grins. And his rare successes were hailed with genuine outbursts of praise.

There was much good-humored raillery; Dr. Cooke and Sam in particular carried on an affectionate and amusing perpetual wrangle. A group of men isolated from the rest of the world tend to drop with conscious pleasure the polite conventions of that world, and our daily conversation was, perhaps appropriately enough, more reminiscent of piratical decks and shoreside taverns than of the university lecture rooms and scientific laboratories from which half of our party came.

We had been at sea an hour or two when Ernest called us into the cabin for our first supper of the voyage. Metal plates and cups were skidding as the *Islander* pitched in the swell. Ernest, with a frightened look, hurled a handful of hard tan-colored ship's biscuit on the table, and fled, to reappear later with a dark warm liquid which he decanted into cups.

"Coffee," Sam pronounced it. "Tea," Mac declared. "You're both wrong; it's cocoa," insisted Dr. Cooke.

And that was all. It seemed an inadequate meal for supposed hearty sailormen, but nobody said anything about it. I wanted to inquire whether there wasn't another course, but reflected that perhaps this was the customary supper on voyages of this kind. Most of the scientists, with the exception of that stout heart, Dr. Cooke, had lost, before this occurred, any interest in food. But I saw later the hardened sampan sailor Yoshi, in the galley, bending over a bowl of rice.

It was night by this time, and our course took us almost due south, beyond sight of even the southeastern islands of Hawaii. The night whirled past, cleft by the high sharp plunging bow. In the pilot house, an electric binnacle lamp glowed, in a milk tin, over the white disc of the compass. Alec chanted solemnly in Tahitian, swinging his weight on the great wheel

as the needle wabbled crazily with the impact of seas upon the hull.

My bunk was one of the two farthest forward in the fo'c'sle, where converging timbers made a narrowing V. Lying on the hard mattress, I could hear the slap of waves on the outer side of the ribless pine planking; the groaning of timbers as the ship plunged forward; the various noises of the engine, among them a rhythmic chirp like that of a cricket, rising shrilly above the subdued throb of the Diesel—a curiously lulling sound.

At times the ship seemed to hurtle through the air from wave to wave like one of the flying fish that plopped on the deck of nights. Lunging down the face of a wave, it would lift me bodily off the bunk, and drop me with a whack. The shutters of the hatch above banged incessantly; the pitching of the boat rang the bell forward of the pilot house; seas splashed against the house and rebounded down the ventilator and the hatch.

But we slept, and more or less heavily, until awakened by the change of watch at midnight or at four o'clock. It was a deep satisfaction to wake in that narrow room, and, even while bumping one's head on the timbers with the jostling of the seas, to think: "Today I don't have to go to the office." And to stand at the wheel, eyeing the needle as it swung back and forth across "170 S-SE," steering for our first low island.

Those first days had their difficulties. A sampan is not, at best, as stable as a passenger liner. And there were little accidents that made it no easier. The expedition had been carefully planned, but it could scarcely have been foreseen that fuel oil would get into the drinking water, or that in the confined storage space the food would absorb the taste of gasoline. A notation in my journal, the second day out, comments: "Oranges have this merit: they taste the same going both ways." Dr. Cooke had put several crates of them aboard,

and we practically lived on them. Our progress south might have been traced by the orange peels floating astern.

Fosberg staggered out of his bunk to the lee side where the more active of us lay in a half-stupor, sprawled across the orange crates and cases of gasoline.

"Where's Ernest? I think I could take some beef tea."

Ernest appeared.

"Ernest, will you make us some beef tea?"

Ernest looked blank. "Beef tea?"

"Yes, beef tea. Here are the cubes; dissolve them in boiling water."

Ernest tottered into the galley, and emerged, after some time, bearing bowls of the steaming brew. Fosberg took one taste, then hurled the contents overboard, and returned to his bunk muttering in disgust.

I was curious. "Ernest, how did you make that beef tea?"

"Just like he told me. I made tea, and then put the cubes inside."

I was one of the first to recover. Yoshio had rigged a light at night over the stern; flying fish leaped aboard, and he fried them in the morning, crisp and tasty, with mealy boiled taro. The third day, the savory odor lured me to the galley, and after a meal of "flesh of freshly fried flying fish," I felt like a new man.

And so, day by day and night by night, we sped south, watching the sea run by. Between tricks at the wheel, we sat on the narrow deck along the lee side and told stories, or, at night, sang Hawaiian songs under the changing stars. Waves toppled over the pilot house and drenched us. Emory amused himself and the party by making Hawaiian string-figures—an island counterpart of the "cat's cradle" of American youth—of which he had collected seventy-two series.

No ship appeared in sight, nor any land: only the infinite variety, within infinite sameness, of the waves; the fantastic shapes of clouds; the march of constellations and the glow

of phosphorus at night in the furrow that slanted off at either side from the bow.

"This," somebody said, "is probably the loneliest stretch of ocean anywhere."

"The sea," offered Sam, "is just a lot of hard, dirty work."

"The sea," Mac continued, "is just something you have to cross to get to places."

So indeed it had seemed, in those first few days, to the wretched lot of us on the orange crates and gasoline cases along the lee rail. But all save one or two scientists were functioning by the fourth day. The Doldrums—to the disappointment of suffering botanists—were not as quiet as their name had led us to expect, but they gave us very fine weather. Bill, in pajama shirt and dungarees, sat on the roof of the pilot house shooting at flying fish with a small rifle; Bubbles, his dog, barked excitedly at each shot.

Small events took on importance in the monotony of sea days. A fish on the line Dr. Cooke was trolling astern; a shark off the starboard bow; porpoises to port; sea birds from the Line Islands, wheeling overhead or diving for fish; Enoka caught one on the trolling-hook, hauled it in and tossed it into the air, bewildered but free.

It was in those days that Dr. Cooke opened the first keg of salt beef.

"Monty's getting restless," Sam had been warning us. "He won't be able to lay off that salt horse much longer. He's been planning this expedition for thirty years, and he's had his heart set on having salt beef, like his ancestors had when they came around the Horn in the 1820's."

Ernest eyed the preserved meat doubtfully, but took it into the galley to do his best—or worst—with it. At the evening meal, we all watched Dr. Cooke as he lifted a leathery morsel to his lips. Tough and tasteless as it was, he never changed expression or flickered an eyelash.

"Boys," he declared, "it's bully!"

But even salt beef didn't matter now, any more than the endless cold corned beef which Ernest opened, can after can, and the pale canned salmon—the kind that normally is fed to cats—with which he alternated it. For all but one or two, the sea was friendly again; the ship had become our home.

3. *The Footprint of Heaven*

"LAND!" shouted Alec from the top of the stubby mast where he clung like the fanciful sailors of our boyhood sea books.

"Where?"

"Dead ahead. . . . See the green light along that bank of clouds? That's Fanning Island."

Even the landlubbers among us could make out that faint greenish discoloration of the sky that marked, on the fifth day out of Honolulu, our first low-island landfall. Gradually the land appeared: an elongated swelling on the horizon, notched with the tips of palms. As we approached, the concrete buildings of the cable station and the high thatched roof of the quarters of the Gilbertese police stood out among the coconut trees in the equatorial afternoon.

Silent and deserted the shore seemed, with the surf creaming against its abrupt beach, while the whistle of the *Islander* bellowed a greeting amid the screaming of sea birds. But a surfboat manned by stocky, smartly uniformed Gilbert Islanders, rowing with tick-tock precision, brought the British medical officer to inspect us for admission. Then Bill ordered: "Let her out!" and we sped around the end of the island and through the narrow pass into the lagoon, to anchor off the copra station of Fanning Island Ltd. The little settlement was a gracious sight beneath the tall palms. The farther

shores were out of view, curving for miles into the misty afternoon.

Gilbertese laborers, in red kilt-like garments, gathered on the shore. Hugh Greig, big and hearty labor superintendent, came aboard to greet us, and the stout Britons of the copra station made us welcome with heroic efforts at entertainment. Lavish as they were with Scotch-and-soda and cold New Zealand beer, our sea-grimed company appreciated most the shower baths of that well-appointed colony and the chance to sleep in comfort ashore.

The newer houses at Fanning are well designed for the tropics: a long enclosed veranda with a central row of rooms having open archways instead of doors, through whose unglassed windows the breeze cools every room. The temperature remained even, all night. On this inner lagoon shore there was no steady drumbeat of surf or far-away roar; only soft broken dashing, and now and then the dry banging of coconut crabs fencing with huge claws. I awoke to swim in the warm, quiet water of the lagoon, while my first low-island sunrise spread incredibly varied coloring over sea and sky.

Great sea birds flew slowly over us as Hugh Greig, standing in the bow of the speedboat, piloted us that afternoon to the other end of the atoll.

"Fresh water doesn't mix with salt water," was his explanation of the yellow color of parts of the lagoon. "And there's some color from the reef. . . . In dry seasons, slime from the coral drifts in and poisons the beach; great sandworms come out of their holes and die, and the place reeks with decay."

A path led down the shore among the densely growing palms. Here, clearing away dead coconut fronds and empty shells, sending absurd, ugly crabs scuttling to their holes, we stood among the shattered tombs of kings. Scattered and broken, but still recognizable in outline, the ancient enclosures lie—the stones beautifully cut and laid, with carved

shoulders and ornamental tops. Farther inland we came upon more ruins—compartments within enclosures, roofed with great flat slabs. Probing in the dust with a stick, Hugh brought up a fragment of bone.

"These ruins," Emory pronounced, "must be at least five hundred years old."

Looking upon the ancient stones, we thought of the life that must have gone on along these lagoon beaches: the arrival of the great canoes, bearing perhaps some chief defeated in war, and the remnant of his people; or a younger son departing for new lands to build a kingdom of his own; the establishment of a settlement; the building of these sacred places where perhaps food was offered to the gods and the ancestral spirits placated; the hewing of these slabs on the outer reef and the carrying overland in baskets or slung to poles borne on the shoulders of men.

"The Manihiki people knew these islands," said Hugh, who, like his cousin our captain, stems from that race of mighty seamen. "They sailed here on the southeast trades. They named this island Tapuaerangi, the Heavenly Footprint, and if you look at a map of the island, you'll see how right they were. It's the perfect shape of a foot.

"At Washington Island we dug up a canoe buried in the peat bog. As far back as we know, the lagoon has been closed, and fresh or brackish water in it from the rains, but there are remains of sea growths inside it. And the Manihiki people say there was once a pass into Washington lagoon.

"A Manihiki man used to go there often. Once he asked for a malatea, the finest fish in any of these lagoons. The people gave him only the head of the fish, and he was angry. Lying off the island in his canoe, he called down the curse of the gods. The island turned upside down, and no malatea have been found there since."

Back at the cable station landing, we waited for the botanists to return from inland. Hugh Greig picked up a hermit

crab and whistled softly until the curious little creature came out of its borrowed shell.

"Father Rougier, on Christmas Island, once set out to go around the island. It's a big island, and he had to sleep out two or three nights. The first night, the hermit crabs nipped him so he couldn't sleep. He built a wall of rocks around his cot, and they climbed over it. The next night he slung it like a hammock between two trees, and they climbed the trees and dropped down on him. The third night he set the legs of the cot in big tins of water, and the crabs bridged it with their shells and bodies and got to him just the same."

The cooking-fires were flickering out when Keneti and I walked down the dark street of the Gilbertese village. One of the islanders hailed us from a rude veranda, and drew up mats for us to sit.

Our host tried manfully to bridge the gap of language. Pointing to his chest, he introduced himself:

"Boy—man—me—Lota!"

We reciprocated.

"Kaikai pish?"

Yes, we would eat fish. One of the women brought a bowl of boiled tridacna clam, still warm, tasting not unlike large oysters.

"*Vabine* . . . me . . . Porena," he introduced his wife. "No pickaninny."

Whereupon he inquired the names of our wives and the number of our "pickaninnies."

A lantern was brought out, and a thick book, which we identified as Hiram Bingham's translation of the Bible into Gilbertese.

"Bingama! Bingama!" they repeated, as, in the dim light, we tried to spell out some of the words. Their Micronesian dialect bears apparently only a very slight resemblance to the Polynesian. But our host taught us to say *kona mauri*, let there be life, and *tamaroa*, good, and *tia ka po*, good-by.

The atoll stretches in a double loop around a central lagoon, studded with coral heads. When Fanning Island Ltd. was formed in 1912, the land area was estimated at eight thousand acres, most of which has been planted thickly to coconuts.

At the time of our visit there were two hundred Gilbert Island laborers, brought on three year contracts.

"Many of them," said one of our British hosts, "like it so well they come back for another three years. They work a nine-hour day for a stated wage, plus quarters and rations, according to government regulations. They do quite a bit of fishing, and save the tinned goods we issue them to take back to the Gilberts when their time is up.

"Each laborer is expected to gather three hundred pounds a day, and two hundred and fifty on Saturday. They go through the forest, chop the meat out of the nuts where they lie, and collect it in sacks."

The refuse, as we saw, remained on the ground, to breed mosquitoes, though at times a crew piled it up and burned it. Three cuts, and the meat was out; it should be chopped apart, the overseers said, so as not to mold. It was brought to the plant and spread on driers, on wheels so they could be rolled under cover in case of rain. After drying, it was sacked for shipment on a freighter that called at infrequent intervals.

Fanning is owned privately by the company, but has a commissioner under the British Gilbert Islands administration. Change was in the air when we were there. Washington Island, very fertile, with twenty-eight hundred acres of coconut land, five hundred acres of fresh water lake and two hundred of peat bog, had been abandoned, and the men at Fanning spoke gloomily of the situation.

"The price of copra is no longer high enough to warrant keeping up such an elaborate establishment as we have here. This island will be closed down too, within a year."

And so it has been. The merry Britishers who plied us with

Scotch and the latest London stories brought by the supply ship a few months before have been recalled; the Gilbert Islanders shipped back to their atolls in the west; Hugh Greig and his hospitable family have sought a home in lands farther south. Only the cable station remains. At English Harbor the roomy tropical houses stand empty to the breeze and whatever ghosts may be abroad; the crabs have their way with the coconuts that drop by thousands on the sand and coral soil, and the sparse grasses of a low island creep over the rusting rails and the deserted paths.

"An ideal airport," somebody observed, looking out across the great lagoon. "Blast out a few coral heads, and the air fleets of the world could ride here."

"And that four-knot current in and out of the pass would generate power to run a city," another continued. "Set up a reversible wheel in the lagoon entrance, connect the right transformers—and you'd have light, water, energy to turn all the machinery imaginable. . . ."

"There'll be a big hotel here some day—a pleasure resort for air travelers across the Pacific. Warm sea-bathing, a climate that doesn't change more than a degree or two, the world's best fishing—and you could stake out acres of golf courses, tennis courts, riding paths on the coral and sand flats. Canoeing, sailing, lovely tropical scenery—it has everything but surf-riding, and one might manage even that."

"It's coming. Copra goes, and something else comes in. The world will yet know Fanning."

"Perhaps so," I agreed. "But I should have liked it better when it was the Footprint of Heaven."

The *Islander* was rolling heavily as we left Fanning in a procession of squalls. Eating a hasty meal of raw fish in the galley with Enoka, I went below to change to dry clothes. As I returned on deck to seek a relatively sheltered spot to sit, Enoka pointed ahead.

"I tell you, we sleep good tonight."

The glass was falling, and we were putting back into Fanning lagoon for safety.

There followed pleasant days at Turefara, as the village was called by the Manihiki people who colonized it long ago. At Hugh Greig's, the last of that colony, we always found a welcome. A basket of fresh drinking-nuts hung always at the door of the rambling house; in the afternoon and early evening, Teanau and her children would be sitting on the mats in the pebble-floored patio; there were songs and string-figures, tales of how Maui learned the secret of fire from the white tern, and how he kicked the islands of Manihiki and Rakahanga apart, and chants of the ancestry of Teanau herself from the noble line of Mahuta. Or, as young Host Greig played Samoan, Hawaiian and Tahitian songs on his guitar, the two shy, large-eyed elder girls danced in a combination of styles gathered from half the Pacific.

It was there most of us were caught by the storm that so nearly cut short the expedition. Host, who had gone to school in Samoa, was leading in a nasal *himene* of that country:

"Good-by, my friend,
good-by, dear to my heart!
Come back to Samoa,
mindful of its beauty!"

In the midst of the merriment, the ship's whistle bored hollowly into the night. We rushed out into the rain, between the tall coconut trees that were swaying and creaking, bending nearly double with the rising wind. Broad sheets of lightning slashed through the tossing groves; great nuts hurtled past our heads and bounced from the coral ground. On we dashed, bare feet stumbling over the coral, through that confusion of alternate brightness and dark; rain drove blindingly, chokingly, into eyes, nose, ears, mouth; the trees strained more wildly at their anchorages as we ran, a tremendous swishing roar over all.

A glare of lights led us to the sea wall, off which we descried the *Islander*, listed ominously, and on her tilting deck the stout figure of Captain Bill, shouting through cupped hands words that blew away indistinguishably in the wind. We could see well enough what had happened. The *Islander* had dragged anchor; one shore line had parted, but the other, bent around a tree, had held and swung the ship inshore upon a bar, just in time to save her from drifting upon the grinding, sharp-toothed rocks near the pass.

Chilled through with the harsh wind in our drenched clothing, we stood shivering a moment; I had not thought one could be so cold, five degrees from the equator. Unmindful of sharks we plunged into the dark swirling water and waded and swam to the ship, glad to haul on the lines for warmth.

As we clambered up the overhanging side, grasping anxious hands of our mates aboard, we heard the mighty voice of Hughie Greig bellowing from the powerboat he had launched, with a crew of Gilbertese, to aid the rescue.

That night lives in memory as a confused scene of flashing lights, bare feet thudding on wet decks, and a medley of shouting in half a dozen obscure languages. A wide splash of lightning revealed at either side of me, hauling on the same wet line, a husky Gilbert Islander in a red kilt, who chanted with every pull, "*Ta pu e! Ta pu e!*"

Somehow, between our own frantic efforts, directed by Captain Bill, and the strength of Hughie's powerboat, we hauled her off the sand. Then came the crucial moment. Could we make headway against the wind and current, or would the ship, and we with it, be hurled to destruction on the reef? As she seemed to waver and lose ground, gathering speed toward the death that waited, the throb of our own engine answered our fears. Yoshio and Enoka had stirred the Diesel to life, and by rare good fortune the propeller was not fouled with sand. Slowly she gained headway into the deeper

and safer water farther up the lagoon, where we secured her with a borrowed anchor. We went no more ashore, save in twos and threes. Captain Bill was taking no more chances with tropical storms.

Life went on with little incidents, as we waited day after day in the shelter of the Footprint of Heaven for the barometer to climb back to normal and the sky to clear. There was the day we spent hours diving for the needle valve of one of the outboard motors, which had fallen into the lagoon; the day one of those motors failed, letting Bill, Sam and Enoka drift out to sea, until at last, just before night shut down, they persuaded the balky thing to start, and came in late with a fish dinner. On a later trip, Alec, similarly adrift, had to burn his shirt as a signal in the darkness so that Bill might find and rescue him.

There was the afternoon Fosberg tried to swim to the ship with a collection of empty square tea tins from the British settlement, for use in preserving his specimens. We saw him struggling in the outgoing current, tossing the tins ahead of him and swimming toward them, and the current pushing both him and the tins back—until, after much laughter and ribald advice, Mac and I dived in to help, and Yoshio rowed out in the skiff and rescued us all.

It was at Fanning that Bubbles' four pups were born. One, left at Fanning to be mascot of the island, failed to survive; a falling battery in Captain Bill's room crushed the life out of another, at sea; the third was left to delight the children of lonely Pitcairn, and the last was Annie, who remained with our company through many islands low and high.

There was moonlight on the lagoon, and great shadowy mantas waving through the water like monstrous marine bats, and the portable phonograph on the afterdeck in the quiet evening, playing *Kai Hawanawana*—"Whispering Sea."

4. *The Road of the Plover*

The Southern Cross was like a flower on a stalk over our bow as we throbbed through the seas toward Tahiti. Flying fish whizzed past our heads and thumped on the cabin walls. Rain squalls passed over us, and we ran out on the afterdeck to bathe in the showers. They were welcome, for the prudent captain had restricted the fresh water allowance, for all purposes, to a quart a day. More than once we all had lathered ourselves liberally with soap, when the rain squall missed us, leaving us a grotesque sight.

"About six o'clock this evening," Bill announced one morning, after taking eleven o'clock sights, "we cross the Line."

The crossing of that imaginary boundary between the northern and southern hemispheres is ordinarily attended with quaint ceremonies derived, no doubt, from Europe's pagan past. Whether the Polynesian voyagers who called it "the navel of God" had any such customs, surviving sea chants do not reveal. But no Father Neptune, resembling a somewhat tipsy Santa Claus, climbed over our bow to toss the first-timers into a pool. There was no pool. Bill blew the whistle at twenty minutes after six, and such of us as were able to stand tottered to the rope that served as a lee rail and —solemnly urinated on the equator!

There was such a lot of sea—great empty spaces between tiny islands. The ship was a self-contained unit, a little floating island in itself, but only temporarily so. Like a battery, it must, from time to time, be recharged. There is no escape, for man, from land. This ship, that took us away from land, was fabricated on land, of materials land-grown. We could remain at sea only a few weeks at a time. The land went with

us; the faded blue paint on these sampan timbers was a bit of Honolulu.

The sun sank behind a great cloud that bit into the sky like the beak of some feathered god. Sitting on cases of gasoline, we watched the southern constellations dip and wheel.

There was something eerie in our groping for that lonely island. With engine throttled down, searchlight futilely raking the sea ahead and to port and starboard, the crew crowded forward, straining for a glimpse in the gloom.

Somewhere in that cloudy darkness ahead was land—low land, fringed with reef, menacing.

Enoka stopped the engine and we waited, rocking gently, for a squall to pass; listening, as the rain sifted down, for sound of surf, and heard only the cries of sea birds overhead.

Bill and Alec cast flashlight beams on the water alongside, studying, with the insight born of generations of experience in the Pacific, the sea's color and drift. Even as the clouds cleared slightly, we could see nothing.

"I smell land," said Alec, sniffing the air.

And it seemed to me that I, too, could detect the fishy reek of shore and the odors of vegetation inland.

Slowly we crept through the night, with many such halts, Bill crouching on the pilot-house roof all night, flashlight in hand.

At noon of the next day, he grinned as he took sights.

"Missed Vostok Island by twelve miles. First time I ever missed an island."

"Better to miss it than hit it," replied Dr. Cooke.

The land breeze was fragrant with gardenia and jasmine as we drifted, off Papeete, waiting for daylight of the ninth day out of Fanning. Slowly the land took form with the growing light: the contour of green slopes and valleys, the deep pocket of St. Mihiel, the cleft of Fautaua, the peak of Aorai

wrapped in mist, and the town along the shore: a steeple, a red roof, the masts of schooners in harbor.

We were to see Papeete again, and know it better, but not to recapture the delicious strangeness of that early morning landfall. Its unpaved but fairly clean streets, its mingled European and southern Chinese architecture, the signs in French and Tahitian, were to become familiar; the endless stream of bicyclists across the waterfront, which seemed so odd to us at first, was to seem as natural as the motor traffic of Honolulu.

Papeete seemed a quiet place. There was no sound of machinery, comparatively little traffic. Cars moved slowly, with frequent, subdued blasts of horns—and everywhere were bicycles, sounding soft bells. Busloads of people were arriving and departing, to and from the country districts—Tahitians wearing, like Hawaiians, leis of flowers, and chattering gaily, with much laughter and many broad jests. Cars went by, filled with young people singing, as at home.

A sense of leisure and well-being emanates from one's first contact with this island—though, as I learned, it palls somewhat with time.

I am glad to have seen Loti's pool before it was modernized. We drove there on our first day in Papeete—nine of us in a big if somewhat dingy car, driven by one misnamed Tematai, the Wind.

"I drive slowly," Tematai explained, "because I don't want to catch up with that gendarme ahead of us. There are nine in the car, and the rules allow only seven."

The policeman, turning a corner on his bicycle, glanced back at us, causing us to quake inwardly with visions of being hauled off to jail—but forbearing to take official notice, he took the turning and disappeared.

In the narrow road up Fautaua valley, between walls of foliage, Sunday revelers were fighting; somebody was trying to drag the driver out of a car which was blocking the road

ahead of us. We waited while the belligerents were parted, and drove around the obstruction as the principal warrior rushed back, with wild gestures, to renew the attack.

Loti's pool was then still in its natural state—a mountain stream of cold, clear water, deep enough for diving. Tahitian girls stood on a ledge, wrapped their skirts between their knees and dived, crossing their legs at the ankle, hitting the water, amid laughter, posterior first. A young man and a girl, with flowers over their ears, were caressing each other in a sheltered nook under the bank, half in and half out of the water, as Loti and his Rarahu may have done.

The natural beauty of the place was already doomed. At the custom house, next day, we saw the bust of Pierre Loti that was to mark the spot.

We swam, too, at Arué, a curve of black sand beach, fringed with coconut palms. But in the mood most of us were in, we were not greatly interested in show-points. We were impatient to complete the official formalities, in this town where one can get only about one thing done in a day, and move on to the Tuamotu.

"Our tape," said the interpreter at the Service du Passeport, "is very red."

The talk at Charles Nordhoff's handsome new house at Punaauia was of ships and reefs and currents, of fish and game. He was interested in stocking the streams of Tahiti with trout and its forests with quail.

Irène Salmon, daughter of kings, charming, intelligent and alert, served an excellent rum punch at the Tiare Tahiti, and spoke feelingly of the late Wilson, who had walked on the *marae* despite her entreaties and tears, and two weeks later was dead.

Odors of vanilla and copra will linger always about my memories of Papeete; cluttery Chinese stores, sound of revelry in Albert's bar; guitars, ukuleles, accordions, singing; girls with flowers in their long dark hair, diving off the dock

or riding slowly past on bicycles—these and the sound of running water, the scent of jasmine and gardenia, the clouds forming around Aorai: these linger longest, from Great Tahiti of the Golden Haze.

5. *Tall Tales in Tahiti*

"I Will Tell You," said Hiro-i-te-maro-ura, "the true origin of the Polynesians."

I had been wandering about the unpaved but cleanly streets and somewhat dingy shops of Papeete, bargaining in lame pidgin-Tahitian and equally lame French with Chinese merchants, when Hiro of the Crimson Loincloth hailed me from the street and led me to his parked car; for though he was, as he informed me, of royal lineage, in these degenerate days he drove not, like his distinguished namesake and ancestor, a three-masted ship, but a four-cylinder rent-car.

He was a rather fat part-Tahitian, shabbily dressed and in need of a shave, but with a certain authority of manner.

"I will tell you," he repeated, "the real origin of the Polynesians."

"If you can do that," I replied, "you will go the scientists one better. They have a plausible theory, supported by considerable evidence, but they do not speak of it with such conviction."

"That is because they are guessing, and I know," said Hiro. "It is part of the secret wisdom handed down from my ancestors.

"My family, you must know, were the royal family of Borabora and the real rulers of the islands. Tahiti was the island whither they came for sacrifices. When the great marae was built at Papara, twelve hundred warriors lay down

with their spears and were buried alive under the stones to guard the sacred place."

"But what about the origin of the Polynesians?"

"I am coming to that. But first I must tell you the history of my family, that you may know I speak with authority. As I was saying, they were kings. My great-grandfather, however, was an Irishman, who landed from a ship at Bora-bora and wandered into the interior. At that time the people of our country were not debilitated as you see them now by the vices introduced by the white men. As my great-grandfather walked from village to village, he found many boxing matches in progress, and being a man of sporting blood and powerful physique, he took part in them. At last he came to the place where the champion of the island lived, and challenged him. The king heard of it, and announced that the winner of this match should be rewarded with the hand of the princess.

"All the chiefs sat around the arena, and the king and his family sat in the place of honor beside the ring.

"My great-grandfather walked into the ring, feinted once, and struck. The champion went down. Twice, three times, four times, my great-grandfather struck—and the champion lay still. My great-grandfather married the king's daughter.

"He was a man, my ancestor. Once . . ."

"I'll grant all that. But you were going to tell me about the Polynesians."

"I will tell you. Have you read the Bible?"

"Most of it," I admitted.

"You remember then the tribe of Dan, whose last survivor was Manoah, father of Samson. I will tell you how it came about that that tribe of Israel became the ancestors of the Polynesians.

"Twenty-five thousand men of the tribe of Dan served as an advance guard for the Israelites in the march of forty years in the wilderness, on their way from Egypt. Moses did

not permit them, while they were on this duty, to approach their wives. Therefore they took mates from among the people of the country. These women, being heathen, persuaded the men to set apart a share of food for their gods.

"God was angry with the men of Dan for this idolatry, and in punishment He dispersed them to 'the isles of the sea.'

"On Tahiti there is a plateau called the Place of Lamentation. God descended there in a pillar of fire and told them He was leaving them here; they had worshiped the gods of the Gentiles and henceforth they would worship no other gods.

"There was another people in the islands—a dark people, the Papuans. Far up in the valleys, you can still see their terraces and house platforms of stone.

"For a time the two peoples lived in peace, but as the years went on, trouble arose. The Danites killed the men of the Papuans, but saved the women. These women taught their children the language of the country, and that is why we do not speak Hebrew today.

"The Tahitians who sprang from this union were a light-dark people of great stature. They kept the ancient law of Moses, until they were corrupted by the whites.

"I tell you these things, because I have heard that you are a writing man. I tell you, that you may write the truth about us."

Some reward, however, seemed in order. The descendant of Hiro of the Crimson Loincloth did not demur when I suggested a visit to Bohler's bar. There, over a rum punch, he resumed his tale.

"My people, as I was telling you, kept the ancient law until the white men introduced evil. Now we are dying away. In my great-grandfather's time there were thousands of people where there are now but tens. There was no disease, no immorality among our people. These things and the white men's ways have brought us ruin.

"But caves still exist where bones and bodies of warriors

lie–giants, they were: their bones are larger than the bones of men today.

"The last king died without issue, but his sister bore children for him to the Irishman, my great-grandfather. When the rights in the property on Borabora were in question, my auntie arose in the meeting and said:

" 'I have eaten all your brains. This Pomare family, they are not true Tahitian; they are Paumotuan. They were raised up by the missionaries; they are not the real kings of Tahiti.'

"Now, promise me that when you go back to your own country you will write what I have told you, that your people may know."

"I promise," I said gravely.

From a scientific viewpoint, Hiro's tale has its flaws. But, not being a professional ethnologist, I could find it vastly entertaining, and having no scientific reputation to jeopardize, I can retail it for its own sake as a story. I promised Hiro I'd tell it–and I have kept my word.

There was a feast at Méré's the night before we sailed, reminiscent of a Hawaiian *luau*, but with French instead of American influence superimposed upon the underlying Polynesian. Méré Stimson, the charming and intelligent young grandmother who had nominated herself a mother to us all, presided over a board that held such delicacies as pickled raw fish, to be dipped in sweet-salty coconut sauce; fresh-water shrimps in fermented coconut; mountain bananas that grow straight up in the air instead of hanging down as proper bananas should; sweet potatoes; mealy sections of baked breadfruit; two kinds of Tahitian *po'e*–the sweet pudding that does not resemble Hawaiian poi except in name and stickiness–all to be dipped into the cool delicious milk of coconut, squeezed out of the grated pulp and mixed with salt water–and with all this, much wine.

Every guest must wear a chaplet of fragrant blossoms; garlanded with these, the elder and more dignified members of

our party resembled Roman emperors. There must be song and dance, Tahitian and French songs; Hawaiian songs stepped up to the brisk Tahitian tempo and sung with Tahitian words.

The gods of evening shook out their crimson cloaks over many-spired Moorea; Tahiti was rose and green with the afterglow, and the lights were blossoming along the shore as the *Islander* chugged past the fishermen on the reef, outward bound. The deck was piled high with baskets of papaya, limes, pineapples, husked drinking-coconuts; clusters of oranges swung in fiber nets; bunches of bananas swayed with the motion of the boat. Scientists and crew lounged about the tilting deck in brilliant loincloths.

"Sam," said Dr. Cooke, as we sat at table in the little cabin, "I think we should open a bottle of that rum we bought in Papeete to entertain officials in the islands down below. We ought to find out whether it's good quality."

Pouring a moderate portion into one of the battered metal cups, he tasted it critically.

"Sam, how many bottles of this did you buy?"

"A dozen."

"Well, I think we ought to have twelve dozen."

Another sip: "Twelve dozen isn't going to be enough; we should have twenty-four dozen."

There was laughter around the table as our jocular leader, pretending with each sip to become more and more merry, raised the jestingly "required" number step by step to a hundred and forty-four bottles!

We were off for the Dangerous Islands, glad to be on our way, but leaving a bit of all our hearts in Tahiti, where we had found so gracious a welcome.

6. *Abandoned Island*

FROWNINGLY the black lava rocks of Meetia split the white spray, but the steep cone of its extinct volcano was rosy with morning as we skirted, the next morning, its abrupt coasts, scanning the surf that broke threateningly on its two uncertain landing places.

Meetia is a small island rising sharply from a narrow beach in a tall shoulder of mountain visible for sixty miles at sea. Though only a day's run from Papeete, it is seldom visited. Lonely in its corner of the Pacific, only the eyes of its wild birds and the wild swine that roam its forests look upon the chameleon changes of color of its ancient dome beneath the shifting light of day.

This is Great Meetia of the Brackish Water, once populous and an independent kingdom, now a silent island, a place of ruin under the curving sky.

My first landing on an unprotected South Sea shore was an initiation. The small landing boat took off from the sampan and wove in among the rocks of a tiny cove. The first and second trips were made without mishap.

"If I signal, bring my Leica ashore," directed Keneti as he embarked with the second load.

The rest of us watched the boatmen threading the few hundred yards of open water and the narrower but more hazardous band of surf. Keneti stood on a projecting rock and waved. Wrapping his camera hastily in a towel, I dropped into the boat with the third landing party.

Tané, the big Tahitian sailor lent us by Charles Nordhoff as pilot, and Kahiu, the Reao islander who had signed on at Papeete, steered between two black boulders. Looking back, I saw a wave rising; my Waikiki-trained eyes telegraphed a warning to my mind, but I reflected that Tané and Kahiu were experts at this business and it was not for a stranger

from a far country to distract them with amateur advice.

The boat rose on the wave, hung over a rock, swerved sidewise. The next wave, hitting the boat before Tané and Kahiu could maneuver us to safety, hurled the craft end over end. I slid into the water on my right shoulder and back, holding the camera aloft with my left hand. Swimming hastily to the ledge on which Keneti was waiting, I handed the camera up to him, luckily undamaged, a split second before the third wave tossed me skidding over the sharp and slippery rocks.

Bruised and gashed, but with no bones broken, I was able to fight my way out with the rest who had rushed into the water to help Tané and Kahiu save the boat. Landing again, we clambered up the steep cinder slope, sliding and stumbling as it crumbled under our feet, to the trail between the two landing places. Here Keneti and I left the others to struggle up the mountain in quest of plants, insects and shells, while we followed the long disused trail. Hutu trees dripped great pompons of flowers—white, purple, yellow at the ends, surrounded by cream-white petals dropping away; their dark torpedo-shaped poisonous nuts lay thickly scattered underfoot; ferns, coconuts, the broad leaves of apé, sprang vigorously out of the dark volcanic soil.

We stumbled along the overgrown trail, gathering limes and oranges by the way, now and then sent sprawling by some unobserved, tripping vine. Bananas ripened in these still groves, and fell in dissolving heaps among the dead leaves. Vanilla-orchids climbed on the poles set up by vanished colonists; breadfruit grew round and full on the great trees with their broad-fingered foliage.

Over Meetia hung an atmosphere of silence and desertion—silence, despite the crowing of cocks that have run wild in its forests, the song of innumerable mosquitoes, and the steady rumble of the surf.

So we came to a marae, and digging in it, turned up a few bits of bone. A marae is a melancholy place: heaps of stones,

somber gray or blackened with weather, overgrown with weeds. There is a feeling about it of a place of people long dead, an atmosphere of decay and of a silence that seems waiting—as if the spirits of those ancient builders who worshiped here were peering silently from behind the gloomy trees.

At a corner of the platform, a banana plant drooped a huge cluster that touched the ground—perfect fruit, bursting with ripeness, and untouched by rats.

"A native would say," remarked Keneti, "that the rats respect the sacredness of the place."

Sitting upon a stone quarried generations ago, he told me something of the story of this island, as he had learned it from old men of the Tuamotu.

"Its chief, eight hundred years ago, was noted for his hospitality. Seeing a Tahitian chief passing in a canoe, he invited him to visit the island. A feast was given, and the local chief lent his wife to the visitor, as was the custom.

"When the child of this temporary union was born, rule of the island passed, through him, to Tahiti."

Leaving a handful of ripe bananas on the disordered altar, an offering to its lonely gods, we followed the trail to the village: a group of iron-roofed houses, unpainted, their dooryards high with weeds. Pumpkin or squash vines sprawled across the gardens; yellow papayas were dropping from the overgrown trees.

We lunched, squeezing upon the melon-like fruit the acid juice of limes, in the grassy backyard of the nearest house, and bathed in water from the rain barrel, in which innumerable mosquito larvæ wriggled with their peculiar restlessness.

It was a pleasant, if lonely, place, this deserted village, with a few rusted implements still lying about its wind-torn cookshed, and the silence crowding in upon the houses under the mellow sunlight and brooding among the prodigiously tall banana plants.

As we lay on the long grass, absorbing the wistful, lonely atmosphere, we heard the long, conchlike bellow of the ship's whistle, and began the half mile hike over the shoulder of the mountain to the landing.

Getting off the island was as difficult as getting on. As I waded out and threw the sack of limes into the tossing boat, a wave somersaulted me over a rock. Coming up, I clambered in beside the limes before the next wave struck, as Tané and Kahiu rowed hurriedly out of the cove.

"Why did the people leave Meetia?" I inquired later in Papeete. "Was it because the prices of copra and of vanilla went down?"

"No; they could always live on the fruits of the land. But the ships came so seldom. Our people like company, and laughter, and song. Meetia is a lonely place, and the spirits of its ancient dead lurk in the gloomy wood."

And yet—Meetia is, in its way, a lovely spot: fruitful far beyond the capacity of the hundred-odd isles that lie between it and Mangareva. It once supported an independent, if small, nation. Its fields and forests and the waters around it could feed a substantial community.

Alone in its corner of the sea, an opalescent jewel, its mountain glimmers in the changing light—a land rich in treasures of earth and sea; an empty land, a lone land, waiting.

7. The Shaven Sea

"Tané Has Elephantiasis," said Mac. "See how he drags that leg, under his big dungarees."

"He has worse than that," put in Sam. "We didn't notice, when he came aboard, because he had a shirt on, but watch him in the galley, with his shirt off or the sleeves rolled up.

I can't eat any bread he makes, with those running sores on his arms."

"I've given him strict orders," Dr. Cooke reassured us, "not to touch anything in the galley with bare hands."

We were sixteen, now, aboard; more crowded than ever with the addition of "Zimmy" the entomologist, Kahiu the Reao sailor, and Tané, the giant pilot and emergency "cook." The scientists occupied eight of the cabin bunks; the remaining two were piled high with their specimens and equipment. The original "crew" occupied the fo'c'sle; Tané and Kahiu spread their mats anywhere on deck. What they would have done had there been rain, I never learned. There had been rain and plenty of it on the voyage down, and the scientists came to envy us our dry berths in the fo'c'sle, as they wallowed in pools of water that drove through the shrunken matchboards of the flimsy cabin into their bunks.

Yet we continued harmonious in these close quarters. We were well fed now, while the fruits of Tahiti and of Meetia lasted. The sea was calm, and we were hardened to the life. It was an easy time for the crew. Tané and Kahiu did most of the work—although that feature was not without its disadvantages.

"I hate to take the wheel after Kahiu," Zimmy confessed. "Notice how he blows his nose in his hand and wipes the hand on the wheel?"

Keneti and I sat on the cabin roof in the cool evening, singing snatches of Hawaiian and Tahitian songs and talking of the life of the islands whither we were bound.

"We don't see much of that life," I complained. "A few hours, a day, on an island, and the natives all dressed up in white men's clothes to greet the visitors, and dropping their regular habits. I don't even have a chance to learn to talk with them. It's like the saying in the navy: 'Join the navy and see the world—through a porthole.'"

"Pari," he suggested, using the Polynesian version of my

name, "why don't you get off with me at Napuka? I've decided to do my work there instead of at Reao. Reao is full of leprosy and the government has quarantined the place. So I am going to Napuka, a more pleasant island and as unspoiled.

"People haven't been there much. It's too hard to get to. Ua and Harry and I spent a few days there four or five years ago, and they said we were the only white men who ever stayed overnight on the island, except the Catholic missionaries.

"They were so unaccustomed to white men that at first we thought they were hostile, for they never smiled—just stood around and eyed us. Later we found out that they didn't know the meaning of a smile. When we smiled at them, they were insulted; thought we were laughing at them.

"Every house is native style, and the food is mostly native food. Probably that's why the people are healthy. Too poor to buy foreign things.

"I think you'd like the place. We'll be there five weeks; then Bob Burrell will pick us up in the *Tiare Tahiti* and you can catch a copra schooner somewhere that will take you to join the sampan at Mangareva or Rapa so you will miss only a part of the general trip.

"You'll learn the language. You'll have to. There's not a soul on the island who can speak anything else. And I hope to pick up some rare old chants there.

"I'm anxious to get off this ship and be among natives. It's all right for these fellows who are hunting bugs and plants and shells. But for us who are interested in human life and customs, it isn't so good."

When Sam heard of it, he remarked scornfully:

"I'm glad I don't have to be cooped up on a low island for five weeks. It would be like five weeks in jail."

"Better in jail than cooped up on a floating pesthouse with that loathsome hulk of rotting flesh."

The *Islander* was not, of course, quite that, and the fact that our shipmates escaped contagion indicates the probable error of the belief of all of us, at the time, that our lately acquired pilot carried a dangerous disease. Aside from that possibility, and the advantages the island offered for study of ancient and contemporary Polynesian life, there was reason in Sam's words. We were cutting ourselves off from all possible communication with the ship or with any civilized aid. Illness or injury would have to be met with our meager emergency kit, quite inadequate for any serious trouble. Schooners call seldom in that outlying region of the Tuamotu; wireless is one of the marvels of the white man's magic of which the natives have heard, but for which there are no facilities. Until the *Tiare Tahiti* appeared to pick us up, we were there for better or for worse, on a precarious bit of coral only a few feet above the sea in ordinary weather and submerged, in times of the dreaded hurricane, beneath floods of almost inconceivable violence.

Keneti had ample supplies of tinned food, better selected than that aboard ship. The island, as we knew, abounded in fish, shellfish and coconuts. We were confident of our ability to meet any but the most extreme situations, and as we then believed, it was for only a few weeks.

We could not foresee that adverse winds, repairs to the *Tiare Tahiti*, and complications at Papeete would stretch our contemplated five weeks at Napuka to more than twice that length of time; that for nearly three months we should not see a white face. But there was little to regret. Keneti found so much ethnological material that he could have spent profitably there almost the entire duration of the trip; and I found there the rest I sought—deep sun-sweet days and surf-lulled, breeze-cooled nights, among a friendly and absorbingly interesting people, on the Isle of Peace.

8. *Flying Spears*

In the Dawn of a bright South Sea Sunday we glimpsed the green glow in the sky that reflects the lagoon of Anaa, and a little later anchored off its rock-strewn shore and its squat white coral lighthouse—one of the few navigation lights in all the Dangerous Islands.

The great, shallow lagoon, surrounded by the eleven islets that caused early navigators to name the atoll "Chain Island," stretched away for miles, visible through an opening in the reef.

This, then, was the Tuamotu: poverty-stricken, but cheerful. In the days of high prices for copra and pearl-shell, the natives had learned to buy tinned foods and rice from the Chinese store, and bread from the Chinese baker; now the bottom had fallen from their market; they must go back to fish and coconuts—which might save them, if it was not too late. Such was the conversation aboard as we dropped anchor in the clear blue and green water, amazingly near the reef.

Anaa boasts also that rarity in the Tuamotu, a small wharf, at which our landing boat drew up, and a smooth road leading toward its principal village. This island is said to have been the first point of contact with Europeans among the isles of those seas.

"Spaniards landed here in 1606," Keneti told us. "They reported that the first woman they saw wore a gold ring, and they saw a redwood log on an island where no redwood grows.

"The log probably drifted from the American continent, but where did the ring come from? There is no gold in the Tuamotu, or in Tahiti. Is there truth in the guess of some ethnologists that the Polynesian navigators voyaged to the coast of South America? Or did some shipwreck leave that band of yellow metal on this unknown chain of islets?

"In 1723, it is said, six white sailors mutinied and stayed at Anaa. I wonder how they liked the rude life of a low island, and what desperation drove them to choose it. They must have lived in thatched huts like overturned canoes, subsisting on fish, coconuts and pandanus, consoled by savage mates. No doubt they took part in the wars that raged throughout the eastern and central Tuamotu."

For the people of Anaa were a warlike race, in the cruel old days, and conquered many of the neighboring islands. Now, as we saw them lounging about the landing, they looked a wretched lot, though better specimens appeared in the spear-throwing contest in the afternoon.

The village of Tukuhora is on the lagoon shore—a village mainly of frame houses, usually with a native-style house of coconut leaves in connection, perhaps for use as a kitchen. One of these frame houses was raised high on a platform of coral and plaster. Most of them are fenced, to keep out pigs, with a low place in the fence for entry and exit of human beings. Anaa people prefer to step over, rather than to open and close gates.

The sound of singing came from the village church as we passed, on the way to the house of Tumu, our guide for the day, where drinking-nuts were opened for the visitors. It was a typical Tuamotuan Sunday: the people, dressed in their best clothes, sat around after the services, looking bored. Tukuhora, at this time, had a decidedly depressing effect. We were better pleased with Otepipi, a village farther down the lagoon, where Tumu guided four of us in the ship's outboard motor skiff—not without some wading and pushing the boat over shallows.

It was a neat village, with a walled churchyard, and with flowering plants set out before the houses, in borders of inverted beer bottles.

"Anaa," the chief of that village told us, "was once the most fertile of all the Tuamotu. We brought soil from Ta-

hiti; we planted breadfruit, bananas, and other food plants. But the hurricane came, and the borrowed soil was torn away.

"Hundreds of people died in that storm. Look yonder at those shattered walls. There stood the government house, and there the church. Our people climbed into trees, but many of the trees were washed away. Those who survived had no food till the government ship came from Tahiti."

The villagers, dressed for Sunday—some even in white coats and Chinese-made tennis shoes—welcomed us gravely, showed us with pride their new church, and its altar inlaid with pearl shell.

They gathered about us on the little pier that extends into the lagoon, while the botanists, through Keneti's interpretation, questioned them as to the native names of plants.

"These names must be worth much money," said one shrewd native, "that the Americans send men so far to get them."

"The scientific names are much more valuable," replied the quick-witted Keneti. "Such as Guettarda speciosa and Tournefortia argentea. Do you want to buy any of our names?"

They were impressed, and decided to trade even.

Landing on the main islet, we trudged through thickets of the low shrubs that grow in that sparse coral soil, fighting off clouds of mosquitoes with sprays of leaves, and stumbling over jagged rock seamed with dangerous crevices: the weather-worn coral of an upraised atoll.

As we returned to Tukuhora village, a javelin-throwing contest was in progress. Thirty men, with spears about six feet long, tipped with iron, but light and springy, were casting at a coconut on a pole some thirty feet high, from a distance of about sixty feet.

Clad in dungarees though they were, they resumed in this martial exercise something of the savage aspect that must have marked their conquering ancestors. Steadying the light shaft with the left hand, they threw underhand with the forefinger

of the right, in beautiful precision. Seemingly tossed but lightly, in a casual manner, the spears, crooked though many of them were, hit the mark in surprising numbers, till it bristled with them like a sea-urchin, and with such force that the points often pierced the nut and stood out on the other side. So many stuck in the nut that the later throws often hit them and glanced off. Those that missed sailed on across the street and remained standing in a vacant lot near a booth bearing the French flag and a sign reading "*Vive le Gouverneur!*"

The village postmaster, a dignified native, explained in Tahitian-patois French:

"This is a competition among eight groups from five villages, each with seventy spears. The spears have marks to identify them, and thus the score is kept. The men throw for twenty minutes, then change goals, setting the mark on another pole. Sometimes they start as early as eight o'clock in the morning and keep it up all day."

This spear exercise seems to be the only reminder nowadays of the warlike past of this island.

"The northern and central Tuamotu," Tumu related, "were two kingdoms, and eight islands west of Fakarava were independent. The islands farther east and south didn't count.

"Not long after the first Pomare had become king in Tahiti, the king of the north prepared to conquer the eight independent islands. But Pomare, who was descended from Tuamotuan chiefs, called a meeting, and took all the islands for his own kingdom.

"Pomare made all the chiefs agree that the flesh of men was no longer to be eaten. From that time on, we have not been eaters of men. But doubtless that custom would have passed away, too, when there were no more wars."

The Pomare are gone now, too; the last queen of the line died recently in Papeete. But their islands lie, palm-crowned and pleasant, in the southern sea, and Anaa, land of darting

spears, remembers when its name was feared throughout the coral rings.

About three o'clock of the next morning, at sea, there was a confused trampling on the deck, and the jar of engines reversing. Running between Faaite and Tahanea, we had come too close and were almost on the reef; only a quick shift and the power of the Diesel saved us.

In daylight we stopped in the lee of Katiu to pump bilges. Katiu is long, low and large; we could not see the opposite shore of its lagoon. The part near us had been ravaged by storm and was largely bare of trees. Though the island is said to be inhabited, we saw no signs save one empty house and the frame for another. Lonely and beautiful, the red reef gleamed in the morning sun.

To starboard, about fifty yards away, was Katiu; to port, out of sight, Raraka; ahead, to the north, no more lands broke that lonely ocean between us and the oval ring of coral that was to be my home. The sharp prow cut into the calm sea. And so, after one more day's and night's voyaging, we came to Tepuka Maruia.