



CANNIBAL JACK:
THE TRUE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF A WHITE MAN
IN THE SOUTH SEAS

MESSRS. FABER & GwyER

have pleasure in sending for review a copy of

Caribool Jack

which will be published on

24 MAY 1928

at $\frac{7}{6}$ net

*They request that the review shall not
appear before the date of publication*





A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BOOK IN WHICH
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY WAS WRITTEN.

CANNIBAL JACK:
THE TRUE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF A WHITE MAN
IN THE SOUTH SEAS.

by

William Diapea

printed from the manuscript
in the possession of

The Rev. James Hadfield

with a foreword by

H. de Vere Stacpoole

L O N D O N

Faber & Gwyer Limited

24 Russell Square, W.C.



FIRST PUBLISHED IN MCMXXVIII
BY FABER & GWYER LIMITED
24 RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LIMITED
FROME AND LONDON
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY H. DE VERE STACPOOLE	vii
INTRODUCTION BY THE REV. JAMES HADFIELD	xi
PUBLISHERS' NOTE	xx
'A FEW EXTRACTS FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM DIAPEA—ALIAS "CANNIBAL JACK"'	3

ILLUSTRATIONS

A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BOOK IN WHICH THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY WAS WRITTEN	<i>frontispiece</i>
A SLIGHTLY REDUCED FACSIMILE OF A PAGE FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT	<i>facing page 2</i>

FOREWORD

WILLIAM DIAPEA, KNOWN AS CANNIBAL JACK, inquiring of his own soul the reason of his wanderings, received no very definite reply. Pleasure perhaps; perhaps to chase shadows or to escape from himself; perhaps just for the joy of being alive.

Whatever his reason he was surely, and out of his own saying, the king of all wanderers and worthy of the kingdom he had chosen—the Great Pacific Ocean.

They say the moon left the bed of the Pacific and went as a vagabond into space; if so she left in her bed something of her dreams and main desire, for of all places in the world here is the home of unrest; of the desire to keep moving coupled with the objects and means of locomotion. Trade winds, currents, beckoning islands, the call of pearls, of copra, of bêche-de-mer, or phosphates and, in the old days, of sandal wood and black birding, all these were

F O R E W O R D

and are part of the conspiracy between the something restless and obscure in man and the great blue sea that brings the blown-away canoe to help in the mixing of the Island races and the Japanese swordfish on the *Kiro Shiwo* current to the Californian Coast by way of Alaska!

But the Pacific is the home of laziness as well as of unrest—and when were the two ever entirely separated? Never in my experience in the case of odd jobbing, beach-combing, petty trading wanderers such as William Diapea—unless in his case—for I know of no record such as he indicates, and I believe with truth. ‘In fifty years’ says he ‘I have visited almost everything in the way of islands situated on that vast expanse of ocean bounded on the north by California, Japan, China and India, and on the south by Tasmania, New Zealand and Australia, and everything included between the west coast of South America and New Guinea and Papua.’

Following all sorts of trades and avocations, from musket-mending to pig-breeding, he reckoned that he had touched at more than a thousand islands and resided on nearly a hundred. He admits quite openly that he had been a hard-shell polygamist, and a hard drinker, and the

FOREWORD

reputation of being the father of 38 children and the grandfather of 99 sits quite easily upon him—at least he does not try to tear it off, but rather crowns himself with the fanciful notion that if this reputation be founded on fact he may yet be the great grandfather of 999 or 1,000 great grandchildren.

Drinking, trading, fighting, musket-mending, pig-breeding, procreating his species and frying in the sun, one might imagine that this amazing specimen of the White Races would have had his time fully occupied. Not a bit. He tells us himself that he had been writing for forty years before at the age of seventy he presented this precious volume to Mr. Hadfield, the well-known missionary. And on page 90 he gives us to understand that the present narrative formed only a part of a much larger autobiography 'written in nineteen common copybooks', of which we have here only the contents of three. If the other sixteen copybooks had anything of the texture of these three their loss surely leaves the literature of High Adventure for ever the poorer.

Mr. Hadfield and the Publishers are to be congratulated on their rare good taste in preserving the original manuscript from the touch of any 'literary' hand. A page here and there

FOREWORD

may be cloudy, but any cloudiness is not of style but of speech; for Cannibal Jack does not write, he talks: he button-holes you, he belches in your face; when he has done, it is not the end of a book, but the stopping of a voice; the end of an evening, the end of a bottle of whisky; with a plate full of cigarette ashes on the table and the tropic dawn standing at the door.

How much truth has he told? How much truth has he hidden? Did he ever meet Litia? Did he ever try cannibalism as some people try caviare for the first time? I cannot say, but if he never met Ratu Finau—read the extraordinary account of that gentleman running from page 115 to page 124—then he had a power for character invention denied to most novelists, and if he never went whaling he yet managed to forestall one of Bullen's most striking observations on the habits of whaling ships.

For my own part this book goes upon the shelf beside Aloysius Horn's *Ivory Coast in the Earlies* and Melville's *Typee*, feeling sure, as I do, that neither Horn nor the author of *Omoo* would turn up their noses at the company of William Diapea.

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE,

INTRODUCTION

MY FIRST AND ONLY MEETING WITH CANNIBAL Jack was about the year 1889, when I had occasion to pay a visit to the Island of Maré, which lies about 40 miles south-east of Lifu where I lived at the time. You may find the respective positions of these two islands by following Latitude 22 in a map of the South Pacific from West to East as far as the French penal settlement of New Caledonia. Adjacent to this, and on the East side, you will find the Loyalty group of islands, consisting of Maré, Lifu and Uvea, and governed by the French as dependencies. Continuing to follow this same latitude, but slightly more to the North, you will arrive at the groups of which Cannibal Jack has most to say in the present volume, namely the Fijian and the Friendly groups.

It was—as already said—on the Island of Maré that I met Cannibal Jack. I had paid several visits to the island in past years, and no

INTRODUCTION

one could wish for a heartier greeting than I received on landing, both from chiefs and their subjects—a race of sturdy men and handsome women. The chief boast of this island is that neither its present occupants nor their ancestors have tasted the flesh of white men. Many of the Maréites could speak the language of Lifu, and in conversation with a party of these I was told that a very old man had recently landed on the island, that he was a stranger to everybody except the very old men; and that he was staying with my old friend Dirty Jerry, the beach-comber, doctor and storekeeper of the district. The next day I received a call from this new arrival. Old he certainly was and grey-bearded, though still lithe and unbent by age. His deeply furrowed face, while indicating past hardships and anxiety, bore also an expression of shrewd intelligence, tempered by an amiable and friendly smile. Altogether—despite his old and frayed apparel—he was a man of distinguished bearing. To make a general comparison of his appearance with one well known to us all, I would invite the reader to think of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

As he entered my room he introduced himself

INTRODUCTION

as William Diapea, telling me he had heard of my arrival, and had called to pay his respects. I suspected later, however, that the true object of his visit was to obtain a stock of writing-paper. I was glad to be able to supply this want in the shape of a few exercise books, for which he was undeniably grateful.

I do not remember much of our conversation, but his personality made a deep impression on my mind. I was surprised to learn during our talk that he spoke the Maré language (which I did not speak), also the three languages of the other two islands of the group (of which I spoke only two). I gathered also that Mr. Diapea was in low water as regards funds, and I was pleased to be of service to him in giving him a few light articles of clothing. I have no doubt that it was in thankful recognition of this that he asked me to accept an exercise book closely filled with an account of some years of his adventurous life. This account is now presented just as it left the hands of Cannibal Jack, excepting one incident mentioned by him which the most friendly censor would hardly have passed. I could not find an opportunity of reading the manuscript at the time, but later when I had leisure, I took it up

INTRODUCTION

more from curiosity than from any expectation of pleasure. Although the handwriting was most trying and indistinct, I found I must finish it before laying it down. I was charmed, and at times thrilled, as I accompanied Cannibal Jack from island to island. My regret on closing the book was that the writer had used such coarse language and described events in so realistic a manner as to preclude any thought of publication. (It should be remembered that we were then in the Victorian epoch.) I therefore stowed the MS. away with other derelict material, where it would have remained in obscurity or have been destroyed had it not been unearthed and perused by one of my sons who reads every scrap of South Sea literature he can lay his hands on, and who clamoured for its immediate publication.

At the time of my interview with the author, I could not be expected to know what manner of man he might be in private life. It was not till later that I learned the nickname by which he was known in the islands of the South Pacific. He was said to have deserted as a boy from a vessel which called for provisions at the Island of Maré, and on which he was serving an early

INTRODUCTION

apprenticeship. Outward appearances are not to be relied on, as I had already discovered during the nine years I had then spent at Uvea and Lifu. A very entertaining work might be written on the South Sea Island traders. They can hardly be said to form a type, so far as my experience goes. Some are men of exemplary character, others are the opposite. You may meet with one who is as wise as a college professor, and another as ignorant as a country yokel. One needs to be prepared for surprises. I once had a French convict living next door to me, and found him to be not only sincere and honest, but excellent company, and I may truthfully add that I never had a neighbour who had not some attractive quality of heart or mind. One reason for the strange companionships of dwellers in these islands is perhaps that they are reduced to Hobson's choice. Even Dirty Jerry, who was proud of his first name and endeavoured to live up to it, was as popular as anyone in the entire group; and I am sure Cannibal Jack, during his stay at Maré, found him a kind and most entertaining host, though he might have wished that the adjectival prefix of his name had not so fittingly qualified his dwelling. Poor

INTRODUCTION

Jerry! One wonders what his old friend and schoolfellow, the New South Wales Australian Prime Minister at that period, would have thought at the sight of this long-bearded, grimy-old beach-comber, who had no use for toilet soap and made it widely known that he took a severe cold whenever he washed his face, and who managed to keep immune from colds by avoiding water to the end. Nevertheless he was a jolly good fellow.

I have met other traders in the South Seas, who, with a little training and suitable environment, would, in my opinion, have become illustrious statesmen or judges. One man with whom I was brought into close contact was endowed with such a gift of fabrication that no one who knew him gave credence to any statement he made. What a loss was here to the world of fiction and light literature! Hayes was the name of this man (not the world-famed Bully Hayes of an earlier date) and he was one of the cleverest raconteurs I have ever met. He had heaps of stories in his repertoire, chiefly of whaling expeditions and cannibal feasts which he had attended. On one occasion he told me of a visit he paid to one of the big chiefs of Lifu,

INTRODUCTION

who invited him to stay to dinner. As he (Hayes) sat by the open door he saw a native attendant rush from the Chief's house after a boy who chanced to be passing, whom he clubbed to death, and who subsequently formed a part of their repast. Hayes protested that he declined that loathsome dish, but it was commonly believed that he had often indulged in cannibalism. His denial is not to be wondered at, for the practice is to-day in such evil repute that no native ever cares to speak or think of it. I knew of only one exception to this rule, namely an old village chief who was accustomed to gloat over the superior flavour of roasted human breast over that of fowl or pig.

In this story Diapea denies cannibalistic practices. I trust that I am not traducing his name if I suggest that in spite of this disclaimer it was the accepted opinion in the Islands that he had been addicted, as no doubt were not a few white men, to such practices; nor is it an unkindness to suggest that this disclaimer may have perhaps been actuated by the sincere regrets of an old man. That he had such regrets for some of his past deeds is clearly manifested in these pages.

Several of the white settlers of early days who

INTRODUCTION

were in the Loyalty Group before I arrived in 1878 are said to have been cannibals. However, I should much prefer to give them, as well as Cannibal Jack himself, the benefit of the doubt. He admits much, but not cannibalism.

Some may wonder that a missionary should assist in the broadcasting of Cannibal Jack's occasional disparaging and even hostile criticisms of missionaries. When we reflect, however, how frequently (though it may be reluctantly) he pays tribute to their beneficent labours, we feel we can well afford to let him have his say, and even to take counsel from his more sagacious strictures. We cannot, of course, expect glowing testimonials from men whose mode of life is quite at variance with our teaching. Nevertheless, such testimonials are constantly being given. Even Cannibal Jack contributes his quota. Moreover, his book will serve an excellent purpose in revealing—as in a cinema—the conditions of native life before the arrival of the missionary.

It appears to me that every clean-living Englishman who sees for himself the difficulties, obstacles and achievements of this Work must, and usually does, become a more or less ardent

INTRODUCTION

supporter of a cause which has done so much for the social, mental and spiritual benefit of these savage islanders; and incidentally for the material advantage of the civilized world.

In conclusion I may add that I have complete confidence in the veracity of Cannibal Jack. Much as his story is reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe, he did not appear to me to be a member of the school of romanticists. His range of experience was so wide that he had no need to draw on his imagination, as did Defoe. I doubt if his adventures were ever questioned by his contemporaries, unless perhaps when he disclaimed the distinction of being Cannibal Jack in word *and* deed. Certainly I have discovered little or nothing in his book inconsistent with what I have learned during more than 40 years of service in the South Seas.

J. HADFIELD.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

EXCEPT THAT THE SPELLING OF PLACE-NAMES has been standardized for the reader's convenience, the spelling, punctuation and paragraphing in the narrative which follows are those of the author. It has been thought better to leave even slips of the pen untouched, for these slips are often characteristic of the writer. For example, *hoc omnus geni* still stands on page 39, though on page 87 he gets the phrase right. The only liberty taken with the text has been the omission of two passages. The first of these follows the second paragraph on page 9; it is the equivalent of two pages in the present volume, and deals, in a manner at once tedious and inaccurate, with the Fiji language. The second is the passage referred to by Mr. Hadfield as too questionable to print; it follows the first paragraph on page 227, and is the equivalent of four pages in length. The section numbers on pages 9, 91 and 148 appear in the original MS.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

POSTSCRIPT

SINCE THE INTRODUCTION WAS WRITTEN AND SET up in type Mr. Hadfield has received from Mr. J. F. Read, a trader living in Lifu with whom he has maintained a regular correspondence, a letter containing the following additional information relating to Cannibal Jack :

'You ask about the late Mr. John Diaper, alias Cannibal Jack, alias Silver Eyes. He died at Maré years ago in the savour of Sanctity aged about 80 or 82. He did leave some papers as he had the mania for scribbling. These papers, on death of Dirty Jerry Imber, passed into possession of Robertson Imber and went to glory at the late fire. This son calls himself John Robertson. I only saw Cannibal Jack at the time he ran away from Fiji with old Streeter. Streeter ran away because he had to, and Jack also was "wanted". You may remember that they landed at Luengöne, chez Forrest, who promptly swindled them out of all cash, goods and also boat, made a slave of Streeter, who was a boozier and would give his soul for a nip, or if no nip was to be had, a bottle of Pain Killer. Diaper was not to be bounced, he had nothing and so emigrated to Maré to live with Dirty Jerry. Diaper many years ago, back in 1860, I think, was earnestly desired by the French on north end of New Caledonia, for murder and selling

POSTSCRIPT

arms and ammunition to revolting natives. If he had been caught it was the first wall and a firing squad, but he and others stole a small craft and went to Fiji. That is all I know. He was what old Artimus Ward called the Kangaroo, "an amoosin cuss". (It will be noted that Mr. Read spells Cannibal Jack's name Diaper; but the name in the MS. from which this book is printed is clearly Diapea).

Mr. Hadfield, in a letter to his son, Dr. J. A. Hadfield, comments as follows:—

'Evidently he [Mr. Read] knows little more of Cannibal Jack's history than we do; at least little that will be of any use to us. I remember Streeter's arrival from Fiji in the stolen cutter, but did not know that Cannibal Jack landed at Luengöne at the same time. The cutter was named *The Stranger*, and by the way, you, with the rest of us made a trip in her to Uvea. I remember this owing to the smallness of her bulwarks which necessitated the tying of one of you to each of my arms for safety during the night. I don't expect any help from Tib Hagen after learning from Read of the destruction by fire of J. Robertson's house.'

This letter of Mr. Read's disposes of the hope hitherto entertained by Mr. Hadfield and the publishers that the rest of Cannibal Jack's Autobiography might be discovered.