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GONE NATIVE

A Tale of the South Seas

by "ASTERISK"

Author of "Isles of Illusion"

CONSTABLE & CO LTD
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To the Wise

THERE may be some few who, because they liked *Isles of Illusion*, will read this book, and, having read, will accuse me of inconsistency on certain points. May I point out to such critics: firstly, that inconsistency is a human failing but not a vice; secondly, that there are invariably at least two sides to every question, and that, the larger the question, the more likely it is that one side should escape immediate notice. Also, one does get more tolerant with increasing age. When I first read *Isles of Illusion* I was amazed at some of the things that I had apparently said even so few years ago.

And that is a point which the majority of my, for the most part, kind critics, professional and private, perhaps excusably, missed. My letters—as the Editor insisted in his introduction—were not the duty-bound retailing of daily unimportant happenings. For most of the time they were the confidential whimpering of a loquacious man condemned to months of intolerable silence. Possibly, if some of my critics had had, when they least suspected, gramophone records made of all their hasty utterances, of all their sparkling *obiter dicta*, for the last ten years, they would be as surprised on hearing them as I was when I read that record of my own.

Some people even attacked me bitterly for

PART I: THE WOMAN

saying in private letters what, in very trying circumstances, I had felt and, at the moment, thought. I have never yet, I hope, sufficiently fallen from the saving grace of humour to expect one single person to see eye to eye with me. But surely a man has the right to voice even his quite fleeting attacks of mental and spiritual biliousness to a friend. Of course, from the moment that that friend passed on the products of my combustion to the public, the public, through its Press, had the right to say whether the mixed gases nauseated them or not. It was, however, quite unscientific to rail at what was burned because of the ensuing reaction.

But I do not wish now to make any sort of apology for the "me" of *Isles of Illusion*. Only I should like the readers of both that and this to understand that time has passed, doing with me, as with many more considerable folk, its kindly work.

" ASTERISK."

ENGLAND, 1923.

PART I: THE WOMAN

I. *The Recruiting*

HER name was not Topsy yet ; it was Ouéla Kohkon. She was—though she did not know it—aged fifteen, which is about two years past marriageable age on the island of Omba.

Ouéla Kohkon was married, but, as she considered, most unsuitably. It did not really matter that Tari Tagowa was old. All husbands were old, for it is only old men who have pigs enough to buy wives. Ouéla Kohkon had cost no less than ten pigs, two of them tusked, and she was very proud of the fact. Many of her friends had gone for far less. Also the price had been paid on the very day of her birth ; there had been no waiting to see how she would turn out. All this was food for much quiet complacency and gentle boasting when, in company with all the other Ouélas and Woiviras and Bouris, she sat on the shore at sunset after bathing.

But in spite of his undoubted riches and position, Tari Tagowa was not a nice husband, even as husbands go on Omba. For one thing, he was blind. That added a great deal of work to the day's total, for he had to be led about at times when other wives were free to swim or to drink coconuts. Then he was covered from head to foot with island body-ringworm. That was a horrid nuisance because Ouéla Kohkon was always catching it from him. Every even-

ing after swimming she had to scan—with the aid of friends—every square inch of her little person so as to spot at once the small tell-tale circle which was the beginning of a condition that she loathed. In her most secret hiding-place she had a little pot of “medicine b’long white man” that never failed to disperse the horrid circle. This precious little pot was the gift of a sister who had gone to work for white men and on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion had returned to Omba for a flying visit on the recruiting ship and distributed almost unbelievable gifts to her relations. Ouéla Kohkon had received this pot of medicine and an umbrella. For many nights she had been too excited to sleep for thinking of and handling her precious possessions. But pots of ointment have a way of giving out. Besides her own needs the pot had served several of Ouéla Kohkon’s dearest friends attacked by the scourge. She gained much glory and many feasts of lap-lap through the possession of this magical cure, but she could already see the bottom of the pot. What was going to happen then? Was her beautiful polished skin to dry up and hang in repulsive paper shreds till even the glory of the totem marks on her cheeks was lost? No; something would have to be done.

Then again, Tari Tagowa was more cruel than he had any right to be. After all, Ouéla Kohkon was a “woman Omba” and not a “woman Ambrym.” She had heard tales,

almost past belief, from travellers of how women were treated on Ambrym, how that they had to crawl on hands and knees in the presence of men, how that the punishment for attempting to run away was to have a fire-stick bound in the bend of the knee till future running was impossible. These stories might be true or they might be "gammon," but Ouéla Kohkon was not going to stand that sort of thing. Tari Tagowa tried to starve her into submission, but she could laugh at that when all her friends gave her food. He knew about her umbrella and was abominably cunning in seeking the hiding-place where she kept it. He had vowed that he would break it, and the worry of having to choose a new hiding-place nearly every day was beginning to make her desperate.

That evening at sunset she sat on the beach with her two dearest friends, Woivira Liliou and Ouéla Tata, and discussed husbands and the future. All three girls were unhappily married—all girls were for that matter, but these three had specially trying old men to bear and found great comfort in weaving plans for a brighter future.

Ouéla Kohkon was always the leading spirit, the daring inventor of exciting projects in these conversations. To-night she excelled herself. And she had some news too, news which caused the three woolly little heads to remain very close together for a long time.

 Casting anxious glances round to the bush

behind to make sure that there was no eavesdropper there, she whispered triumphantly to her friends. "Women, I have something to tell you. Yesterday a white man's ship came to Nduindui and anchored there. It is still there. It is waiting for us."

Magnificently she waited for the incredulous looks and excited whispers of protest from her friends. They did not disappoint her, but it was Ouéla Tata with her childish question who paved the way to the real triumph.

"Ouéla Kohkon, I think you are lying. How can you know? All day we have been with you, and you have not been to Nduindui. Are you, perhaps, a flying-fox? Did you go by night and see the white man's ship?"

Cautiously Ouéla Kohkon fumbled in the folds of her pari-pari; triumphantly she produced—from what the polite would call "her person"—her evidence, and waved it in the faces of her doubting sisters.

"Ah, women, you think you know all things. Tell me what is that. Isn't that a very beautiful silk handkerchief? Isn't that piece of money a dollar? Where then did I get them? Did Tari Tagowa give them to me?"

A smothered giggle from the others answered the last question. They knew how likely mean old husbands were to make such magnificent presents. But where could such riches have come from? Together they voiced their delight and their overmastering curiosity.

“ Oh, Ouéla Kohkon, tell us. What man have you seen, and where, and when ? ”

This was delightful. Ouéla Kohkon slowly rolled herself a cigarette, purring all the time her sense of satisfaction at such a beautiful surprise, chuckling at the far greater one that was to follow. Then after a decently enjoyed interval she lighted her cigarette at Woivira Liliou's fire-stick and continued.

“ Well, women, since you believe me I will tell you. It was my brother Moli who gave me these things. In the night he came, making no noise, speaking softly to the dogs, who knew his smell and did not bark. He is a boat's-crew on the ship called the *Dolphin* and his ship is anchored, as I said, at Nduindui. The presents are from my sister, Ouéla Kilukilu. . . . ”

“ From Tasiko ? ”

It was Ouéla Tata who forgot her manners and interrupted. Ouéla Kohkon frowned at the unseemliness, but her own excitement prevented her punishing the offender with too long silence. After a reproving glance she beckoned the two other heads closer to her own and resumed.

“ Yes, from Tasiko, from Colombe Bay where she went five years ago. You remember, women, the last time the *Dolphin* came here to Pulagalaga ? My breasts had not yet come. You remember how the boat that came ashore was decked with lovely silk handkerchiefs instead of with flags ? Oh, what a place that must be !

How rich and generous are those white men ! ”

Ouéla Kohkon paused dramatically while she and her two hearers recalled the marvellous scene of the coming of that fairy craft and did their best to imagine what could be the place from whence it came, where silk handkerchiefs were of absolutely no account, where dollars were as common as coconuts, where there were no nasty, jealous old interfering husbands. Very well did they remember the going away of Ouéla Kilukilu and no less than six other Pulagalaga women. Such departures were always surreptitiously carried out, at night, but that one had been particularly startling to those who remained ; for Ouéla Kilukilu was one of the wives of the Big Chief of Omba. What an awful commotion there had been. Canoes had been manned and sent out to try and overtake the *Dolphin*, but in vain. The men had come back empty-handed and frightfully angry. The solemnest of tambûs had been put by the Big Chief on the passage of Pulagalaga. No recruiting-ship, not even the audacious *Dolphin* with its half-caste Omba captain, would dare to break it. There was no hope for these poor little slave-women. Sadly they sighed and turned pathetic eyes to Ouéla Kohkon. Had she, in spite of all, some hope to offer them ? Mutely for a few minutes she enjoyed the homage to her well-known fertile imagination and then, taking pity on her listeners, continued.

“ Women, my sister Ouéla Kilukilu sends to bid us three run away from Pulagalaga.”

“ But, Ouéla Kohkon, how can we? Never would a ship dare to come here. And *they* would never let us go.”

Ouéla Tata's timid, half-hopeful objection was waved magnificently aside with a flourish of a cigarette.

“ Oh, Ouéla Tata, you are only a girl-child. You know nothing. Is it a long day's journey to Nduindui? If a woman leaves Pulagalaga when the sun is overhead, where, I ask you, would the sun be when she arrived at Nduindui making all speed? ”

Humbly Ouéla Tata showed with her finger that the sun would only be half-way down on its journey to the horizon, a mere three hours' walk, but her eyes and her head turned towards the village asked yet other questions, mutely raised more difficulties. These Ouéla Kohkon hastened to disperse.

“ Yes, you see, women, it is easy to go to Nduindui. The *Dolphin* will be there for a week. No one from on board will come to Pulagalaga rousing suspicion. Captain Frank is wise and knows our difficulties. His mother is my mother's own sister. And are not our 'tamaragais' so fortunately away? They will not have finished planting the Big Chief's yams for a week yet. Moli said that the *Dolphin* would not fire off a dynamite to signal to the men-bush to come down to the salt-water.

It is only us women that they want. Our men will not know that the ship is at Nduindui. But it will be dangerous to wait. Any day the Big Chief may hear the news and then the 'tamaragais' would hasten down to the salt-water. To-night we will give out to the old women that we are going out on the reef to search for crabs. The old fools will not suspect. Their breasts are dried up. And we will go to Nduindui."

That was Ouéla Kohkon's peroration. Slowly extinguishing her cigarette, she tucked the remains behind her ear, glanced triumphantly at her friends and rose, looking the question, daring them not to agree.

Carried away by her eloquence they just nodded assent, and getting up followed their leader silently from the beach up the little winding path that led to their village.

The thoughts of all three were turned longingly to certain stores of yams in the gardens, but the gardens were a long way off and a visit to them at that time would be sure to excite suspicion. No; it was no use being sentimental. They must leave the yams.

When close to the village they separated and each conspirator made a private détour to reach her own lord's house, being careful to greet any old woman whom she met with the "gammon" of the projected crab party.

Arrived at her house, Ouéla Kohkon's preparations for the journey were quickly made.

Tari Tagowa had never bought her any clothes since he had taken her, so two spare pari-paris and one dress, all her modest wardrobe, were easily slipped on and made no appreciable difference to her figure.

She looked longingly at her sleeping-mat, but it was Tari Tagowa's property and it would be difficult to carry it unobserved. It must stop. But there was important business to do outside.

From one hiding-place had to be dug three or four sticks of "trade" tobacco, all that remained of a going-away present from a youthful admirer who had recruited six months ago. Life without a cigarette was scarcely conceivable to Ouéla Kokhon, but she had had great difficulty in hiding her store from Tari Tagowa.

Then there was the famous pot of ointment, or what remained of it. Even in the hour of her leaving Ouéla Kokhon could not avoid taking precautions before removing for the last time her treasure from its cache, a half coconut inconspicuously and naturally wedged under the protruding root of a tree. She smiled to think how many people must have passed that tree, probably even noticed the coconut but never guessed what wealth it concealed.

Then last of all was the turn of *it*—her cherished idol, her umbrella. That with the simplicity of real genius that defeats cunning she had hidden in the thatch of the house right

bush, a scramble through the undergrowth, and they were on the track leading to Nduindui and freedom.

By now it was dark in the bush and, in spite of the excitement, the three little persons soon began to feel the Melanesian's certainty of presences in every tree, of horrid hands stretched out to grab them by the hair. They dared neither light a torch nor sing, the only two certain ways of keeping devil-devils away. Without a word each girl produced from under her skirts a spare pari-pari and made it fast round her little woolly head. That at any rate would make it harder for a devil to catch her by a quick snatch from an overhanging branch. Then joining hands, always without a word, they began to run. Four good miles did they cover like that, until the arrival at a sudden drop in the road and a whiff of salt air told them that the worst of their journey was over. They were now immediately above the bay of Nduindui. In an hour's time the moon would be up. A quick run down to the beach, a quiet whistle to the waiting boat—and there you are.

But caution was still necessary. They did not know whether the Pulagalaga men had heard of the *Dolphin* being anchored at Nduindui. If they had, they would most certainly go down to greet friends and relatives and to make certain that none of their women tried to get on board.

In whispers the three conspirators discussed the possibilities. They could see lights both from the *Dolphin* and from the village, so courage returned with their breath. As usual, Ouéla Kohkon's counsel prevailed. Still panting, she issued her orders to her quaking little friends.

"Women, this is what we must do. The moon is just rising behind the hills. If we wait longer the beach will be bright as in the sun at mid-day. The men of Nduindui might see us and might stop us. Surely they will be afraid of the Big Chief's anger. No; we must go at once. One by one we will go. I will go first. You must give me time to get to the salt-water and then you, Ouéla Tata, will come next; Woivira Liliou will come last. When we get to the water we will call like the grey pigeon of Omba. Moli will hear us and will come."

Silently the others nodded their assent, and with a brave smile to reassure her followers Ouéla Kohkon led the way, quaking in all her little person but determined not to be caught. Down the steep little gully she scrambled, her practised feet never shifting the smallest pebble, moving in the black darkness like a cat. At the bottom of the gully the road branched. To the left was the village; to the right the track run parallel to the sea, separated from the beach by a few yards of thin scrub. It was in this direction that the *Dolphin* was anchored,

so fortunately there was no need to pass the village.

Turning then to the right, Ouéla Kohkon crept on a yard or so at a time, dodging from tree to tree, her heart-beats choking her.

And then came the abominable realisation of her fears ! Quite suddenly, from the beach, only a few yards on her left, came the sound of voices, Pulagalaga voices, and—horror of horrors !—Tari Tagowa's voice.

They had suspected and were there in force ; and there they would remain till the *Dolphin*, tired of waiting, up-anchored and left. It was too awful. But with the crisis came returning courage and determination not to be beaten on the post by that leprous old blind monkey.

Leaving the track, Ouéla squirmed her way through the undergrowth, moving now on her little belly like a snake, somewhat impeded by the umbrella fastened to one leg, but still crawling with never a sound until, at about two feet from the edge of the bush, she could push aside a branch and look out on her enemies.

Yes ; there they were, not ten yards away, sitting in a circle on the beach, no lights, talking quietly. Ouéla Kohkon could recognise them all, partly from their voices, partly from instinct. They were all the old men, husbands of wives likely to run away. Were they going to win or was she ?

She knew that there was no hope of crossing

the beach and getting to the water unobserved before the moon got up. In the bush she could move quietly, but here there was a wide slope of broken coral to cross, and even a tiny little crab set it ringing like a musical box. And these men would be on the listen all night. Oh, it was disgusting.

Suddenly, in spite of the awful danger, she nearly let out a scream. Something moved in the bush quite close to her. It was too close to the salt water to be a devil. What was it? Ah, of course! It was one of the others, or both. It was both; silently they smelt out Ouéla Kohkon, and creeping up and joining hands with her sat and waited, not daring even to whisper but communicating by their fingers their curses at these horrible old men.

And then luck, which had seemed to have played them such a scurvy trick, turned and fought for them with a vengeance.

Clear in the night air across the curved bay there came from the bush at the Southern opposite extremity a loud whistle. Three times it was repeated. At the third repetition a splash of oars came from the neighbourhood of the *Dolphin* and the girls could distinctly hear a boat being pulled in the dark.

The men had heard the whistle too and the sound of the boat, and had set off running silently along the sand. There were their erring wives. All right, you little cats! you won't get away this time.

Scarcely crediting their good fortune, the little cats did not wait a second. There was a large rock about a dozen yards out in the sea. For this by instinct they made one common rush, so as to get behind it and await what came. Across the coral, across the sand they scampered. Into the water, wading, then swimming, until they finally scrambled breathless on to a ledge on the sea side of the rock of shelter. And there—there waiting for them was Moli and a boat full of smiling, friendly Loyalty boys.

The other boat, the whistle from the bush, had been a plant, a trap into which those jealous old fools had fallen nicely. Silently the whole party rocked with laughter at the thought. As if anyone had ever heard the *Dolphin's* crew rowing when they meant business! Who had whistled? Why, Captain Frank of course, who had been hiding in the bush until the three little runaways had got safely past him. Oh yes; the *Dolphin's* crew knew their business. None of the Pulagalaga men would dare to interfere with Captain Frank. There was no tambû on Nduindui and he had a perfect right to be on shore if he liked. Did not his own mother live there?

Come now, it's time to get on board. We'll get the anchor up quietly and be all ready to start by the time the other boat comes alongside.

With an enormous sigh of relief Ouéla Koh-

kon produced her umbrella from its uncomfortable hiding-place, and grasping it in both hands stepped into the dinghy feeling that now at last real life was going to begin.

II. *The Voyage*

§I

THE *Dolphin* was anchored about three hundred yards from the shore, but during the crossing of that distance not the faintest sound came from the four oars that pulled them rapidly alongside. The Loyalty boys were on their mettle to show these Omba women what real recruiters could do. Equally silently did they bring the dinghy alongside and then, having lifted the women one by one aboard, without a sound that could have been heard from the shore they pulled the boat up on deck and lashed it in preparation for the start.

The second dinghy could now be heard coming from the southern end of the bay, oars splashing, plenty of talk and laughter from the crew.

So as to be quite ready for an immediate start before canoes could be launched and come alongside to make trouble, the crew started heaving up the anchor. The stowing of the chain could not be done without a little noise, so to drown that and the clanking of the winch the men started a loud sing-sing and one ingenious wight thumped on an empty kerosene tin so that listeners on shore would get the impression that the ordinary evening sing-sing and dance was in full progress.

In the meantime the second dinghy had

come noisily alongside and had been pulled silently up. Quietly, quietly up went jib and mainsail, round went her head, anchor lashed, and away crept the *Dolphin* with at least two hundred pounds worth of Omba womanhood on board.

While all the manœuvres of getting under way were in progress the three adventuresses had remained huddled together aft of the cabin just where they had been pushed on board. They had taken off their wet dresses, Ouéla Tata as many as four, the others two each, and now they were standing shivering, wringing the water from their pari-paris, their brown skins glistening in the moonlight. None of them had ever set foot on anything larger than a canoe before, and the experience was terrifying. And there, bright in the moonlight, was their Omba, their beloved Omba, slipping away in a bewildering, appalling fashion.

The cruelties of their "tamaragais," the boredom of daily tasks, the desire for travel and excitement, were all forgotten for the moment. All that they could realise was that Omba was disappearing. So down they squatted and cried, quietly but bitterly, the tears running down their poor little squat noses, choking them, blinding them. Oh, Omba, Omba!

No one took any notice of them. Away for'ard the crew were having their kai-kai,

laughing and joking. Close to the runaways the Captain and a Maré boy and a woman were eating with their food spread on the cabin skylight. They were talking some language that Ouéla Kohkon had never heard—she had only heard varieties of the Omba tongue but considered herself quite a linguist—and were eating in a way she had never seen. In spite of her grief she began to feel curious and started to rub away the tears so as to get a better view of the surrounding mysteries.

Once or twice indeed she peered fearfully over the starboard side to see that land was getting fainter and fainter, but the paroxysms of tears became less violent after each succeeding peep, the shy looks over her shoulder longer and more interested.

Then she began to examine the face of the woman illuminated by the light of the hurricane lantern. Surely she must be a "woman Omba." She was talking that strange language, but those totem marks stamped her as a Bouri. Where had Ouéla Kohkon seen that particular "tumboi" before? Oh, of course, she knew her now. She was a Bouri from Longangua, a long way up the coast from Pulagalaga, but they spoke the same language. Ouéla Kohkon tried to convey this wonderful discovery to her two little friends, but they were too overwhelmed with grief to pay any attention to

her. Rocking themselves backwards and forwards, their faces huddled into their knees, they were enjoying their grief in true Melanesian fashion.

Sympathy started Ouéla Kohkon off again, but really she could not keep it up. The *Dolphin* was well out at sea now and making curious movements such as she had never felt before but which stirred her to a pleasant sensation that after a bit she recognised as an extraordinary hunger. She dried her eyes finally and with determination on her *pari-pari*, shook herself, took a firm grip of her umbrella and stood up.

The movement attracted the attention of the diners, and the woman, getting up, came aft and spoke to her.

“You are Ouéla Kohkon, aren't you?”

“Yes, and I think I know you. Why are you here?”

The woman smiled in a friendly manner and laid down by Ouéla Kohkon's side a large plate loaded with rice and delicious roasted yams.

“I am Bouri, daughter of Tari, of Longangua, and I am the Captain's woman. Long ago I came to Pulagalaga when you were but a child. I will not stop to talk now. If you are hungry, eat this food. When the sorrow of the other girls is finished, perhaps they will eat too. Good-bye.”

With a reassuring smile she went back

to join the Captain and the "man Maré," both of whom, out of politeness, had kept their backs severely turned to the sorrowing little ladies. Time enough to talk when sorrow was over.

The smell of the roast yams, real Omba yams, set Ouéla Kohkon gently weeping again, but very gently this time, and the weeping was soon interrupted by quiet satisfied munching.

By and by, as she sat pensively enjoying her second yam, she felt a hand moving towards the collection of food on her lap. That and a subsequent loud sniff told her, though she was much too well-behaved to look, that one of her friends was likewise beginning to forget her poignant grief. After a few minutes' decent interval she turned her head slightly. It was Ouéla Tata who was feeling the zest of life again. The tears were still coursing down her cheeks, but they were salting the large lump of yam which was pressed to her slowly moving lips.

Woivira Liliou was rubbing her nose and eyes with the end of her pari-pari. The smell of the yams had reached her too and brought comfort. Without a word—speech would still have been indecent—Ouéla Kohkon divided the large lump of rice into three parts with deft fingers and pushed a portion and a couple of yams to each of her sorrowing sisters. For ten minutes they munched solemnly and conscientiously.

Then when the last crumb had been silently gathered up and each of the three was thinking longingly of a cigarette came Bouri, to shake hands this time with them all and lead them down below to the cabin. Here, from a bewildering and dazzling store, she produced for each girl a new dress, a silk handkerchief, a blanket and—most wonderful of all—a packet of French tobacco and a book of cigarette papers. This last to those who had never better than cut up “trade” stick tobacco and banana fibre for paper was a crowning mercy.

Having dressed themselves and rolled a cigarette they accompanied Bouri on deck to be presented to Captain Frank and the *Maré* mate. The Captain knew enough Omba language to do the polite, but the *Maré* man could only shake hands and grin and say something in that unintelligible tongue that he had been talking while at his meal.

Bouri explained that that was the white man's language and that they would soon learn to talk nothing else. She herself, being out on the *Dolphin* nearly all the year, had almost forgotten how to talk Omba.

Having properly introduced the young women, Bouri now seized them for her property and, leading them to the lee side of the skylight, sat down with them and at once plunged into a long talk about the beloved island.

First one and then another of the runaways took up the tale, the doings of all and sundry, known and unknown, fact and gossip. Bouri in return gave them the news of Omba women at Colombe Bay and on neighbouring plantations. In particular she had news of interest for Ouéla Kohkon about her sister Ouéla Kilukilu.

In her most impressive voice she told it, well aware of the excitement that it would produce.

“Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, you would not know your sister now. For many years she has been the chosen woman of Gordon . . .”

“But, Bouri, who is Gordon?”

The mannerless interruption came simultaneously from all three of the wondering little women. Bouri, excusing them on the score of youth and their exceptional circumstances, smiled and went on.

“Gordon is the son of the Big Master. He is a master himself, though young. And he is very, very rich. All the dresses in the store, all the scent, all the tobacco, and many things that you do not know belong to him. Oh, the presents that he gives to that woman! It is wonderful! Big Master knows nothing of all this, even though he is married to an Omba woman. He is old and stupid, though very strong and very bad-tempered. But Gordon is wise and nearly always gets what he wants. He has made

Ouéla Kilukilu chief of all the women who sew, partly because of her great skill, but really so that she shall be close to his room and far from the old man who wanted her badly once. All the Omba women say that Gordon is so mad with love that he will even marry Ouéla Kilukilu and make her missis. But I do not think so. She is getting old, and though Gordon has loved her many moons she has not given him a son."

All this was nearly incomprehensible to Ouéla Kohkon and her friends. Vaguely they had heard of white men taking Omba women to wife. Vaguely they had heard of love and marriage as being connected. But the ideas were not yet clear. They fully understood that every young girl belonged from birth to some rich old man and that in due course she would go and live with him and work for him.

It was Ouéla Kohkon who voiced the amazement of the three.

"But tell me this, Bouri; for I cannot know the ways of white men. How can a white man who has never been to Omba take an Omba woman for his wife? To whom then does he pay the pigs that are her price? And is she not ashamed to go like that to the bed of a man who is of no totem, untattooed, a creature of no caste?"

Bouri yelled with laughter at Ouéla Kohkon's simple questions.

“ Oh, Ouéla Kohkon, you are very young. Truly you will learn many things from the white men whose customs are so different from ours. Nor are they all bad either. But you will see for yourself. You will learn to speak with them in their language. I speak it as one of them now, for I am always on board the *Dolphin* and never speak our own tongue. I will teach you as we voyage to Santo, to the Chinaman's.”

The questions spoken by three pairs of wondering eyes were very pleasing to Bourri. For the first time for many moons she was enjoying the privilege of showing off her worldly knowledge in her own language. She rolled herself a cigarette and proceeded with her tale.

“ Yes, women, we are going to Santo where Old Master has a store. It is kept by a Chinaman who buys sandalwood from man Santo and sells them tobacco and guns. Three times a year does the *Dolphin* go to him, taking him food in tins. Old Master does not know that we were going to call at Omba. That is Gordon's work, and it was Ouéla Kilukilu who urged him to it. She said that her heart was hungry for you, Ouéla Kohkon. Perhaps she will not be glad when Gordon has seen you though, for he is young and changeable and his eye turns ever to the firmest breast.”

All this talk was like new and strange wine

to Ouéla Kohkon and her little friends. Santo—Chinaman—sandalwood—stores. She had certainly heard of these things, but had never really formed a definite hope that one day she would know them.

She would have loved to go on talking all night. The moon, just past the full, lit up the sea like a mirror and made ink-black shadows on the deck. A good trade-breeze kept the *Dolphin* steady, with only now and then a playful lift of her bow and a merry shake to show how she loved the sea and the wind and sailing. Forward the Maré men were crouched round a fire in a brazier, sometimes talking quietly, sometimes singing just as quietly. The Maré mate was at the tiller. Captain Frank had turned in on top of the skylight and was snoring already.

Bouri began to yawn. She was such an old hand that even the excitement of recruiting three of her countrywomen could not keep her awake at sea. She was going to sleep down in the cabin. The three girls could please themselves. If they were too cold on deck, or if it rained, they could come down and sleep on the floor.

Unanimously the three voted for the deck. Their sorrow was over; Omba was no longer visible; they were out on a huge adventure. Naturally they did not want to sleep; they would talk and talk and talk. To-

morrow they would sleep. So Bouri left them and went below.

Having wrapped their new blankets round their shoulders and rolled one of the new delicious cigarettes, they settled down for a gorgeous talk. But they did not know the sea and its power over even little women freshly escaped from slavery. The talk began and wandered on for a little, but first one mouth and then another and then all three began to open so wide and so often that talk was out of the question. Almost simultaneously they succumbed and, cuddled together like young pups, forgot all their joys and troubles till a polite stirring by the foot of Moli at daybreak woke them to the knowledge that, if they still wanted sleep, they must go and finish it below, for decks were going to be washed down.

§II

For the first time in their lives they had wakened up at sea, and the strangeness of the experience was worth more than even the joy of an hour's extra sleep with no morning fire-making to worry about.

Yawning in the unrestrained way that is considered good manners on Omba, they all three got up, their blankets still wrapped round them, for the morning air was chilly,

and perching themselves on the coaming of the after-hatch peeped round at the new and wonderful sight.

Far away on the starboard quarter was a dim haze which they felt rather than knew was their Omba. From that direction the sun was making preparations for rising, throwing off his gorgeous-coloured sleeping-garments, sinking them slowly in the peaceful blue waves which seemed to come swishing up to kiss the *Dolphin* good morning before rippling softly away to leeward.

Their gaze had naturally sought out Omba first. After slowly sniffing up the freshness and the goodness of the dawn the little travellers turned their sleepy eyes to port. Here, close to them, was land, land as far as they could see, for'ard and aft, high hills covered with dense bush, bays with white foam showing where were the barrier reefs, and in one bay a large white building perched on the hill-side. What could this strange-looking country be? It was quite different from Omba. There were no coconut trees, the distinguishing mark of their own beloved land.

Moli came to their rescue with the information that this was Santo, and that they would sail like that all the morning until they doubled the northern point. The afternoon, and perhaps the night, would be passed in working down the lee side of the island

till they came to the Chinaman's place. There if the Chinaman had any sandalwood, they might spend two days getting it on board, and then home to Tasiko.

He was just going to make tea now and would bring them a pannikin and two biscuits each. This unknown luxury of being waited on and having food provided which they had not worked for themselves seemed a promising beginning to the first day of their new life, and the arrival of the tea, a tarry liquid semi-viscid with sugar, and of the two huge biscuits which only Melanesian teeth could munch, settled their approval and convinced them that they had done well in recruiting.

The morning passed in delightful fashion: talk to Bouri who came on deck with the sun, an investigation of the trade-room and the surprise of more presents from their unknown new master, a little nap curled up on the skylight, and then at eleven o'clock kai-kai, a satisfying meal of rice and tinned salmon washed down with another pannikin of the delicious tea.

The *Dolphin's* luck holding, they got a slant of wind to double the northern point, made their anchorage at four o'clock, and going ashore in one of the dinghies the intrepid young women set foot for the first time in their lives on land that was not Omba.

Ashore everything was full of interest and excitement for them. There was "man Santo" with practically no clothes and "woman Santo" with absolutely none. There was the Chinaman who looked for all the world like a "white man." And everywhere there were hundreds of pigs.

The Chinaman had quite a lot of sandalwood and three days were spent in loading it from his store, where he had only just left himself room to sleep, all the rest of his two-roomed galvanised iron house being filled with the sweet-smelling wood. He had long ago sold out all his "trade" and used up all his firm's money, while for food he had been living on yams which he grew and on pigs which cost a stick of tobacco each.

In spite of his solitary existence and fierce-looking neighbours he seemed quite contented, the joy of trading making him forget all the luxuries of his variety of civilisation. His slant eyes twinkled, however, when he saw the generous supplies of tins of water-lily roots, bamboo shoots, ground-nut oil, soy sauce and other delicacies which make life worth living for a Chinaman.

A small lump of sticky-looking stuff wrapped in dried leaves and exchanged by Captain Frank just before leaving for a large box of "dollars" completed Mr. Sui Chan's happiness. For a week he would be deliriously

happy in his house tight shut to all customers. Then he would re-open and would spend two, perhaps three, months busily making enough money by small peculations from his till to be able to purchase on the next visit of the *Dolphin* another week of bliss.

Some of this Bouri, wise in the ways of Chinamen in Nouméa, explained to the three young recruits, but they were not very interested. It was enough for them to spend the day in bathing, the evening in long, long talks. They were blissfully happy and would have been content to spend their lives like that with no thought to take, not even the considering of lilies.

On the morning of the fourth day all the sandalwood was on board and sail was set for Tasiko. At the last moment a little excitement was caused by the arrival on the beach of two men, stark naked and bleeding, who rushed into the water and swam for the *Dolphin*. They were hauled on board and left to get their breath while the anchor was stowed. No one on board could speak their language, so they were promptly given names by Captain Frank and "signed on" for three years. Obviously that was what they wanted. Otherwise why did they come on board? What they were bleeding for was their own affair and part of a doubtless bloodthirsty past.

As for their nakedness, that was nothing

surprising on Santo, and was soon remedied by the handing over of two yards of red calico to each man and a short lesson in how to wear a pari-pari.

The new "indentured labourers" accepted the gift and lesson quite stolidly, refused suspiciously a plate of rice but fell like wolves on some yam and, having devoured it, promptly went to sleep. They were strong-looking men and would be very welcome on Tasiko.

So the *Dolphin* had made a good trip, not out for recruits and yet coming in with five. "Fifteen years of labour" would well pay the expenses of her trip.

The journey from Santo to Tasiko was uneventful, each of the five days the same monotony of long tacks. A white man would have been bored; not so the adventuresses from Omba. Each day, however long, was a joy to them. There were peeps of new islands which appeared and disappeared bewilderingly first to port and then to starboard. There was the fun of fishing for bonita and the delight of eating it in huge quantities when caught. And then there was the last day, Colombe Bay sighted in the morning and slowly but surely "made."

The flags were hoisted to let the folk on shore know of the great success; anchor was dropped with a splash in the dead calm water of the bay, and in the first dinghy,

the boat of honour, Ouéla Kohkon, with all her new wealth in an imposing bundle, her precious umbrella grasped tightly in her hand, went ashore.

III. *Ashore*

AMONG the little crowd of brown people and white people waiting on the black sand of Colombe Bay for the *Dolphin's* dinghy was Ouéla Kilukilu, Ouéla Kohkon's sister.

The little adventuress would not have recognised as a sister, except by the tattoo marks on cheek and brow, the magnificently attired young woman who came forward to greet her. A white muslin dress, no less than five coloured silk handkerchiefs slung about her neck, one particularly gaudy coloured bound round her hair—and that hair was bright gold!—white shoes like a white man's and a ravishing necklace of coloured beads, formed a disguise such as Ouéla Kohkon, not being capable of abstract thought, had never faintly pictured.

The effect of it now was to make her even more speechless than is demanded by Omba good manners when greeting a long-lost relative. Scarcely touching the carelessly proffered hand, and having repeated the operation with well-bred nonchalance upon the equally unenthusiastic hands of the two dozen or so spectators, she turned and accompanied her sister, walking of course behind her, up the steep bank of scorching hot black sand.

At the top of the bank, in the shade of a

flamboyant tree, was standing a young white man surrounded by dogs. Ouéla Kilukilu was already talking to this young man in the language of which her newly arrived sister now knew several words, and after due introduction and a little talk which Ouéla Kohkon vaguely understood, the three turned and, passing a series of overpoweringly enormous white wooden buildings, crossed an open square of tall coconut trees and arrived at a wooden house, smaller than the other buildings, but still of huge size in the eyes of the wondering little traveller. Here the white man left them and the sisters went in to wait for the arrival of the two other Omba recruits who had not been accorded the honour of going ashore in the first dinghy.

Feeling that by now a decent lack of enthusiasm had been shown, the two sisters began to display in their own fashion their affection for one another and their delight at meeting again.

They did not understand kissing—the elder had lately begun to learn but still considered it a meaningless function and certainly nothing to do with the present case; they felt no need to touch one another; they simply squatted down on the earth floor of the little house and talked. Being “woman Omba” they were naturally storytellers, and what a story each had to tell!

Ouéla Kohkon, the newly arrived, be-

gan. In her softest voice, first and second fingers of each hand crossed, head hanging, she spun the yarn of the escape from Omba.

In the middle of the story Moli arrived with the other two refugees, but they knew their manners too well to interrupt. Shaking hands silently with Ouéla Kilukilu, whom they had not seen for three years, then with Ouéla Kohkon, whom they had left half an hour ago, they squatted down and listened, not interrupting but just nodding gently when Ouéla Kohkon made one of her best points.

The waiting on the shore at Nduindui with the old men so close, the dash for the rock and the recognition of Moli, brought particularly emphatic nods from the fellow-heroines. The voyage was more lightly dealt with. The true storyteller's instinct warned Ouéla Kohkon that in the matter of voyages on recruiting ships her elder sister was more experienced than she. That yarn could be swapped later on for the benefit of some "new chum," but it was not fitted for the present séance.

During the recital Ouéla Kilukilu had appeared studiously inattentive and bored, playing with her bead necklace, rolling cigarettes, catching mosquitoes, anything but listening. That was for manners' sake. Once the recital finished and the soloist rewarded with

a cigarette, the chief listener showed by deft questions that not a word, not a detail of the story, had escaped her. She was now showing her gratitude for the pleasure received, delicately complimenting the performer and, at the same time, fixing in her memory this priceless yarn as an addition to her own stock.

The story-telling had taken a long time, and the sound of a series of blasts on a conch, "boubou b'long work 'e finish," surprised them while the exchange of question and answer was still in full swing.

Reluctantly Ouéla Kilukilu announced that for the present the entertainment must be suspended. Had they been at home the talk would have gone on far into the night. Only when the joys of "storyan" had been drunk to the very dregs would the calls of hunger have roused them to cook and eat, after which sleep would naturally have followed, lasting its due time without absurd worries about cutting up and spacing that inexhaustible physical quantity which is such a bugbear to the white man, such a natural source of delight to the brown.

Here, however, the brown people were not free. The white man had imposed his fixed hours for eating and other natural functions, and the white man had to be obeyed. So now it was a question of kai-kai.

First the new arrivals were taken to the store, dim in the fading reflection of the sun already dipped, full of "boys" and women buying and watching one another buy, a place of such bewildering magnificence that the "new chums" from Omba would willingly have relinquished food for the joy of staying there.

To Ouéla Kilukilu it was stale and she was in a hurry, so steering her protégées through the crowd she got to the counter, introduced the young women to a half-caste storekeeper who greeted them politely in Omba language and procured for them each one a tin plate, a spoon and a pint pannikin.

From the store the foraging party returned to the little wooden house where they had so pleasantly spent the afternoon. Ouéla Kilukilu explained that this was the apartment of the unmarried women. At present there were only herself and a "woman Pentecost" unattached, so there was plenty of room for the new-comers. There were bunks round the walls, the girls could take their pick. It was a pity that they had no sleeping-mats, as Omba mats were rare on Tasiko and the local product was only good enough to walk on. However, on a plantation, if one was on good terms with the authorities, there were always plenty of new copra sacks which made very comfort-

able bedding. She would see to that later.

Now as to food. Gordon had told her that, for to-night at any rate, the new Omba women were to be rationed from the white man's kitchen. There was always plenty of food to spare, and among the curious messes that white men ate there was sometimes something that was not too bad.

To-morrow the destiny of the "new chums" would be talked over. If they were sent out to work on the plantation, "'long altogether," they would get their food at the "kitchen b'long all boy." If, however, Gordon decided to attach them to the household staff of maids, seamstresses and others of less definite standing, they would draw rations from the white man's kitchen and would have plenty of time during the day to make "lap-lap," roast yams and otherwise provide a reasonable foundation to which to add the white man's unsatisfying dainties.

They must hurry to the kitchen now, as Nam, the Tonkinese cook, was apt to be cross and stingy if his lady-pensioners arrived after he had begun to serve the white men's dinner.

While imparting this information, Ouéla Kilukilu had been occupied in washing out, rather perfunctorily, the various dishes of an enamel-ware "gamelle" or dinner-bucket, and when the operation was concluded led the way across the coconut-grove to the kitchen at-

tached to the white men's house. At the door of the kitchen were gathered about a dozen women, each armed with a "gamelle," all smoking cigarettes and chattering cheerfully in the strange language of the white men. Several were Omba women, and to these the new-comers were presented together with a hurried summary of their adventures. The other ladies seemed interested too but, as the introductions were made in the Omba language, could only show their interest by sympathetic smiles. Ouéla Kilukilu took no notice at all of the foreigners; evidently "woman Omba" ruled the roost at Colombe Bay, a fact which Ouéla Kohkon and her friends quite understood and, by their haughty bearing, thoroughly endorsed.

The chatter, interesting as it was, did not last long, for Nam soon gave the signal for the distribution of rations by removing the lid from a mighty saucepan of steaming savoury soup and turning with a bewitching smile to the assembled ladies. Ouéla Kilukilu was the first to step forward with her "gamelle," the marked way in which the others gave her pride of place and the assured manner in which she accepted it showing plainly to her abashed little sister that Bouri had not exaggerated the importance and influence of her position. The new-comers were all solemnly presented to Nam, who honoured them with a hearty squeeze from his greasy hand and a speech

of welcome, to which Ouéla Kohkon, though only understanding the words "welly good" and "kai-kai," politely replied by friendly smiles and the gift of a gracefully accepted cigarette.

During the palaver Ouéla Kilukilu had been investigating the contents of saucepans and making her selection for the evening meal. The soup would do; the rice and some boiled yam were eatable; a generous helping of native cabbage moistened with gravy from the fowl could also be managed; the ragoût of course was untouchable, spoiled by the white man's curious mania for burning his throat with red pepper; the fish smelt of garlic. However, with the addition of a large loaf of new bread and a billy-can of sweet strong tea, a fairly reasonable feed was gathered together and room was made for the entrance of other ration-seekers.

Ouéla Kohkon and her friends had been very interested in the selection of the various dishes, all delightfully new to them, but it was the bread which proved to be the *pièce de résistance*. This was a luxury unknown and unimagined by the little travellers; dipped into a pannikin of tea—on the advice of the experienced Ouéla Kilukilu—and slowly munched, it was an ample recompense for any amount of danger and exile. Certainly these white men knew a thing or two.

After kai-kai conversation began again.

This time Ouéla Kilukilu was the narrator, explaining with well-chosen examples the life on a white man's plantation, giving the most delightful thrills of surprise and anticipation to her gratified hearers, saving to the very last the almost unbelievable sight of a camphor-wood trunk filled—absolutely filled—with a bewildering display of riches. Ouéla Kohkon could never have conceived that one woman should be the possessor of so many dazzlingly beautiful dresses, such quantities of the gaudiest Japanese silk handkerchiefs, at least three large bottles of incredibly powerful scent, two mouth-organs and—surely a miracle!—three umbrellas!

Ouéla Kilukilu in displaying her riches very properly had fingered them carelessly, turning them over as things of no account, scarcely looking at them herself, but the "new chums" were hard put to it not to forget their own manners. They might not praise; breeding forbade them to dwell for more than a second on each carelessly-displayed article; but their staring eyes and quickened breath could not so easily be controlled. Finally, when the exhibition was ended and the box—in itself a marvel, with a lock that sounded a bell on turning the key—was shut, a whole cigarette had to be rolled and smoked in silence before ordinary conversation could be resumed.

Very willingly would the new-comers have

listened all night to the marvellous new things that they were hearing, the situation of so many Omba women as "woman b'long white man," the delightful assurance that each of them too might certainly hope to attain to such an enviable position, to be the possessor of a well-stocked trade-box. But they were to learn that such a position brought certain restraints, certain irksome compliance with the habits of the wealth-bestowing white men. While talk was yet in full swing the door was opened by an elderly man who stood in the doorway and, without any greeting or other mark of politeness, shouted something unintelligible but evidently angry to the assembled girls, and then, equally unceremoniously, banged out, locking the door after him from the outside. Ouéla Kohkon and her two friends, quite unused to angry white men with terrible blue eyes, had sat trembling during the tirade, casting wild glances round in search of shelter till the awful apparition vanished.

In a whisper, after his departure, Ouéla Kilukilu informed her startled little friends that that was "master," that his house abutted on to their present abode and that the "old feller" always wanted to sleep early and did not like the sound of talking. The door was locked to prevent night-adventurers, white or brown, from possible poaching on the very valuable preserve of the "house b'long single

woman." Of course, "old feller" didn't know anything about her affair. Well, it was a nuisance, but they had better go to sleep now.

IV. *Learning*

DAYLIGHT was just beginning to filter through the tiny window of the house when Ouéla Kohkon was wakened next morning by long-drawn blasts on a conch. She knew nothing about clocks or white men's time, but this was the beginning of her first day in a delightfully new world and curiosity urged her to get up at once and investigate her surroundings.

Sitting up in her upper bunk she rubbed her eyes and looked round the house to see whether any of the others showed signs of readiness for talk or adventure. Her first glance was disappointing. On the opposite side she could see Ouéla Tata in the upper bunk, Woivira Liliou in the lower, both motionless, heads still covered with pari-paris as a protection against mosquitoes. Evidently there was no hope in this direction just yet, as Omba manners forbade the wakening of sleepers and they looked good for another hour. Perhaps Ouéla Kilukilu was stirring. Bending over the side of her bunk she peered into the one below where she had seen her sister turn in last night after extinguishing the lamp, but, to her surprise, there was no sleeper there. How could that be? Ouéla Kohkon was certain that the only door could not be opened; she had tried it herself after "master's" departure last night because she was curious to know how white

men managed to fasten doors ; the window was much too small to be used as an exit ; there was no opportunity in the house for hiding.

This mystery had to be solved, so she descended from her perch and looked more carefully round the other empty bunks. Well, it was very puzzling ; but perhaps that door could be opened after all ; perhaps Ouéla Kilukilu, versed in the strange ways of white men, knew the trick. Why shouldn't she try for herself ? With another glance at her sleeping friends, regretful that they were in no condition to share this daring enterprise, Ouéla Kohkon laid a trembling hand on the handle, turned it and—wonder of wonders !—found that the door offered no resistance at all. Nothing prevented her from going out to investigate the enticing mysteries.

She opened the door gently, a little at a time, and peeped out. Yes, she must certainly go. There were all sorts of strange things in sight : large white birds walking about with outstretched necks, making curious noises ; enormous creatures that looked like grotesque pigs with what seemed to be branches jutting from the sides of their heads ; one of them had a baby, without branches, and was suckling it ; terrible things if one saw them at night, but perhaps harmless in the bright light of the rising sun, merely white men's curiosities.

Bit by bit Ouéla Kohkon had sidled out of the door, closing it gently behind her. Now

she was really outside and had only to decide which quarter should be investigated first. A look round the wooden hut where she had slept showed her a largish building quite close. That was evidently "master's" house, and had better be avoided in case the angry old man with the terrifying eyes was already up. In front, across the coconut grove, was the big house, where the white men ate and where—as Ouéla Kilukilu had explained—those of them slept who had not got women. That must certainly be looked at. Fortunately there were, scattered among the coconut trees, large bushes to act as cover, temporary shelters as she flitted fearfully past the strange animals and birds.

But it was rather a nerve-racking journey. Those huge pigs, their mouths moving slowly all the time, looked at one with such enormous eyes, made such strange movements with their branched heads. And there were actually two standing right between her last leafy refuge and the house now distant not more than fifty yards! Could she summon up her courage and brave them in the open? Through the open windows of the house she could see all manner of delightful objects that simply screamed for closer examination; but she dared not leave her cover. It was really too exasperating! And then, quite unexpectedly, the way was cleared. From a gate at the far end of the grove a man appeared and called out. Ouéla Kohkon could not understand what he shouted, but evidently

the strange beasts could, for they turned slowly and walked towards the gate whither all their fellows were going too. The man opened the gate, the animals filed solemnly out and she was free to advance to the satisfaction of her curiosity.

With a quick little dart she covered the intervening space and was now immediately under the windows of the house. They were too high to be seen through except by making small jumps, but even in this tiring and tantalising way Ouéla Kohkon managed to catch glimpses of many new and wonderful things. She saw white men's beds, the occupants faintly visible through mosquito-curtains ; on the walls were men's and women's faces, houses and trees, quite small but easily recognisable ; in all the rooms were boxes, similar to Ouéla Kilukilu's, doubtless full of priceless treasures. From window to window she moved, making about six little jumps at each before she could pass on to the next. Finally she arrived at the corner of the house, and here her patience was well rewarded, for beneath the window ran a cement ledge on which she could stand and peep to her heart's content.

The room was larger than the ones she had examined before ; it contained no bed ; there were no faces on the wall ; but it was full of interest for all that. Right opposite the window, for example, she could see the window itself and—framed up to the waist—a person

whom some intuition told her was herself. She had certainly known small mirrors, things about the size of a dollar in which one could see plainly one eye and some nose ; for the rest her experience of reflected images had been gained only in quiet pools on the reef at Pula-galaga, and then she was not quite certain that it was not herself who in some mysterious way was both in and out of the water. Anyway, she knew that if ever so small a fish came to the surface of the pool, she, Ouéla Kohkon, got out at once and was altogether on the edge. But this was quite different. There she was in the room, moving her head, smiling, even putting out a red tongue. How could it be ?

So engrossed was she in her own movements that it came as a shock to her to find that she was not alone in the mirror. Close beside her, almost touching her face, were the head and shoulders of a man, a white man with nice pinky-looking skin. It was the back of his head and body that she saw, and every now and then there came an arm, the hand holding a shining razor. Evidently the man was shaving ; but where was he ? She could almost touch him with her head, but her outstretched hand always got lost in some mysterious way when she tried to feel whether that pink flesh was warm like her own.

And then quite suddenly the man disappeared from the mirror and came past the open door quite close to her. Like a flash Ouéla Kohkon

bobbed down, just missing a basinful of water thrown out by this disturbing vision. For some minutes she remained, panting with fright, crouched on the ledge, till with returning courage she raised her head slowly and peered cautiously over the sill. She could see in the mirror a woolly head and one eye, but that was her own. Where then was the man? The noise of running water in the far corner of the room betrayed him. He was standing in a big sort of iron dish and on his body was falling from the ceiling what surely must be rain. No, it couldn't be rain. The sun was shining and the man was in the house. What extraordinary things these white men did!

But he certainly looked very nice. His body was white and he seemed to be rubbing himself with something that made it whiter still. From the window Ouéla Kohkon caught a smell that reminded her of her sister's beautiful scent. So this was how white men bathed themselves! Then suddenly the bather half-turned round and she recognised the young man to whom she had been presented by Ouéla Kihukilu yesterday when she came ashore. She knew that it was Gordon, son of the angry old man who had made them stop talking so absurdly early last night. But this man didn't look angry at all; and he was certainly much more beautiful than he had seemed yesterday with his clothes on.

Ouéla Kohkon felt no fear, her curiosity was too strong; certainly she felt no shame, for a

man—even a white man—could scarcely bathe himself with his clothes on. So engrossed was she that she raised herself to a standing position on her ledge and continued to enjoy the very pleasant sight. Then without warning Gordon turned his head full round and caught sight of her framed in the window. His face, even his beautiful white body, went quite red, and into his eyes there came—just for a moment—the same angry look that had made his father so terrible last night.

He turned his back, snatched at a large towel with which—much to Ouéla Kohkon's disappointment—he hid his nice white body, and then faced round and smiled at her. The angry look was gone, giving place to one which the little peeper, too petrified with mingled curiosity and fear to move, did not quite recognise, but felt that she rather liked. She returned his look, gazing right into the blue eyes that seemed to speak friendship and something else quite strange. This was really a pleasant game and the young man obviously liked it too, for without a word he continued to play it for quite a nice long time.

Now he was speaking too, with an amused look on his face, evidently asking her some question. Ouéla Kohkon understood the words "house" and "door." That broke the spell. Quite suddenly she realised that she was doing something wrong, something that might entail horrible consequences. With a little gurgle of

fear she leaped down from her perch and fled, right across the coconut grove, brushing against several of the great white birds, in a bee-line for the little house, opening and slamming the door behind her in one convulsive jerk, and not till she was snugly back in her upper bunk did she begin to feel safe. She looked round the house ; Ouéla Tata and Woivira Liliou were still sleeping, so she could not discuss with them the startling adventure ; her sister was still out. There seemed really nothing to do but have a little nap herself, so, after meditating peacefully for a few minutes on the sight she had so recently enjoyed, she solved her problem in her usual happy manner by falling suddenly and deeply asleep.

v. *Clouds*

OUÉLA KOHKON was wakened from her nap by a voice which she recognised as her sister's. So Ouéla Kilukilu was back at last. Apparently she was angry too, for she was speaking in shrill tones, accompanying her monologue by banging things about and generally behaving in a petulant manner. What could have happened? Was it anything to do with that bewitching young man at his bath?

Ouéla Kohkon was not left very long in doubt. No sooner had she shown a leg over the edge of the bunk, thus proving that she was awake and could be reasonably addressed, than her sister faced her with angry looks and flashing eyes.

"Ouéla Kohkon, you are a fool! You are only a girl-child and not worth two wretched, thin, female pigs. You will never have children. Your breasts shall . . ."

But this was too much. Half-dazed at the sudden attack, weeping bitterly at the awful insults, Ouéla Kohkon leaped from her bunk and turned on her traducer.

"And you, Ouéla Kilukilu, daughter of a shark, filthy spawn of a flying-fox, lover of devils, how dare you speak to me like that? Most surely was no price paid for you when you were young, and now that you are old and dried up you come to be the sport of white

men. What have I done? Why are you cross?"

Both girls were weeping now; but both felt that for the moment honour was safe; all had been said that any such occasion required; now they could begin to discuss reasonably the point at issue.

Seating herself quietly on the floor, Ouéla Kilukilu pushed a pannikin of tea and a biscuit towards her erring little sister, and then in her most ordinary voice launched her accusation.

"Why did you go out from this house and get me into trouble? Why did you show yourself to my man and try to turn his head? Tell me this, Ouéla Kohkon."

Thus adjured, the culprit, her mouth comfortably filled with tea and biscuit, hastened to explain.

"But, Ouéla Kilukilu, I did not know. The door was open. You were not here. How did you get out? And where were you?"

This turning of the tables did not please the elder sister. She showed signs of wishing to begin again the exchange of insults with which she had started the discussion, but the suspicion that she had not exactly scored and that perhaps Ouéla Kohkon would again be too strong for her at that game calmed her anger. She answered the impertinent questions quietly.

"Why, Ouéla Kohkon, do you not know? I am the chosen woman of Gordon, chosen out

of all the Omba women here. It is he that gave me the second key to this door. That is how I got out. But it is all a great secret. Master wants to marry me to a 'man Pentecost' whose time is finished and who demands me as the price of signing on again for three years. That is why he locks me in at night. He knows nothing of a second key. Like a fool last night I forgot to lock the door behind me. That is how you managed to sneak out. And if the Old Master had seen you out, or if some man had told him, there would have been terrible trouble. Never must you do such a thing again, Ouéla Kohkon. Would you have your only sister forced to marry a foul, uncircumcised 'man Pentecost'?"

The thought of such a possibility dispelled the last traces of Ouéla Kohkon's anger. Her sister, Chosen Maiden of the Little Red Flower, marrying a filthy eater of female pigs! No, never! What Omba woman could live to support such an insult? Humbly she acknowledged that she had been at fault. But why did Ouéla Kilukilu speak of trouble? Had "master" been told? And had he shouted in that terrible voice of last night?

"No, Ouéla Kohkon. Old Master never gets up till the sun is hot. That is how I have always time to get back here and lock the door before he comes to send us to the kitchen to get our tea. He came this morning after you got back and while you were still asleep. No; it

was Gordon who scolded me. And he spoke of you in a manner that I did not like. He is my man, Ouéla Kohkon. You shall not steal him from me."

The younger sister hastened to assure her jealous relative that no such thought had entered her head, nor would. What did she want with white men? But all the same a very comfortable feeling came over Ouéla Kohkon when she thought of those beautiful eyes, that lovely white body, the certainty of a magnificent box crammed with dresses. However, there might be other white men equally beautiful, equally generous. She would wait and see.

Tea was finished now and Ouéla Kilukilu announced that they must all go to Gordon's office to "sign on" and have their tasks apportioned to them. What "signing on" could mean was far beyond the comprehension of the three "new chums," but, anyway, it was something new, and therefore delightful. Primly, but consumed with excitement and longing to talk, they followed their guide across the coconut grove, past the big house of Ouéla Kohkon's adventure and round to the store, in one corner of which was a little room full of the strangest things, the use and meaning of which the little women could not even faintly imagine.

Here they found Gordon, seated at a table deep in conversation with Bouri and Captain Frank, while in one corner of the room were squatted the two "man Santo" whom the

Dolphin had so providentially rescued and recruited. The conversation was evidently about these men, for at a word from Captain Frank they stood up and shuffled forward to Gordon's table. Without a word Gordon took hold of one of the men's hands, pressed the thumb of it first on a pad then on to a sheet of paper covered with black marks, repeated the operation with the other man and then gently pushed them from the table, whereupon Captain Frank took them in charge and left the office with them and Bouri.

This mysterious happening had so engrossed the attention of Ouéla Kohkon and her two friends that they had barely listened to Ouéla Kilukilu's whispered explanation that it was the ceremony of "signing on," that the two "man Santo" were engaged for three years as boat's crew on the *Dolphin*. Now it was their turn.

Shyly the three answered to the pushing of Ouéla Kilukilu and her whispered command to advance to the table; equally shyly, with down-cast eyes, did they shake the proffered hand of Gordon, before repeating with their own thumbs the operation which they had seen carried out by the two "man Santo." Ouéla Kohkon would willingly have "signed on" any number of times, so pleasant did she find the thrill imparted to her own little brown paw by the pressure of Gordon's strong white hand. She would indeed have liked to raise her eyes to see

whether that curious look was still in the blue ones that were close to her now, but decency forbade. Besides, she felt that her sister was staring hard at her, looking for trouble ; and Ouéla Kohkon hated trouble.

During the " signing on " ceremony nothing had been said, but, as soon as it was finished and Gordon had shaken hands once more with what were now " indentured labourers," Ouéla Kilukilu addressed the girls in the Omba language and said that she would act as interpreter in the matter of discussion of what kind of work was to be allotted to each. She thereupon began to talk unconcernedly and fluently with Gordon, standing carefully between him and the interested parties to protect them from his obviously admiring gaze. Woivira Liliou and Ouéla Tata were soon settled. They were to help in the white men's house, make the beds, sweep the rooms and be generally useful. All this Ouéla Kilukilu translated to the girls, adding in a whisper for their encouragement that they might consider themselves very lucky ; there were plenty of unattached white men ; it wouldn't be long before each attained to the glory of her own little house and the joy of unlimited dresses and other finery.

Ouéla Kohkon's case seemed more difficult, and here the interpreter obviously shirked her self-imposed duty, for a long conversation took place between her and Gordon, first argumentative, finally with angry words and gestures.

It was all quite unintelligible to the poor little girl concerned, though obviously of enormous interest, as she listened pathetically to the meaningless babble, anxiously watching the different expressions that came into the magic blue eyes, instinctively feeling that he was taking her part. Once even, round Ouéla Kilukilu's shoulder, she managed to exchange a glance which, though it lacked the full meaning of the early morning's eye-play, caused her the most pleasurable sensations. It seemed, too, to urge Gordon to new efforts on her behalf, for he banged his hand down on the table and spoke very angrily, apparently giving a final command to Ouéla Kilukilu and instructions to interpret it. This she did though obviously in the very worst of tempers and much against her will. Ouéla Kohkon was to be a seamstress. It was utterly foolish to take a little savage, an ignorant girl-child for such work! What could she know of making dresses and how to use a sewing-machine? And she, Ouéla Kilukilu, champion dressmaker of Colombe Bay, would have to lend her machine! It was mad, but Gordon insisted, and all white men were mad!

Ouéla Kohkon listened to all this with beating heart and wide-staring eyes. Willingly would she have refused, for peace sake, the apportioned post, even though the very idea of making those entrancingly beautiful dresses seemed far beyond the seventh heaven of her little imagination. But she was powerless to

make her wishes known. Her sister turned her back to signify that she washed her hands of the whole concern. Explanation to Gordon was impossible ; indeed an attempt to plead with him only resulted in more very disconcerting eye-play and a fresh manifestation of rage from Ouéla Kilukilu. Finally they all left the office and proceeded to the white men's house, Woivira Liliou and Ouéla Tata to be handed over to the care of the housekeeper, an elderly Omba woman, for instruction in their new duties, Ouéla Kohkon to begin under her sister's ungracious tuition the new and troubling adventure of being a seamstress at a white man's store.

VI. *Storm*

THAT day, and many following days, Ouéla Kohkon passed happily engrossed in the mysteries of dress-making. Her quick little mind and skilful fingers soon disproved Ouéla Kilukilu's scornful prophecy of failure, for before a week had passed she was able to sew with the machine, turning out, not as rapidly as her elder sister certainly, but with decent speed, a quota of dresses per day that earned the hearty approval of the half-caste storekeeper and gained the surreptitiously proffered praise of Gordon himself when, on the way to or from his room, he passed along the verandah where the seamstresses worked.

It was wonderful how many times a day some business or other called Gordon to his room, and, of course, it was only right that he, charged with all the affairs pertaining to the store, should display an intelligent interest in his workwomen. Sometimes, though rarely, Ouéla Kilukilu was absent when this interest was displayed; and then the whispered, laughing comment of the other women after his departure, gave food for very pleasant self-satisfaction to Ouéla Kohkon. The other seamstresses were all Omba women, all safely attached to white men, all very friendly to the little new-comer and all bitterly jealous of the elder sister with her airs and graces, with her insufferable conceit at being the elect of

the most eligible white man at Colombe Bay. Whenever their self-appointed queen left them alone for a few minutes, machines stopped as if by magic, cigarettes were produced from behind ears and a chattering began which drowned even the noisy talk of the maina-birds in the plantation.

And how sweet was all that chatter to Ouéla Kohkon, and how naturally she took her part in the weaving of delicious plans! There could no longer be any doubt; Gordon would find a way to put the younger sister in the elder's place. He was very wise at that sort of arrangement. And after all, my dears, she is *passée*. Even that golden hair, produced by some magic white man's medicine without the labour and disfigurement of smearing the shaven poll with lime and waiting till the hair grew again ruddy-gold! What of it? Even that could not hide the fact that she was growing old without the slightest sign of being able to add a jolly little half-caste to the band that played about round the store. And why—tell me this, women—did she always wear a bathing-dress like a white woman? A woman who was not ashamed of having begun to dry up would never do that. And her temper! Only yesterday she had dared to tear up in her rage a pair of Gordon's trousers! For all the world as if he were only a "man Pentecost" or worse!

But he wouldn't stand that for long. He was very good-tempered, not like that horrid

old bear of a "master" who had been known even to take a stick to his woman; but still Gordon was a white man and, as such, little likely to support even Ouéla Kilukilu's pranks too long.

All this talk was as precious incense to Ouéla Kohkon's budding knowledge of her own value. All this and more did she confide in whispers to her dear friends Ouéla Tata and Woivira Liliou after the evening swim and when waiting for the summons that called them to Nam's house of savoury mystery. The two other girls had their confidences to impart also. They were both being courted in an entirely honourable manner and felt that it would not be long before they left for good the little "house b'long single woman" where Ouéla Kilukilu's tyranny was fast making the evenings unbearable.

Really the life here was delightful. Their tasks were of the easiest, mere trifles to girls who had spent their days since babyhood in slaving for never-satisfied old husbands. Then this freely expressed admiration of quite young men—even though they were white men—was very acceptable to little women who had never even dreamed of being thrilled in a manner quite unknown in a land where marriage was by purchase and where the unbreakable laws of totem, caste, and tambû allowed for no such thing as a maiden's fancy.

The intercourse with foreigners, too, was full

of interest. Here at Colombe Bay were gathered together men and women from all the islands, curious creatures some of them, naturally inferior to the inhabitants of their beloved Omba, but interesting for all that.

The Saturday evening dances, occasionally prolonged "time moon 'e big-feller" till Sunday's sun was well up, were particularly bright spots in a pleasant week. Here there were none of the absurd rules which forbade women to attend particular dances. Decked out in their new dresses, beautifully scented with the strongest perfumes from the store, girt about with as many gaudy silk handkerchiefs as possible, the ex-downtrodden-slave-wives revelled in their new-found freedom. Of course they never forgot what was due to them as "woman Omba" even when merriment was at its highest, and many a sharp rap over the knuckles from their bamboo canes was administered to audacious hands of "man Maewo," "man Ambrym" or any of the other inferior races.

Attendance at the dances and contact with people who could not speak the Omba language had necessitated the learning of the lingua franca of the islands, biche-la-mar.

Even Ouéla Kohkon, who had practically no relations, except on Saturdays, with any but her own countrywomen, had already picked up quite a decent amount, and it amused her to air it in the evening on her slower-witted little

friends. It was nice, too, to be able to reply in a shy whisper to some of Gordon's remarks as he leaned over her sewing-machine in his anxiety to see that she was not wasting her time. She did not understand half of what he said, but it did not take her long to learn the proper answer. A bashful little maiden when pestered by the not unwelcome attentions of a young man of any race whatsoever had merely to lower her eyes and say "Gammon 'ere!" in order to pass as thoroughly accomplished and well bred. Of course if her ignorance of the great world made her raise her own brown eyes a little too soon and find them engrossed with a pair of twinkling blue ones—well, nobody was to blame for that.

And so life passed pleasantly enough for six more moons. Each day brought its precious little moments to Ouéla Kohkon. Each day seemed to make the affair between her and Gordon more priceless, more inevitable. He had even begun to give her sly presents: handkerchiefs, bottles of scent, packets of beautiful tobacco—small things that she could hide and gloat over in secret, awaiting the glorious day when she should have a "bokkis" of her very own, filled with tokens of respect to show to her admiring friends. Even Ouéla Kilukilu seemed quite resigned to abdication and treated her small sister pleasantly enough. Of course the matter was never mentioned openly between the two girls. Ouéla Kohkon understood too

well the chagrin of a woman who has begun to lose her charms ; she sympathised with Ouéla Kilukilu—but after all, these things were natural and the way of all flesh.

On the rare occasions when her sister deigned to join the evening swimming party instead of going off by herself to wash in the river—with soap, like a white woman!—Ouéla Kohkon could not help thinking how natural was Gordon's preference. How could any man want that grotesque figure in its clammy, clinging bathing-dress which betrayed rather than hid the ravages of full twenty years, when, for the asking, he might have her own firm little body with the tiny pear-shaped breasts, its beautiful polished skin and comely legs? Why, Ouéla Kilukilu had even grown afraid to swim! Instead of joining the other girls in long plunges out to the reef, in the fun of pretending to be a shark by swimming under water and grabbing with the mouth at a floating friend, she stayed close to the shore, afraid to spoil the silly golden hair, bobbing up and down like an old woman! How could Gordon, who swam like a fish himself, have any patience with such middle-aged cowardice?

It was after one such swimming party, when Ouéla Kilukilu had gone off to dress herself in private like a silly white woman, when the little friends were allowing the setting sun and gentle evening breeze to caress and dry them as they smoked, that Ouéla Tata dropped the thunder-

bolt which scattered Ouéla Kohkon's peace and filled her with horrid fears of a troubled future. The story must be true : it had come direct from the Omba half-caste storekeeper, who was so smitten with Ouéla Tata's youthful charms that he had actually proposed marriage—a white man's binding marriage with all its unbelievable dignity and riches!—and was pressing for a reply.

He had overheard a conversation, a long and angry one, which had taken place that very morning in Gordon's office between "Old Master" and his son. Hearing the names of Omba women bandied about, he had considered it his duty to press his ear against the weather-board partition which separated store and office and, in consequence of what he had gathered, inform Ouéla Tata of the plot that was brewing.

"Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, it is surely true. Louis would not lie to me. Old master was terribly angry and spoke to Gordon as to a dog."

"But surely, Ouéla Tata, Gordon is a master here too."

Ouéla Kohkon could not conceive that her idol could be less than all-powerful. Surely he could hold his own against that horrid old man who had never yet deigned to notice her existence.

"Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, he is a master, but he is not the Big Master. Louis explained to me

that the old man does not often interfere, but, when he speaks, all is done that he commands, even by Gordon. And Louis thinks that all this trouble comes through Mary . . .”

“The cat! She is but a female pig, old and dry. She has no teeth. Why should she interfere?”

This outburst from Ouéla Kohkon was unfair, though, under the circumstances, excusable. Mary, the old Omba woman, legitimate wife of “Old Master,” had always treated her young compatriots with great kindness, furthering by her great influence their little love affairs, always jealous of the prestige of her own folk. Why then had she taken a hand in this plot? Ouéla Tata hastened to explain.

“Oh, Ouéla Kohkon, you are really very silly. You have been so blinded by your Gordon that you have not seen. It is Ouéla Kilukilu who has done this. Every day she has been shut up with old Mary, making this trouble, to revenge herself on you.”

“But what has she said, Ouéla Tata? It is surely all lies.”

“Yes, doubtless she has lied. Louis could not understand everything that was said, but he thinks that Ouéla Kilukilu has told Mary that Old Master wanted you, that he came and spent a long time in our house every night and that he gave you presents.”

This was too much to support while sitting down. Wrapping her pari-pari round her with

great dignity, Ouéla Kohkon rose and expressed her amusement and contempt in a mingled yawn and laugh. That she should be suspected of casting eyes at that old horror, "Big Master" though he was! It was too absurd! Why, he was nearly as ugly as Tari Tagowa, and quite as old! However, the matter must be discussed.

"But tell me, Ouéla Tata, why is the old man angry?"

"Oh, that is Mary. She is very jealous and believes all the stories about Old Master. Louis says that the stories are true too. He is a strong man, though old, and likes young girls. But it is not you that he likes; it is a young Maewo woman, the wife of old Jimmy, that he visits every night when Mary thinks he is with us. That is Ouéla Kilukilu's cunning lie."

Still Ouéla Kohkon could not understand. Certainly it was unfortunate that Gordon and his father should have quarrelled, and that she, though quite unjustly, should have roused the anger of the awful old man. But she could soon, with the aid of her two friends' evidence, convince Mary that there was no cause for that particular piece of jealousy. What, then, did it matter? Why did Ouéla Tata pull such a long face? Had the old man said anything worse?

"Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, much worse. In his anger he has ordered Gordon to go away on the

steamer to a place called Sydney, a long, long way from here."

"But he will come back?"

Confidently Ouéla Kohkon put the question. Nobody went away on boats for ever. She knew all about departures and returns. There was nothing terrible in that.

"Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, he will come back after six moons—if he has found a white woman for himself. If not, he is to stay away. Old Master says that he makes too much trouble with the Omba women, always taking for himself the best and youngest."

"Well then, most surely Ouéla Kilukilu will never work her devil's spells on him again. No more will she talk to us as if . . ."

But Ouéla Tata could not hold up her climax any longer. Her artistry triumphed over her affection for her little friend. She burst out:

"No, Ouéla Kohkon, she will do us no more harm. She is going back to Omba to-morrow on the *Dolphin* to soften by her return the anger of the Big Chief at our departure. And you, Ouéla Kohkon, are to be sent out to work in the plantation. And you are to be married to Bulabun, the boss boy, the man Pentecost."

* * * * *

If Ouéla Tata was not content with the success of her artistically broken news, she must have been very exacting, for the effect upon her

hearer was instantaneous and heartrending. Casting herself face downward on the beach, poor, staggered little Ouéla Kohkon howled aloud with grief and rage, beating the sand with her feet, clasping handfuls of it in her despair. What had she done to deserve this fiendish cruelty? Her lover taken away from her! Her only sister—treacherous hag though she might be—gone! Herself snatched from her beloved dressmaking and sent out to hoe weeds like any “woman Maewo,” to be always dirty, to have no time to swim, to be a slave again! Marriage with the “man Pentecost”—whatever privileges it might bring—she would not even consider. She would rather kill herself. She would swim out to the opening in the reef and give herself to the sharks sooner than commit such an abomination. Oh, why, why had all this come upon her? What had she done? Why had she ever left her beloved Omba?

Silently Ouéla Tata and Woivira Liliou cried beside their friend. The sun had long since set. The evening breeze had turned to chill night air, but still the poor weeping little woman lay there, naked, despairing, heartbroken. The bell had gone for the evening kai-kai, but who could think of kai-kai now? What should she do? Kill herself? No; she was too young; life was too sweet and sharks were cruel. Some even said that they were sea-devils, and she could well believe it. She would run away.

But where, and how? She had never been outside the plantation, did not know a single path on the island. And every one had told her that the bush all round was packed with devils. A young Omba man, her tribal brother, had run away once, but after two days had been forced to come ignominiously back through hunger and the malignancy of the Tasiko devils. And if a man was powerless, what would be likely to happen to her? No; escape by land was impossible. But what about the sea? After her long voyage on the *Dolphin* the sea held no terrors for her. Moli had explained to her how you could find your way by day or night, however far you wanted to go. True, the white men used a funny thing to direct them, a thing that wobbled about that you could see but could not touch. But Moli had told her of other ways, had showed her the stars that pointed out the way to Omba. . . . Oh, come! All was not lost yet! She would show that blue-eyed old monster who scorned her what an Omba woman could do.

Gradually her weeping had ceased, stilled by the hope fast rising in her brave little heart, stifled by the necessity of making plans. Politely Ouéla Tata and Woivira Liliou had stopped crying too. They had even busied themselves in gathering together the garments that their friend had discarded for the swim, and now they mutely held them out one by one, pari-pari, chemise and dress, while Ouéla

Kohkon, teeth chattering with cold, but eyes alight with courage and excitement, dressed herself and sat down to meditate on a new adventure.

VII. *Escape*

LONG and earnestly the girls talked, discussing every possible and impossible way of rescuing Ouéla Kohkon from her threatened fate. But even the fertile imagination of the authoress of the escape from Omba staggered before this problem. It was one thing to get away from "man Omba" with a boat waiting and plenty of friends eager to help; it was quite another to get away by sea when the only boats were hostile and belonged to that terrible old white man well versed in all the simple methods of would-be-escaping "indentured labourers." Disconsolately Ouéla Kohkon eyed the various craft anchored in the bay and drawn up on the steep-shelving beach. Well she knew that there was no hope there, even if her two friends had been willing to accompany her. There would be neither sails, nor oars, nor even rowlocks in any of those boats. "Old Master" had been bitten too often in the early days through light-hearted "borrowing" of dinghies and whale-boats by brown people seized suddenly and overwhelmingly with a longing for their own island, cheerily forgetful of any "Contract of Engagement of a Native Labourer."

A native canoe? There were several on the beach and, if the paddles were also there, that was perhaps a possible means of escape. But

Ouéla Kohkon shuddered at the prospect of such a voyage. Too well she remembered the terrific distance she had travelled in the *Dolphin*; days and days and days. How could she possibly get food sufficient for such a journey? And the nights, alone at sea! For all she knew there might be devils, if not sea-devils, at least malignant wandering spirits of men who had died away from home and would naturally be hungry, eagerly on the look-out for a succulent, solitary, young woman. No; she could never brave that alone. In company perhaps—though three in a canoe would be a dangerously tight squeeze on the open sea—but neither of her friends was really anxious to get away. Ouéla Tata spoke longingly of the little wooden house owned by Louis, over which she would rule with nothing else to do the livelong day but enjoy herself. And then what unlimited presents could be given by a doting husband who was also a very lightly controlled store-keeper! A unique chance for any girl!

Neither was Woivira Liliou more inclined for the adventure. She was going to have a baby, and the father—whom she proudly affirmed to be none other than Nam, the Tonkinese cook—was only waiting for the end of his engagement to take her to the little store which he had already bought down the coast. He was going to pay Old Master the price of her indentures, so as to make certain of his child. And Chinamen were such good husbands,

and so generous! No; she was very sorry. Anything she could do to help, she would, but . . .

Bitterly Ouéla Kohkon realised that she was alone, that her two great friends with whom she had shared every joy and every sorrow since babyhood had deserted her. But never for a moment did her brave little heart fail her. This was her trouble, and she was going to beat it. She did not reproach the others with their desertion. She knew that they were sorry; their tears were evidence enough of that. But where was she to turn for help? Bouri! Ah! There was an idea! Bouri was wise in all the white man's ways and would surely help. Drying her tears, she got up and faced her sobbing friends.

“Women, we will go and speak with Bouri. She will surely be able to think of some plan. She and Moli are alone on the *Dolphin*. I know, for I saw Captain Frank and the Maré man go ashore in their white clothes while we were swimming. They would be going to drink grog with Old Master and will not be back till the big moon is right on top. Come on.”

Eagerly Ouéla Tata and Woivira Liliou jumped up too. This really looked like business. Bouri would be certain to help their little friend. All might yet be well.

The three girls hurried along the shore of the bay until they were opposite to the point

where the *Dolphin* bobbed at anchor gleaming in the moonlight with her new white coat in readiness for her departure. They could see Moli leaning over the taffrail, fishing, silhouetted against the shining, placid water of the lagoon. Quick and shrill there went out to him from the darkness of the overhanging bourao the call, three times repeated, of the Omba pigeon, signal all through the islands that there were Omba women on shore wishing to communicate secretly with those on board. Three times repeated came the answer to the eager little watchers on the shore; they saw Moli haul gently on the painter of the dinghy and lead it quietly round to the side of the *Dolphin* hidden from the beach. Then he disappeared. Five minutes, ten minutes passed, an eternity! Could he have misunderstood the signal? Or was he too frightened of Old Master to play games here right under his nose? They had almost given up hope when a rustling in the bushes behind them told them that their countryman was there, faithful as ever to the sacred call, ready, as always, to help Omba women against the world.

Of course he had not brought the dinghy straight ashore, where any lurking spy of a "man Pentecost" could see him and hasten to curry favour with Old Master by informing him that his stringent orders against traffic between the *Dolphin* and the shore were being broken. No; he had come ashore among the man-

groves at the point and made his way silently through the bush. And now what did they want?

In excited whispers Ouéla Kohkon broke the news to Moli of the awful fate awaiting her, of her determination to escape, and of the necessity of consulting Bouri. With emphatic words and much very proper appreciation of the unspeakable "man Pentecost" who dared to lift his devil-begotten eyes to any Omba woman, let alone his own sister, Moli conveyed his willingness to assist. His man's thoughtfulness, however, made him point out one little difficulty in the way of the proposed clandestine visit to the *Dolphin*.

"Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, surely I will take you. But what of the others? Is it not near the hour when the Old Master comes to lock up your house? He will have been drinking grog with Captain Frank, but at this early hour he would surely see that the house was empty. Your sister is of the party too, so that she may come on board secretly when the Captain returns. We are to sail at midnight. Bouri told me this, though I knew nothing of your danger. Surely Ouéla Kilukilu will warn the old man to look inside the house. What is there to do?"

It was Woivira Liliou who answered. Much as she would have loved to go on board the *Dolphin* and join in the delightful game, she would deny herself for her friend.

"Yes, Moli, you are right. Ouéla Tata and

I must go back now. We will put out the lamp and weep aloud. Then the old fool will not enter, white man though he is. He will think that we are all there grieving for the going-away of Ouéla Kilukilu."

Mutely Ouéla Kohkon and Moli nodded their recognition of this wisdom. It was the moment of parting and they could not speak. Tears choked them all, but for Ouéla Tata and Woivira Liliou there was more than sorrow, there was bitter shame. Their friend was going away—instinctively they felt that she would never come back from that ghost-like ship—and they had nothing to give, not so much as a paltry silk handkerchief or a packet of tobacco whereby to show their breeding and their grief. Unable to bear it, they turned away, shaken with sobs, slinking like cats along the shadows of the bourao, then running in a bee-line for their little house. There would be no need of feigned grief when the Old Master came to lock that door.

"Come, Ouéla Kohkon, we must go. You can weep again with Bouri, but we must hasten now."

Moli's own voice was trembling too, as he leaned down and raised his little sister from her heart-broken attitude on the sand ; but he was a man, and there was work to do. Silently they threaded their way through the darkness of the overhanging bush, carefully they stepped from root to root of the gnarled mangrove, black and

sinister in the clear shallow water, until they reached the spot where the dinghy was lying. Here Ouéla Kohkon, after one final outburst, leaning for comfort and support on the strong shoulder of her brother, pulled herself together. The spirit of adventure was on her again and left no room for grief. Bouri would know of some way out. Old Master should be taught a lesson.

With every stroke of the sculls that pulled her nearer to the anchored *Dolphin* her courage mounted, and by the time they were alongside and she had clambered on board she was quite able to pour into the sympathetic ear of Bouri her troubles and a petition for help that she somehow felt would not be refused. For some time Bouri let the excited little chatter have free play, merely checking it at times with questions to make sure that the danger was really grave and that, so far, no suspicion could have been aroused of the victim's intention to escape. Then, smiling complacently at the compliments to her own well-known skill in managing such difficult situations, she stopped the pathetic outburst with apologetic hand.

"Ouéla Kohkon, forgive me, but time is short. I must speak. Truly you did well to come to me; for I think I have a solution to your affair. Indeed I would have spoken of it before, but I saw that you had found favour in the eyes of Gordon and I hoped that some good might come of it. Now that this evil has come

instead—thanks to that devil's daughter Ouéla Kilukilu—I think it is not too late."

"Oh, Bouri, tell me! Who is he, and where does he live?"

Bouri in her superior wisdom smiled indulgently at this innocence. She knew white men better than that, but it was no good saying so now.

"Ouéla Kohkon, I did not speak of any man; but it is a man, a white man, that I had in mind. His name is George and he lives at a passage called Lehili on the island of Uma. He is a great friend of Gordon's and by great luck we are going there this very night. Gordon is sending some female pigs there to be mated with this man's great boar. Oh, Ouéla Kohkon, never did you see such a boar as that, bigger than three Omba pigs and wonderfully fat . . ."

"But tell me, Bouri, does this man want me? And how can I go there unseen?"

At any other time Ouéla Kohkon would have loved to talk at fullest length about such a marvellous pig; now she was all impatience for news of its owner, and, as Bouri had said, time was short. The moon was getting towards the zenith and at any moment Captain Frank's whistle might be heard summoning the dinghy for his return.

"Ouéla Kohkon, you are young, and I think that, when George has seen you, he will want you badly enough. I saw him on our last voy-

age and he was very sad. He keeps a store with another white man called Harry. Harry is not sad because he works very hard and eats a lot ; but George is always sad, writing on paper, and eating little. But he is a good man, and kind, and he talks our language well. I told him that I would find him a woman, having you in mind, and he thanked me for my good thought."

"But, Bouri, how comes it that a white man speaks our language? Is he then a missionary?"

Bouri laughed. As if she would have proposed a little Omba wife to a sour-faced missionary!

"No, Ouéla Kohkon, he is no missionary, though very different in voice and face to even the best of the white men that keep stores. He has learned our language from a book and from talking to his house-boy, Charlie, a man from my own passage. But now, it is late. You must come with me and I will show you where you can hide on board."

They had been sitting on the taffrail and now Bouri rose and was leading the way for'ard when a loud splashing in the calm water made them both start and look hastily over the side. A curious object met their eyes, a thing faintly visible in the deep shadow thrown by the *Dolphin's* hull. What could it be? A shark? Certainly there was something sticking high out of the water, but surely it was too large for a

shark's fin. Besides, sharks do not splash and this thing was splashing violently as if to attract attention. It was Ouéla Kohkon's sharp young eyes that first pierced the darkness and solved the mystery. Excitedly she turned to her companion.

"Bouri, it is a woman swimming! And that is my umbrella!"

And so it was. And the swimmer was now gently calling her name too. Bending low over the gunwale she seized the end of the extended object, just as Bouri, who had dashed for the cabin, returned with an electric flash-lamp and revealed by its light the head and shoulders of Ouéla Tata and, just behind, the smiling, dripping face of Woivira Liliou. A voice came from the darkness.

"Oh, Ouéla Kohkon, we could not let you go like that. Here is your umbrella and a bundle of your clothes. More we could not bring, but there are two dollars from me and two from Woivira Liliou wrapped in a quite new handkerchief."

"But, women, how did you get out?"

Bouri, as she put the question, had dropped in a sailor-like fashion a bight of rope over the side and both girls supported themselves easily on it, careless of sharks, glad only that they had managed at the eleventh hour to save their honour.

"Oh, Bouri, Old Master was very drunk. He could not lock the door. He tried but the

key would not go into its hole. He fell and was sleeping outside the house. Mary and Captain Frank came and carried him away, for he was making noises like a pig. And Captain Frank is drunk too, and . . .”

But Bouri recognised that this was dangerous. Mary might visit the empty house at any time. The whistle for the dinghy might go ; and the girls be seen in the bright moonlight.

“ Well, women, you have been very brave. But you must go. Ouéla Kohkon is all right and I will look after her. Good-bye.”

“ Good-bye, Ouéla Kohkon ; good-bye, Bouri.”

A wave of their hands and the intrepid little friends had turned away, swimming strongly but silently for the distant shore.

As soon as she had re-coiled the rope Bouri turned once more to Ouéla Kohkon, whom she found carefully investigating the contents of her bundle. She had had proper tribute from her friends ; her precious umbrella—forgotten in her excitement and grief—was with her again. What else mattered ? She followed Bouri cheerfully down the companion into the cabin and listened to the elder woman’s instructions.

She must not, of course, be seen or heard. Captain Frank, even when drunk, would never sanction connivance at her escape. It would mean a terrible row with Old Master and, very likely, the loss of a comfortable job. But that

was easily managed. There was a sliding door in the bulkhead of the cabin leading into the fo'c'sle. Bouri kept the key of that door. No one slept in the fo'c'sle, from which the exit on deck was by a booby-hatch which Ouéla Kohkon could easily slide back for herself, from inside. They wouldn't go in the passage at Lehili by night, but would stand off. The dinghies would be launched and the female pigs landed in them. When Ouéla Kohkon heard the noise of the launching of the dinghies, she must wait a few minutes to let them get loaded and away and then slip up on deck. The Maré mate and the boat's crew would be with the boats. Captain Frank would most certainly be asleep. Bouri herself would be at the wheel and would see to it that Ouéla Kilukilu did not go poking her ugly nose for'ard.

No further instructions were necessary from one Omba woman to another. Ouéla Kohkon understood quite well how she was to slip quietly over the side and, holding her precious bundle well above her head with one hand, make her way ashore. That was child's play. She rather dreaded being shut up alone in the dark fo'c'sle, but Bouri assured her that it would only be for two hours, and, in any case, she had her umbrella. She would stick it out. And she wouldn't marry that Pentecost devil after all.

She had just signified to Bouri her complete understanding of the instructions and her determination to play a part worthy of "woman

Omba ” when the expected whistle sounded loudly from the beach. Moli, who had been sleeping peacefully on the booby-hatch, woke up, clambered into the dinghy and pulled rapidly for the shore. Bouri pushed back the sliding door, and Ouéla Kohkon, trembling a little, but comforted by a firm grip on her never-failing talisman, stepped into her dark refuge.

VIII. *Haven*

IT was rather a terrible time that Ouéla Kohkon spent in that dark, smelly little fo'c'sle, barely high enough for even her diminutive form to stand upright; but it had its compensations. Although she was alone, without the faintest glimmer of light, with swarms of copra-bugs and cockroaches making the most impertinent inroads on her small person and necessitating constant angry repulses, she was too near the life of the ship to feel the full terror of confinement in the dark.

First there was the arrival of the dinghy, the sound of voices on deck as the occupants came aboard. There seemed to be many people; evidently the crew had come off at the same time as the officers and passenger. That meant that they would be sailing almost at once. Yes; that noise was the creaking of the blocks as the dinghy was hauled up by the davits and swung inboard. Then came the pattering of feet over her head, the light thud of ropes, and from the darkest corner of the roof of her cage the clanking of a winch and the heavy banging of a chain.

Now she could feel that they were moving, gently at first, just a light swinging of her prison floor and the sound of little lapping waves against its walls. Then came a pronounced rocking—they must be through the pass now and on the open sea—getting after a bit so

violent and making standing so uncomfortable that, in spite of the horror of the invisible crawling host, Ouéla Kohkon was obliged to sit down, leaning for support against the cabin bulkhead, her clothes gathered closely about her feet. And then had come one of the compensations. From the cabin, through the thin partition, she could hear the sound of voices; Bouri and Ouéla Kilukilu talking, talking about her, Bouri upbraiding the passenger for her treachery, Ouéla Kilukilu expressing her contrition, confessing that she had sinned solely through jealousy of her little sister's fresher charms.

That was delightful hearing ; and in her dark prison, heedless of the impertinence of swarming insects, Ouéla Kohkon hugged herself with self-complacent gratulation that she should have lived to hear this tribute to her worth. But better was to come. Ouéla Kilukilu's voice was getting fainter, her sentences were being interrupted by coughs. She was not weeping ; that had all been done ashore and there was no reason to begin again now. Ouéla Kohkon could scarcely contain herself for joy at the pleasurable certainty of what was to follow. Yes ; there it was. A languid " Bouri, I am very ill ; I think that I shall die." Bouri's scornful order to lie down on one of the bunks. The clanking of a bucket as it was put down roughly on the cabin floor. And then on the other side of the bulkhead, in the darkness,

little hindered by the unruly lurching of her rocking cage, Ouéla Kohkon danced, with her umbrella as her war-club, a wild dance of satisfied revenge.

Ouéla Kilukilu was being seasick! She who had derided so scornfully the feebleness of "new chums" on recruiting vessels, who had even refused to believe that her little sister had never felt a moment's qualm, was displaying a weakness that, graphically described as it would surely be by Bouri on arrival at Pulagalaga, would afford intense amusement to all and sundry. An Omba woman being seasick in a cabin! What more complete proof could there be of degeneration and middle-aged decay? Gleefully to herself Ouéla Kohkon said it in imitation of the mincing tones of Ouéla Kilukilu speaking the white man's language: "I'm 'e throw out *big-feller*. 'Im 'e mal-de-mer *too much*." Oh, it was lovely.

As yet no thought of the adventures before her had troubled Ouéla Kohkon's enjoyment of the very satisfying present. A girl who had escaped from great danger and has received in such full measure both tribute to her charms and an intensely amusing revenge cannot worry herself much about the future. It was only the banging down of the boom over her head and the cessation from its violent dancing of her nasty little prison-house that made the gloating prisoner realize suddenly that her journey was at an end and that there was work to do.

She heard the dinghies swing outboard and splash into the water ; she heard the squeaking of the female pigs as they were dragged unceremoniously along the deck and dropped into the waiting boats. Then came the sound of gruff orders and the clunk-clunk of oars in rowlocks. It was time to move.

At the last moment she doubted her ability to carry, with one hand out of the water, her luggage during what might be a long swim from where the *Dolphin* was lying, in through the passage to the shore ; but most certainly she was not going to leave behind the precious possessions that had been fetched by Ouéla Tata with so much trouble. Slipping off her dress and chemise she added them to the already large bundle, and then with her pari-pari she bound it firmly to her little woolly head. The umbrella she could manage easily. Ouéla Kohkon was ready for yet another plunge into the unknown.

Pushing back gently the booby-hatch till it was wide open enough to admit her strangely garnished head, she peered cautiously round the deck. Yes ; Bouri had been right. There was no one about. From the skylight just abaft of where she stood stentorian snores told her that yet another detail of the scheme was nicely in its place. Captain Frank, quite unperturbed about his ship, was sleeping off Old Master's potent grog. The framework of the skylight prevented her seeing farther aft, but doubtless

Bouri was at the wheel, unable to move, anxiously watching for the appearance of the little refugee. A spring, a wriggle with both hands on deck, and she was up and crawling swiftly for'ard. She would have loved to stand upright to wave farewell to Bouri, but she might be seen from the dinghies ; it was too dangerous. One little brown leg went over, felt for and found the bobstay, its fellow quickly followed and got firm hold ; one hand on the gunwale, the other down to the bowsprit-shrouds ; both feet and the upper hand loosened ; a swing, a drop, and without a splash Ouéla Kohkon was in the warm loving ocean starting on her swim.

A hasty reconnaissance while hanging to the *Dolphin's* bowsprit had shown her that the swim was going to be a long one. But what did that matter to an Omba woman, accustomed from babyhood to spend half the day far out at sea ? She had only to get through the pass and then the rest would be easy. She must look out for the returning dinghies though, and, if by chance they had started for the ship before she was ashore, she would have to lie quiet, her bundle just above the water. In the moonlight the men would most likely mistake her for a turtle, even if they saw her. It was a good job they were not likely to have a gun with them. She plugged slowly but surely on, swimming on her side, her right hand just awash holding the umbrella vertical, her head well raised to

avoid too much wetting of her cherished clothes.

It was painful going, but already she had done the worst part ; already she could feel the grip of the long rollers that burst in foam on the coral reef. It would not do to miss the pass and get mixed up with that boiling mess. She turned a little to make sure of her direction, craning her head above the water. Yes, she was going straight for the pass, but—horrors ! here were the dinghies !—close to her and coming fast. There was nothing else for it. In a flash Ouéla Kohkon had dived, going deep down, staying till her little head was bursting, her ears ringing like a bell, then up to the surface with a gasp for breath and a wild look all round.

She was safe ; the boats had both passed her by fifty yards ; but her narrow escape had been dearly bought. She realised it the instant that her head rose above the water, before the first sobbing strangled breath had brought relief. Her bundle had gone ! Torn from her head by the quick dive, irretrievably sunk in the depths of the Pacific Ocean, every stitch of clothing that she possessed had disappeared. True, she had still, firmly gripped even in that moment of panic, her trusty umbrella ; but that brought small comfort now. Oh, how she had pictured herself dressing on the sand ! That beautiful muslin dress ! That lovely silk handkerchief for her head ! Those yellow beads round her slim neck ! And now ? Her

white man—for already she had mentally appropriated the unknown—would take her for a “man bush,” a savage, a “woman Santo.” Oh, it was too disgusting! And even the umbrella might be spoiled by its adventure. For a time her grief mastered her. Treading water instinctively, her tears poured down to mingle with the salt water, her little naked body shook with sobs, sending small ripples that glittered in the moonlight all around. But it was no good staying there. Very soon the tide would be running out strongly through the pass and entry would be perhaps impossible. With one last sob and a half-vicious sniff she turned, and in a few quick, skilful strokes was through the swirling shoal-water and in the calm of the lagoon.

Then, when already she could feel the soft white sand close to her feet, fortune turned and fought for her. For there, standing at the water's edge, was George. There could be no doubt. Bouri had described him carefully and the moonlight was strong on his white clean-shaven face; and it was very sad. He had not seen her, for he was looking at something down by his feet. Ah yes, a dog that was rolling on its back half in, half out of the water. Well, she must introduce herself as best she could. Letting her feet sink, covered just to her shapely waist by the moonlit sea, her umbrella gripped tightly with both hands, she stood up and called his name.

At first the man did not hear ; and even when a louder repetition of the shout made him look up from the playing dog he did not seem to understand where the call came from. He looked up at the stars, round at the little white house behind him, everywhere save at her. Despairingly she waved the umbrella round her head and shouted for the third time, " George, George ! " Ah, he had seen her now, and was talking fast and loudly, but in a language Ouéla Kohkon did not know. She caught the words " God " and " heaven," but the rest was plainly gibberish. Surely he could not be mad ? But at any rate he looked kind, so, plucking up all her courage, she advanced slowly through the lapping wavelets, talking as she came.

" George, I am Ouéla Kohkon, daughter of Abok, and Bouri sent me to you because you are sad. Good day."

Ah, now he seemed to understand. But why, why was he laughing ? Surely there was nothing amusing in a little woman having taken such pains to reach his passage and having suffered a terrible loss on the journey. Angrily Ouéla Kohkon stamped her little foot, causing a shower of warm phosphorescent water to splash upon the pyjama trousers of her ill-mannered, though attractive-looking host. Ah ! That had brought him to his senses. He had stopped laughing now, had stretched out a firm white hand and was speaking to her—as Bouri had foretold !—in her own language.

“ Good day, Ouéla Kohkon, daughter of Abok, child of the sea. I am glad that you have come. But how did you come, and whence ? ”

He was standing beside her now, her head somewhere between his elbow and his shoulder, his eyes bent kindly down on her still dripping little face.

“ I came in the *Dolphin*, for Old Master wanted to make me marry a ‘ man Pentecost, ’ a foul shame for me, as well you know. I swam ashore and—and—oh George, I lost all my clothes and all my presents ! ”

The memory of her loss came over her again with sudden poignancy. And she was very cold. Sinking at George’s feet, she clasped his knees and burst into a torrent of blinding tears. The man stooped and gently patted her bent head.

“ Ouéla Kohkon, do not cry. In my store there are many good dresses and all else that you may want. Wait here a minute till I come back. ”

And then he was gone, leaving his disconsolate little visitor still crouched on the white sand, but already feeling better and more hopeful. What kind of dress would he bring ? And would he understand that her position demanded other things too ? Yes, certainly Bouri had been right. This was a good man, not so young perhaps as Gordon, but bigger and, evidently, quite as rich.

He was gone a long time—she could hear the sound of voices and laughter from the house—but when he returned he had clearly not been wasting his time, and quite surely he understood well the ways of little Omba women. His arms were loaded with dresses ; two whole bolts of calico had he brought from which to choose a pari-pari ; a cardboard box of chemises, and another of perfectly sweet silk handkerchiefs.

“ There, Ouéla Kohkon, choose quickly something and put it on, for my friend Harry is in the house and he must not see you like that.”

Ouéla Kohkon did not quite understand the last part of the speech, but the first was very intelligible and wholly delightful. Like a flash the memory of her sufferings and sorrows disappeared. George had sat down on the sand beside her and was smoking his pipe, smiling kindly on her as she dived her eager hands into the bewildering heap of magnificence that he had brought.

Softly cooing her pleasure she made her choice, holding up for his grave approval each separate article until her costume was complete. Then, after helping him roll the remainder into a bundle, one hand confidingly slipped into his, the other holding a sodden, dilapidated umbrella, she marched proudly beside him to the gaily lighted house.

IX. *Topsy*

FOR a long time next morning Ouéla Kohkon could not realise where she was. Her first effort was quite abortive; one small hand stretched tentatively out in the half-darkness told her that she was certainly not in her upper bunk in the little house at Colombe Bay. But she was warm and comfortable; she had had a tiring swim and much emotion the night before; so she snuggled again into her blankets and abandoned the problem for a moment. The next time she woke, it was broad daylight and the task was easy. Rubbing her sleepy eyes, she sat up and glanced around.

Of course, she was at George's passage! And this was the little kiosk where he had told her to sleep. It looked very white and clean in the bright morning light which filtered through the canvas curtains above the waist-high concrete walls. The floor, on which she lay, was white and hard too like the walls. And there was a door, a real white man's door. The roof was thatched, tugura thatch, like a chief's house on Omba. Yes; it was very nice; much better than the "house b'long single woman" with its earth floor and iron roof. And surely what she was sitting on must be a white man's mattress—a great thick soft one like those on Gordon's bed at Colombe Bay. And a mos-

quito-net! Two beautiful white blankets, and that lovely soft pillow for her head. For all the world like a white man. How grateful she was to Bouri, and how she wished that that spiteful seasick cat could see her now!

The thought of other people roused in her mind the realisation that she was lonely and wanted to talk. Besides, there was a lot to see. Perhaps George was already up and they could walk round together and examine all the wonders of her new abode. She had not seen much last night, only the verandah of the little house and a peep into the room where the two white men slept. The other part of the house George had told her was the store; but it was dark and they had only the one lamp, so the treat of inspecting that was still to come. She had liked Harry, although he could only speak the white man's foolish language and had hurt her hand badly when he shook it. They had only talked for a little time last night because she was very sleepy. Yes; she remembered now. She had gone to sleep on the verandah. She must have slept quite a long time too, for the moon was nearly down into the sea when George had led her to the kiosk. What a nice man he was, and how sympathetically he had listened to the story of her journey from Colombe Bay and the disaster of the swim. By and by she would tell him about her escape from Omba. He would like that;

but she would have to tell him when Harry wasn't there, so that she could use her own language.

She got up now, stretching herself luxuriously in the early morning sunlight, looking round for the new dress which she had been just awake enough last night to slip off. Yes; there it was hanging on a chair. Lifting up the mosquito-net, she stepped gaily from her comfortable bed, examined with professional approval the proof of George's generosity, donned it, and was ready for the day.

Her first peep out through the curtains showed Ouéla Kohkon that this new world was brimming with things that called for immediate inspection and made her move quickly to the door. She opened it and stood for a few minutes in the doorway looking round. Close to her, across a little patch of grass, was the house, but no one was moving about there yet. Behind and all around was bush with plenty of coconut trees and bread-fruit to send her thoughts travelling quickly back to her beloved Omba. But that didn't matter for the moment. Omba was far away and there was much to see here. Right over there in the corner, for example, near the salt water, she could see a curious collection of little wooden houses with a wire fence all around. What could that be? And there was a man going towards the fence carrying a bucket. Oh yes; those must be

the houses of the wonderful pigs that Bouri had been so enthusiastic about. And the man must be Charlie, the Omba man-of-all-work. Most certainly that called for the first visit.

Lighting a cigarette from the packet with which Harry had so politely welcomed her, she tripped across the patch of grass still wet with the night's dew and intercepted her countryman.

"I am Ouéla Kohkon, daughter of Abok, and I have come from Colombe Bay to be George's woman. Good day."

Charlie, a young man bearing on brow and cheek the same totem marks as Bouri, put down his bucket and in well-bred fashion responded to the salutation. Turning his head aside so that so much resplendent beauty should not blind him, he lightly touched the lady's outstretched hand and then, facing her, gave his own credentials.

"I am Charlie, son of Tanga, and I work here for George, who is a good man. Good day."

Having performed their ceremony as became son and daughter of a distinguished island, they began to talk. Gladly did Charlie answer the eager questions of this miraculously arrived compatriot. For years he had had to do without civilised intercourse and this was a glorious opportunity. Man Uma simply did not count. They were savages,

scarcely knowing one yam from another. And their language! And their women! Horrors, Ouéla Kohkon! untattooed! and guarded so absurdly closely by their repulsive husbands that one could not pass the time of day with them without risking trouble from a gun or a badly carved club. Not that he had any fear of such uncouth savages, but George was very strict and had threatened him with blows if he ever disturbed the family life of Uma.

“Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, George is a good man. Many years have I served him, and I know. First I was his house-servant in Pango, when he was ‘Government.’ Oh, that is a good place! The steamers come, sometimes three in the space of one moon; and there is much grog, as much as a man may want to drink. And every month George pays me my money, one pound, Ouéla Kohkon. And often he gives me presents.”

“What presents, Charlie?”

Ouéla Kohkon risked the interruption, because the point was very interesting; and men were so foolish when they talked, always hurrying over the most essential details. She did not doubt George’s generosity, but it was nice to know.

“Oh, many things, Ouéla Kohkon: a clock that rings to wake me in the morning when it is time to feed the pigs; and every year a pig, a male pig, and fat . . .”

But this was almost unbelievable. The tenth part of the price of a wife such as herself every year. Surely Charlie must be romancing.

"No, Ouéla Kohkon, it is true. And more than that, George has promised to buy for me with pigs a wife from among these Uma women. But I do not care much for them. They cannot speak our tongue, and are very dirty. Never do they swim at sunset; for fear, they say, of some very bad devil-devil that haunts the water on this reef. But I think . . ."

What Charlie thought about the unhygienic habits of the Uma women had, however, to wait till another time; for George had appeared on the verandah of the house and was shouting for his tea. The man-of-all-work hurried round to the small kitchen behind the house, while Ouéla Kohkon, suddenly shy, walked slowly up to the verandah steps to greet her lord. He was in pyjamas, leaning over the verandah rail, smiling kindly on her as he filled his pipe.

"Good day, Ouéla Kohkon. Did you sleep well?"

What funny things these white men said even when they talked her own language so well! Of course she had slept well. She smiled at the absurdity, but greeted him politely, standing below him among the hibiscus, in the shade of a fragrant frangi-pani.

Really he looked very nice ; not a bit old ; and the skin that she could see through the open pyjama jacket was just like Gordon's. Now he had lighted his pipe and was talking again.

“Ouéla Kohkon, I have much to say to you, but we will drink tea first. Come up here and sit down. Do not be afraid.”

This was an unexpected honour and contrary to all her experience at Colombe Bay. Even when Old Master had been away and Ouéla Kilukilu had lived quite openly in Gordon's rooms, she had always come over to the little house to drink her tea. So staggered was Ouéla Kohkon that she remained rooted to the spot, head hanging, fingers pulling nervously at the great scarlet flowers among which she stood. It was only a repetition of the command and the opportune arrival of Charlie with the teapot that caused her to pull her small self together and ascend the steps, trembling but determined to bear herself in a manner worthy of an Omba woman bought—at birth—with no mean price.

And really it was very delightful, if rather absurd, having tea like that with George, sitting on a chair like a white woman, having her tea poured out for her as if she couldn't do it for herself. And the pieces of roasted bread were really delicious, if a little unsatisfying. She noticed that George did not dip his bread into his tea, though. Perhaps he

did not know how nice it was when eaten thus. By and by she would tell him. And certainly he did not put enough sugar in the tea. She wondered how he could drink it like that with only two spoonfuls to a cup. She had to make wry faces and eat a lot of bread, whereas George seemed to like it and drank two cups to her one. He had finished now and, smiling very nicely, turned to his silent little guest.

“Come, Ouéla Kohkon, we will go down to the sea and talk. Harry will be getting up soon, and I have much to say.”

And so he had; and very pleasant hearing it was. Sitting beside him at the water's edge, her little prehensile toes drawing patterns in the soft white coral sand, Ouéla Kohkon listened entranced to the schemes propounded by this man. Not that she really needed such an absurd display of generosity. She had come voluntarily to be his woman, and asked for nothing more; but, all the same, no girl could help feeling delighted at such flattering appreciation of her worth. How different this was from the light-hearted business at Colombe Bay, where Omba women were taken and left as if they were of no value at all.

This man evidently was well acquainted with her people's rigid code, and a sound judge too. So far he had only seen her. What would he say when he had sampled her

accomplishments, tasted the yams that she had cooked, seen how many dresses for the store she could turn out day by day? And what a price! No less than twelve of those astounding pigs, that even Bouri, with all her knowledge of the world, had confessed to be worth each one three Omba pigs! The total value of her market price as computed by George was beyond Ouéla Kohkon's powers of calculation; all she could do was to try and make a mental picture of the arrival of them on the beach at Pulagalaga and the excitement and pleasure they would cause. For, of course, the pigs were for Tari Tagowa. He had paid for her and in no other way could she really feel that she was free.

George had finished talking now and proposed that they should go at once and select the pigs, as there was a cutter from the next village starting to-morrow for the North; he would arrange with the Chief to carry them, and Charlie should travel as ambassador to see that the ransom was well and truly delivered.

Delightedly did Ouéla Kohkon trot along beside her lord and master till they came to the collection of houses where her unsuspecting price was lodged. Long and earnest was the discussion, Charlie acting as expert adviser to put forward the man Omba's point of view, before decision could be made. Finally the dozen were selected and branded

on their massive rumps with a T.T., while Charlie, delighted at the prospect of his mission, was sent off to warn the people of the village to reserve accommodation on their cutter for the distinguished passengers.

The business had taken a long time. Harry had shouted out his good morning from the verandah a long while ago before going to open the store. A crowd of Uma natives, men, women and children, were gathered on the beach with strings of copra and small sacks of trocas shell, waiting the pleasure of the white men. All this business called urgently for Ouéla Kohkon's investigation; but still she lingered with George by the pig-sties. There was one point—a most important one—which he seemed to have forgotten. Perhaps he did not know the whole ritual of the purchase of a wife. It wasn't quite nice that she should have to remind him, but, as he was only a white man, she would risk it. She looked shyly up at him. He seemed to be asleep with his eyes open, staring out to sea, but woke up quickly when she touched him, and smiled at her.

“Well, Ouéla Kohkon, what is it?”

“George, surely you cannot know. I am no more Ouéla Kohkon. That name has passed away with the payment of the price. And you who have paid the pigs must name me afresh. What name do you give me?”

Evidently George had known about this

ceremony after all, for he had a name ready on the instant. Taking her hand, he raised it to his head ; then, with the ordained quick look to left and right over his shoulder to make sure that no eavesdropping devil-devil could hear, gave her her new name.

“ I, George, have paid the price ; and you are Topsy.”

PART II: THE MAN

I. *Change*

§I

A SMALL bay on the lee side of the small island of Uma. The sun had just dipped behind the craggy outline, twenty miles away, of Malekula, home of cannibals; the intervening sea, kept gently moving by the dying trade-wind, showed all possible and impossible shades and colours, flashing into pure white where the surf beat softly and continuously on the barrier reef encircling the island.

In the centre of the curved shore of the bay a small clump of coconut trees straggled round a tiny white wooden house raised up on piles only divided from the water by a bank of volcanic sand. Behind the house the land rose steeply to high hills densely covered with dark gloomy bush out of which showed in the dying light against the sky the fantastic heads of coconut palms and tree-ferns, the wide spread of towering banyans.

At anchor in the little bay lay a trim forty-foot cutter, gleaming with new paint in the reflection from the water. Black against the sky the form of a native stood out motionless on the bowsprit, poised ready to dive.

On the verandah of the house a white man had just finished his evening bath and was attiring himself in dinner costume of clean

pyjamas. Having dressed and lit a pipe he went to the edge of the verandah and shouted, in the *doh'-la* tune commonly used by Oxford undergraduates when they wish from the quadrangle to attract the attention of friends on the upper floors, addressing himself to a second white man who at the water's edge was superintending the piling by two natives of various packing-cases into an absurdly small dinghy.

"Har-ry, come to kai-kai."

At a repetition of the shouted chant the person addressed turned and trudged up the bank of sand to a distance where his voice could be heard above the surf.

"All right. Close up finish now. I just want to take this load aboard and make things snug and . . ."

"Oh rot, man, the boys can do all that. Come and have just one little drink before kai-kai. Sun's well down. Come on."

Harry Graham weighed the question and then, reluctantly deciding to abandon work for the day, shouted directions in *biche-la-mar* to the two "boys" to be sure and put on the hatch-covers, let out a little more chain, pump her out last thing at night and first thing in the morning, etc., etc. Then, having delivered his orders and having cast a worried look round to see whether there was not some job that demanded doing, he mounted the wooden steps

of the verandah, sat himself down with a sigh of pleasure on a packing-case, and accepted the drink held out to him by his partner, George Donaldson.

“Well, here’s to us.”

“Chin-chin. Here’s good-bye to Uma.”

Having performed the rite, the two partners settled down to enjoy that apéritif half-hour which only dwellers in the tropics can thoroughly appreciate. When for twelve long hours one has been tortured by the blinding, grilling sun, one learns to make the best of the short tropical twilight, the little time of freedom from pests, when the flies have ceased to madden and before the Anopheles mosquitoes have begun their business of making night more unbearable than day.

The conversation was chiefly a monologue by Harry Graham about to-morrow’s voyage, the disposal on board the new cutter of all their possessions, and other strictly practical matters.

Donaldson was content to smoke his pipe, sip his whisky, and listen half-abstractedly to his partner’s voluble flow, his gaze wandering from the dark mirror of the sea, still stained blood-red in patches, to follow the movements of the native woman who at the other end of the verandah was laying the table for the evening meal.

He longed to tell Harry to stop talking and

enjoy their little bit of peace, but gratitude forbade him, particularly that evening, to risk hurting the feelings of this honest, hard-working friend who, after a long day of toil, thoroughly enjoyed making plans for an equally strenuous to-morrow.

So George contented himself with occasional questions and answers while his mind was busy with a retrospect of the five years of partnership as "traders" on Uma. To-night was the end of that chapter.

Six years ago the two men had met in Pango, the capital—and only town—of this Group of islands in the South Seas.

Harry, ex-mate of a Union liner, had turned up there as sailors turn up everywhere. Tired of the sea, he had got a job in one of the "stores" in Pango. Dependence did not suit him and, having saved a little money, he jumped at George's proposition to buy their present abode, house and store combined, with its five hundred acres of land, and see what they could make out of the famous "island trade."

At the time of their first meeting George was an official in the Gilbertian Government in Pango. He had arrived in the islands in pseudo-romantic quest of a long meal of lotos, but with sufficient good sense to assure for himself, through his Government post, food of a more sustaining kind.

There seemed to be no lotos plants in Pango

or in the explorable vicinity. The Gilbertian officials might have amused at the Savoy with the proper music ; in Pango they were merely ridiculous and maddening.

George was struck at their first meeting with the sailor's essential goodness and soundness. Moreover, Harry was a man who had been to places and done things, a most bracing contrast with those bureaucratic imbeciles who had been boring him to the verge of suicide for two years.

The disposal of the property on Uma had come to George's notice in his official duties. He mentioned the matter to Harry, who suggested that they should go into the affair as partners, he, Harry, to go and do the work, while George remained in Pango and drew half the profits.

George, however, smelt possible lots on Uma and decided at any rate to go and try the life, which could not be more unsatisfactory than his actual condition. He threw his post in the face of the astounded Chef Bureaucrate ; Harry gave his month's notice ; and the strangely assorted pair set out.

During their five years' partnership they had become real friends. Harry admired George for many qualities which were not really existent, and for some that were. George loved Harry for his simple honesty, his staunchness and his courage, although he was, naturally enough, at times driven nearly to desperation

by Harry's unlikeness to his own cherished ideals.

Life had been primitive on Uma, but not entirely without compensations. The freedom from all conventions, the "to-morrow is as good as to-day, if not better" spirit of the real islands had narcotised George till he had almost forgotten the past and was content to phantasy the future. And they had prospered materially. In five years they had saved enough money to buy a nice plantation and house on the neighbouring large island of Tasiko, have built for them the indispensable recruiting cutter, and yet leave enough over to come and go in case misfortune happened to the plantation.

Early to-morrow they would be leaving. Harry was going out with the cutter to recruit labour for the plantation, just dropping George at Sakau on Tasiko, from which place the owner, a man called Stephens, would run him down the coast in his launch to Burumba, where he was going to stay with Dr. Macdonald, a medical missionary and old friend of Pango days.

§II

"Kai-kai 'e stop."

The native woman interrupted George's thoughts and Harry's monologue by clattering the soup-tureen on the table and announcing

in biche-la-mar her equivalent for " Ces messieurs sont servis."

" Right-ho, Topsy, Monday 'e sleep yet ? "

" Wha' name ! 'Im 'e sleep finish time two-feller 'e no derrink grog yet. 'Im 'e fever."

" Orright. Byumby me come look him. Come on, Harry, last ' la soupe ' on Uma."

The two men sat down to the nicely laid table and George dispensed a fragrant soup.

" Lescault going to come round in the morning, George ? "

" Yes, I suppose so ; I hope so at any rate."

" Poor little Topsy, I'm sorry for her in a way ; but I suppose she'll be happy again in a day or two."

" I suppose so."

" But you'll feel the wrench of parting with the little chap, George. It does seem a pity, but . . . "

" But ' gigli con gigli dover florire,' eh ? "

" Sorry, George, I didn't understand. I used to be good at French at school, but when you and these froggies speak I never understand a word. What did you say ? "

" Never mind, old thing. It was a little ' mot ' that got its user into trouble once. It means that half-castes ought to consort with half-castes."

" Yes. I think so too. And Lescault is a very good chap for a French half-caste. He

doesn't booze, and he's well off. Besides, he's properly married to Estelle, isn't he?"

"I believe so. That makes an enormous difference, of course. Oh, let's drop it, Harry. We've talked it all over till I'm sick of it. Have some more soup?"

"No, thanks."

"Topsy! Take 'im ragoût 'e come."

The "island ordinary," called ragoût by the French and polite, "bloody stew" by the impolite Britisher, replaced the "la soupe," and Topsy, taking a half-smoked cigarette from behind her ear, lit it at the lamp and sat herself down on the floor to talk and watch the white men kai-kai, her nightly custom for three years.

"Monday 'e sweat finish. You no want come make 'im drink quinine?"

"Byumby, Topsy. Me kai-kai finish, me come. You go kai-kai now; two-feller 'e want talk."

"Orright, byumby you come."

Topsy, apparently unmoved by her dismissal, tucked her conversation cigarette behind her ear and shuffled off to the little cane-grass house which had been her pride for three years, where she had nearly lost her life in giving birth to her wonderful "piccaninny b'long white man," and which she was leaving to-morrow for ever.

She appeared stolid and unmoved in front of the white men, but when she reached her

house the tears were rolling down her poor stubby little nose. She was being cast off with her Ishmael, and she knew it. The sight of a yam roasting on the stones and a saucepan full of native cabbage brought consolation. She did not philosophise consciously, but did the better thing—dried her tears and sat down to enjoy present comforts without spoiling her digestion by dwelling on possible future discomforts.

George was too civilised to imitate her. He watched her move off, and divined by instinct that the poor little thing was crying. He pushed his untouched plate of stew disgustedly away, and with "Oh lord, Harry, I do feel a damned cad," got up and went out.

Harry remained to satisfy his well-earned appetite. He felt very sorry for George, but could find no words to express his sympathy. If it had been daytime he would have gone out and worked savagely hard. As it was, all that he could do was to eat savagely hard and thereby show his appreciation of George's cooking.

Donaldson had gone to the little kiosk used by Topsy and the child as a bedroom. There he was standing staring at his pretty two-year old half-caste child who, in spite of malaria, was sleeping with a happy smile on his baby face. He was staring, staring with drawn face and with eyes that told the hell he was enduring. For three months he had given himself this

nightly torture, ever since he had finally decided that, for the child's sake, they must part. To-night, as every night, the torture became too hard to bear in silence. With a mixed curse and prayer, "Oh God, why aren't you white? why aren't you white, my baby boy?" he rushed out and down to the empty, hopeless beach and mocking sea.

There Harry found him and plunged at once into an exposition of his ideas on how to run their new plantation. He watched George's bite on his pipe get less tense, and talked on feverishly until he began to get replies. Then with a sigh of relief that the fight was over again he led the way back to the verandah.

For a short time the two talked, but the mosquitoes had got very busy and were putting an end to comfort. Harry was sleepy, as he usually was at eight o'clock in the evening, and turned in under his mosquito-net, where he was soon snoring peacefully but lustily.

§ III

George, feeling that sleep would be long in coming to him, tried, nevertheless, to read himself to sleep in order to escape from the buzzing, biting plague of fever-dealers. The heat under the mosquito-net, however, made that refuge impossible until he really was too sleepy to be kept awake by sweat trickling

down his neck. He got up again and, having wrapped his feet in a blanket and tied his pyjama sleeves round his wrists with string, he smoked furiously and tried to feel comfortable and sleepy. But disagreeable thoughts would worry. Harry's loud snoring, the bare squalor of their one room, the heat, the mosquitoes, everything began to get on his nerves. Getting up from his deck-chair he went to his bag which stood ready packed for their departure, and from it took his panacea for all the worries that had so often attacked him during the past five years. It had never yet failed him, this dope. He trusted that it would not now. His "nerve cure" was "writing to John," so now he settled himself in his anti-mosquito armour and to an already prodigious letter added as follows :

" . . . Well, John, here's an end to phase two of my Island life. I wonder what the last phase will be. I know that the contents of this letter will make you curse me once again for an unstable, vacillating idiot. But, what would you, John? If I could make up my mind, I would. You know that Europe, and you, and many things, simply scream to me. I see full well all I am losing, all I am wasting, by staying on here. But, in spite of reason, in the face of very strong desire, I can't make up my mind to smash this dream and wake up to reality. I have fully exposed to you my fears about

coming home. I know that I should be looked upon with quite active suspicion, especially in my own super-respectable calling. Seven years of beach-combing need the deuce of a lot of explaining away when humbly petitioning to be allowed to rejoin the great army of convention-worshippers. I would risk all that, however, if I could only be sure of my own mind. I fancy that I know what is the really strong bond that holds me. I fancy that you know too.

“ I am going into this new plantation scheme without any enthusiasm at all. Harry is very keen on it ; and that is enough for the present. He has been such a splendid old thing to me for five years that I am bound to sham keenness for his sake. One thing comforts me. Were I to die to-morrow, were I to leave Harry with all the plantation caboodle on his hands, he would be really infinitely better off than he is now, tied to a useless creature like myself. For I am no bucolic, John. I hate the idea of all that I shall have to do and be interested in. Harry loves horses, cattle, trees and all the other funny things that one has on a plantation ; so he will be thoroughly happy at getting on to the land. Fortunately he has strength and energy enough for the two of us. My little stock of those useful commodities has been gradually but surely dissipated by malaria and other Island delights and entertainments. I don't see a new supply coming in either,

unless I can invent some very definite interest in life. Well, we shall see.

“ Since I wrote you last, I have pronounced my own judicial separation. Poor little Topsy took it very much as I had expected—floods of tears dried in a few hours, and then enthusiasm for the new adventure and acceptance of it as a matter of course. The worthy half-caste, Lescault, is coming round first thing in the morning to take my ex-family down to his place. He is a very decent chap and is as keen as mustard on adopting the kid, since he has none of his own and no hope of having any, and has quite a considerable property to leave behind him. Topsy will be ‘one of the family’ of course. She will be perfectly content to hand over her baby to Lescault and his wife to bring up; on her own island such adoption and loose exchange of children is part of their ineradicable ‘fashion b’long me-feller.’ No; it is not Topsy who is going to feel that pinch. I have been eloquent on that subject many times before, John, so I will spare you—and myself—now. You know me well enough to understand: no one else does. Well, I’ll shut this up now and get to bed. Good-bye, GEORGE.”

The dope had worked again. George had got back once more to his now normal level of eat, drink and sleep (particularly sleep), for who knoweth what the morrow may bring

forth. The morrow would probably be like most of the others that had become yesterday and finally grown up into the past. But one is not to know that the night before. So George slept.

II. *Père Douceret*

§I

AT a quarter to five George woke. It was one of his little peculiarities always to have the correct time, even in the islands where time is of very little importance. His chronometer was for him one of the hooks which still held him to civilisation. He was not sufficiently a colonial to be able to tell the time by the sky, nor enough of an islander not to care what the time was.

Harry was still asleep, still snoring. George got up very quietly and crept out of the house across to the kitchen to make the morning tea. This was his daily custom. For one thing, he was the sort of person who prefers to break his fast in private. Harry, directly he was awake, was ready for talk and fun. Also, he relished his tea in rather an obvious manner. That was too much for George's morning nerves. For another thing, he liked the early morning, before the sun had got up to torment wretched man. The sea was always quiet then, calm as a pond, not yet showing its full Pacific blue, but of a more mysterious and less changeful shade, as if it had been the same all night and only put on its flamboyant Joseph's coat for the benefit of vulgar man.

Whenever he stood and enjoyed the early morning sea, he thought of the deluded poet whose lotos-land was "always afternoon." By

anyone who has endured a tropical afternoon too hot to siesta, the sand at a temperature to burn the feet through the stoutest boots, the sea impossible to look at for glare and of no colour at all but mere heat, the dipping of the sun and the approach of dark are longed for as at least a temporary oasis before enduring the same torture to-morrow. Even the early morning is tainted by the knowledge that in a short time the heat will be intense, the insects will have resumed work. "Always afternoon." No, thank goodness, it was not!

In the little kitchen, cane-grass walls and thatch roof, George lit the fire, carefully laid by Topsy the night before, and put the kettle on to boil. Like all sensible people in the tropics, he had long ago given up "English breakfast." A cup of tea in the early morning was enough to last till eleven o'clock, when the French breakfast formed the most substantial meal of the day. When taken with plenty of French red wine it made one sleepy enough to get through most of the dreadful afternoon either in sleep or semi-sleep. Then at sunset a shower-bath and change into clean pyjamas for the *apéritif* and dinner. And so days passed. The native customers never moved out of their huts in the heat of the day, so there was no point in being up and in the store. And in the islands one soon learns to avoid doing pointless things, however good they may be for the soul's welfare. Perhaps that

was what the poet meant by his endless afternoon.

While waiting for the kettle to boil, George stole over to the kiosk to see whether anyone was stirring there. A glance showed him that at any rate Topsy was not yet awake, for the lamp was still burning. In spite of his chaff she was too much of a Kanaka to sleep in the dark when all the devil-devils are abroad, but directly she awoke the memory of the price charged at stores for kerosene made her put out the lamp instantly and by instinct, although for three years she had been able to waste as much of the precious liquid as she liked.

He drew aside the canvas curtain of the kiosk and peeped in. He could see the little white cot where his baby was sleeping, but the curtain drawn round it prevented him from telling whether the inmate was awake. Probably not. He never waited long before climbing out and coming to the kiosk door to call out "Dad-dy, Dad-dy," in exact imitation of his father's doh'-la call. George dared not wait for that this morning. After another glance, which showed him Topsy and half a dozen of her friends asleep under one large mosquito-net, he went back and made his tea, swearing a little at finding that Topsy had left the tin of milk and the butter on the table and that they were both a swarming mass of ants. That happens so frequently in the islands that one soon forgets even to swear about it. He

merely did without milk, all the other tins being already on board the cutter.

Tea finished, he lit his pipe and went back to the house to call Harry. Everything was ready for their start, but Lescault was to be round soon after daybreak and George wanted to make arrangements with Harry to meet him and get Topsy and the child away in the whale-boat with all their belongings. He had steeled himself to the parting, picturing exactly what he would do, how he would behave, but now he begun to doubt his own strength and wanted to be ready for emergencies.

Harry was awake and performing his morning toilet, which consisted in putting on his boots. He was ready for a hard day's work.

"Good morning, George. Is she up and down?"

"Good morning, Harry. Yes, six o'clock. Tea's ready; I've had mine."

"What's the sea like?"

"No sea at all. Bit of a rip outside, but not enough to trouble the *Maope*. Look here, Harry, I'm funking this after all."

"What? Leaving the little . . ."

"No, no. That's all fixed. But I can't stay to see them go. Do you mind . . ."

"Fixing up with Lescault and seeing them off? Of course I will."

"Thanks awfully. I'll just go and say good-bye to Topsy and then walk along the beach to Liro. I'll be back by nine o'clock. That

will be plenty of time for us, won't it? I shall be able to see Lescault pass on his way home, so I shall know when to come back."

"All right. I'll go and have my tea before it gets cold. Don't worry, old chap; he'll be all right."

Harry very nearly laid his hand on George's shoulder, but remembering, at least subconsciously, that he was an Englishman, drew it quickly back and clattered off to drink his tea.

George went over to the kiosk where the light was still burning. The door was locked, as a further protection against devil-devils, but the surrounding wall being only four feet high and closed only with a canvas curtain, he had no difficulty in entering. He selected Topsy from among the sleeping crowd after a search and woke her by prodding her with her umbrella, which precious possession always reposed by her side at night.

Like many others of her sex, the Kanaka woman is not at her best in the early morning. Topsy was cross at being wakened, it being an unpardonable *gaucherie* among her people to wake up anyone who had not asked to be so robbed of any sleep that good fortune sent. The ensuing good-bye was, in consequence, fortunately for George, robbed of any tenderness that might have made it hard. He kept his eyes sternly away from the cot and prayed that he might get out of the kiosk before that little yawn and scramble, that he had listened

for so many times, precluded the appearance of a little dark head and nut-brown face round the bed-curtain and the anxious search for hiding daddy who would jump out from the most unexpected hiding-places and catch his laughing boy and carry him down to say good morning to the sea, while lazy mamma unwillingly got up and made his rice hot.

That had been a morning ritual for all days ever since the boy had been able to toddle. It was all over now.

With a last grip of the hand to Topsy, which she made no pretence to reciprocate, he rushed out and, going down to the beach where the outgoing tide had left a strip of hard sand bordering the reef, turned to the left and walked hurriedly on in the direction of Liro, where lived a French missionary priest, the only other white man on the island.

§II

George pushed on, keeping close to the water's edge where the sand was hard. It was seven o'clock and the sun was well up, but here on the lee side of the island, facing west, the shore was still in the shade of the heavy bush and high hills. Out on the edge of the reef the long roll was thundering as usual, but inside the barrier the water was dead smooth, calm as a mirror and showing marvellous reflections from the coral below.

Rounding a little point, he came into a large bay, and half-way across it could see a whale-boat pulling slowly along. The naked backs of the four rowers shone in the sun; in the stern was perched a figure in white manipulating the long steer-oar. That was Lescault bound for Lehili to fetch the cast-off woman and child. George turned away his eyes and in his heart cursed with base ingratitude the worthy half-caste who had come so opportunely to his aid.

And now he began to meet natives along the beach, some bound for their gardens, some armed with bows and arrows in search of a chance big fish left semi-stranded in the shallow water on the reef. To each one he had to give a handshake and pass the time of day. He spoke their language and knew every man and woman by name. They had been his customers for five years, and in the islands native customers are native friends.

At the far end of the bay he came on a whole village engaged in launching their big whale-boat for a cruise to some neighbouring island to sell and buy pigs and exchange news, the only serious business of the Melanesian. Fully ten minutes had to be spent shaking hands and talking to the chief, a cunning old one-eyed ruffian named Maggi, with whom he had had many a battle over the price of copra and the amount of compensation that the white man had to pay for shooting pigs that came

and ravaged his cherished vegetable garden. George had nearly always given in to Maggi, because he loved the old man's roguish sense of humour and his hearty contempt for the new and polite manners introduced by the well-meaning but mistaken Presbyterian missionaries. Maggi, nominally a Christian, still sported the "nambas," the cylinder of leaf which constituted the heathen's only garment and testified to his rank according to its size, though, in deference to missionary opinion, he hid it by wearing a shirt. Trousers he scorned as useless and cumbersome. As a consequence of Maggi's friendship George and Harry had been granted practically a monopoly of the trade on Uma, no trader from outside having found it worth while to come over when, at Maggi's word, strict taboo was put on every store but theirs.

Leaving the village of Putokai behind, George rounded the point at the extremity of the big bay. Beyond this point the island was a succession of little bays, each one of which contained its village close to the water's edge. After crossing two of these he came to the village for which he was bound. There at Liro lived Père Douceret, one of the French Mission priests, who for five years had been his only refuge from the very ordinary conversation of Harry and the very perplexing problems of his irregular ménage.

Père Douceret was rather an exception to

the usual run of French priests in the islands, most of whom are not conspicuous for much culture, though all hard-working missionaries. He had been a fashionable preacher in Paris in his youth. A rather more than usually scandalous *histoire* had driven him to the mission field, where in sackcloth and ashes he had worked out his sentence of banishment.

Thirty years on one small island had given him time to know "man Uma" very thoroughly and to rate him at just what he is. The père had lived a solitary life, and had made the best of it. He had devoted much time to lodging himself as comfortably as possible and to providing himself with all the little additions to island fare which are so acceptable and so hard to get from outside, especially when one rejoices in the princely income of fifty pounds a year. His fowls, eggs, butter, cheese, wine and at least two kinds of liqueurs were worthy of the very great days of Christianity. He welcomed Donaldson as a visitor both because he could speak French and because he could really appreciate a well-cooked meal and its proper accompaniments.

But besides being a *bon viveur* Père Douceret was a man of very sound sense and very kind heart. It was in this quality that George sought him this morning.

§III

Arrived at the mission house, a tiny wooden bungalow surrounded by kiosks and outbuildings beautifully made of plaited cane-grass and roofed with tugura (the ivory-nut palm) leaves, George found the old man superintending the butter-making for the day. A crowd of bright-faced youngsters were learning the père's secrets and amusing themselves by poking gentle fun at the hard-working butter-makers.

At the sound of steps on the coral path Père Douceret turned to greet his visitor, well knowing who it must be in that solitude.

"Good day, Mr. Donaldson ; so they are off and you could not bear to stop and see them go ?"

"Good day, mon père ; yes, you are right as usual."

Père Douceret smiled gently as he held out his hand.

"I'm an old man, Mr. Donaldson, and I have lived alone for a long time. I don't make as many mistakes as I did when I was young and talked a lot. But come into the kiosk and have a drink after your walk."

George followed the old man into one of the various native-made outbuildings whose coolness was in itself comforting after the glare and the heat of the last part of the walk along the beach. Moreover, he felt more strongly

than ever before the atmosphere of calm and kindness which always surrounded the old priest. In the trouble of his spirit he had found no satisfaction from the well-meant but rough sympathy of Harry. He knew that Harry's words of comfort were prompted by real kindness, but that fundamentally his partner could not understand the seeming contradiction of his deliberate abandonment of his child and the grief caused by the step.

Several times during the past year George had come to talk over his problem with Père Douceret; it was really the père's advice that had finally decided him to do what his own common sense urged against the terribly strong cravings of his heart. Now he had come for comfort from this shrewd, kindly old man.

"There you are, Mr. Donaldson. I don't think that even a Frenchman could tell that that is not Pernod."

The père had been bustling about preparing refreshment, and now produced with great pride his latest achievement, a home-made absinthe drunk with water beautifully cooled by slow evaporation in a canvas bag hung in the draught of the trade wind.

"It's a pity that I can't make ice, but one can't have everything. When I want a really cold drink, I sip a little warm water first; then that water from the gargoulette tastes delightfully cold after it. But you did not

come to hear me confess my little weaknesses. I know what you are thinking. You are asking yourself once again why you can't keep that boy and bring him up according to your own ideals. Are you not?"

"Yes, mon père, I am. You know that all along I have cherished that thought. But do you think that it is really impossible?"

Slowly the old man sipped his opalescent drink, pausing long before replying.

"I do, George. You allow that, eh? I am a very old man, and an old friend too. I have told you before that I am certain that you are doing the right thing in parting from the boy before he gets old enough for the change to do him harm. Now he will not remember you consciously at all. If you were to come back in six months, he would not even recognise you. Therefore he will suffer no grief. If your suffering seems hard, don't forget that you have brought it on yourself; don't try by avoiding pain for yourself to bring certain pain to the child."

"But why would it be certain pain to him if I kept him?"

Père Douceret rose from his chair and slowly paced up and down, his eyes lowered, speaking to himself rather than to George.

"Because you are what you are, my son. If you were a Frenchman, if you were even an Englishman of the class of your friend Harry, I might give you different advice. A French-

man thinks much less of colour questions than you English. You know that many of our high Colonial officials are not only half-caste but often full-blooded natives. Your friend Harry will be perfectly content to end his days in these islands. It would not matter if his boys were half-breeds. Here in the islands the mixed race has a perfectly recognised and respected position. But I don't think, my son, that you will be strong enough to stay here very much longer. And then what would happen to your boy? Where in the British Empire would he be received as you would naturally expect your son to be received? Have you ever tried to make a real picture of your arrival, say, at your home with a half-caste child?"

"Well, I'm sure he's pretty enough, far prettier than the majority of white children. No one could help loving him, whatever his colour might be."

The père had reseated himself during his speech. At George's interruption he smiled gravely.

"George, you say in English that love is blind. Don't forget that, my son. Remember the difference between children and adults. Think carefully of Lescault. I remember Lescault as a charmingly pretty child. His father died when he was very young, and I brought the children up here. Would you like to introduce Lescault as your son in an English

drawing-room? Now, be honest. Would you?"

Hating himself for what he was bound to say, angry with his logical questioner, George spoke bitterly.

"No. You know I wouldn't. But I can't believe that my boy would ever become like Lescault."

"Why not, George? Lescault's father was as fair as you. He was, like you, a Celt with blue eyes. He was every bit as good-looking as you. I gave the boy quite as careful an education in the habits of a white man as you could give your boy here. And yet look at the product. You know that he is happier in the company of natives than he is with us. Why not let him be happy? Why spoil another life by forcing him to adopt habits and conventions which are only good for us because we have inherited the need for them?"

This seemed a hope for George. Quickly he snatched at it, half knowing, fearing the response.

"But, mon père, my boy will have inherited from me the need of those habits and conventions."

Père Douceret shook his head.

"I don't think so, George. Perhaps you have not studied questions of breeding very much. Your friend Harry would be able to tell you that in all cross-breeds it is the female

side that determines most of the new characteristics, and that new characteristics predominate in all such products. On that subject, have you ever noticed that these half-castes can't breed among themselves? They can only do so with either full-blooded whites or natives. That looks as if they were an outrage on nature."

"Oh, don't talk like that, mon père. It seems horrible."

Gravely Père Douceret answered the indignant outburst, rising again to resume his solemn, kindly promenade, pausing from time to time to fix his benevolent gaze on his unhappy friend.

"Yes, George, many facts are horrible when you have the courage to face them. And you must have courage. You have got to think not only of the present and the immediate future, but also of what you might be called upon to face, say, in fifteen years. Where are you going to find a wife for your boy except among the natives? As you know, there are very few girl half-castes; and what there are, I regret to say, are invariably bad, however carefully they have been brought up. In them the animality that caused the mating of the parents seems to be multiplied to such an extent that they have none of the natural instincts that even their poor mothers had. They are nearly always sterile and, consequently, vicious. Could you honestly welcome the coming to

your house of any such woman as your son's wife? And yet what other wife could he find? In a French colony he might perhaps find a white woman who would marry him, but such marriages are very rare and nearly always failures.

"Now, George, I have said hard things. You asked me for my advice, and I have given it. Do you want me to say anything more?"

The old man had stopped his promenade and with one hand on his companion's shoulder was looking benightedly in his face. Reluctantly, yet feeling the enormous importance to his conscience of the question, George stammered out:

"Yes, mon père. I have taken your advice. I have given up my child. But what about paying? I seem to have shoved all my responsibilities for the child on to Lescault's shoulders and got off scot free myself. It is partly that feeling of being a shirker and a cad to the mother and child that hurts me. If I have sinned—and I can't help acknowledging that it was only weakness that made me take the woman in the first instance—surely I ought to pay."

Père Douceret heaved a gentle sigh. Really, these introspective penitents were rather trying in such a climate! Before answering, he mixed carefully and deliberately two more drinks, then, drawing his chair close to George's, folded

his hands on his knees and delivered himself of his kindly, sensible little sermon.

“And don't you think that you are paying now, my son? And you will go on paying for a long time. You were entrusted with too many talents to get off lightly. But just one thing, George. I have talked to you about it before, but it is worth going back to. You English, if you will excuse me, are too morbid in your attitude to questions of sex. That comes from the joylessness of Protestantism. We acknowledge freely that man cannot, and was never intended to, live without exercising the strongest of all his instincts. You know what our friend Bergson says: that the ideal man remains instinctive while becoming intelligent. That is the mistake you have made. No one can blame the instinct which drove you to reproduce your species. But you did not show intelligence in choosing your mate. And, to go further back still, you were unintelligent when you left your own country to come out to these savage parts. This sort of life is possible, though by no means ideal, for the simple-minded. You know quite well, or you ought to, that you are one of the unfortunate complicated folk. I very much fear that you will never be really happy in this world, for what appeals strongly to one of your selves will prove repulsive to one of the others. One self craved for the simple life, for patriarchal raising of sons. That self drove you to the South

Seas, and led you to commit the error which your morbidity makes you speak of as sin. It may be that that self is really the strongest part of you, the others being only excrescences. I have thought a lot about you these last five years, George, and an old man who knew the world a bit and then has chewed the cud for thirty years does really see further into things than you young folk. So I am going to end my sermon with a little practical advice. Why not give the simple part of you a fair chance? You did not in taking up with that poor Omba woman. You were too unequally yoked. But why not do something a little more intelligent and yet remain instinctive? Why not marry a woman of your own race and settle down on your new plantation to raise worthy sons with the patriarch's certainty that you will leave them all that man really wants for a living? Why not, George?"

The old priest drained his glass and in his enthusiasm leaned forward and patted George gaily on the knee.

"But how could I, père? You know that the climate would kill an English girl in a very short time. And then look at the isolation. How could I ask a girl to come from civilisation to a place where she would not see another white woman twice a year? Besides that would mean going back to England and hunting round. We don't marry by contract, you know."

Leaning back in his chair, Père Douceret

looked at the pathetic figure before him and laughed.

“George, you amuse me. Here you have been living for five years within twenty miles of an ideal planter’s wife, indeed you have known her for longer than that, and you have never seen the simple way out of your difficulties. What about that charming Miss Macdonald at Burumba? There you have a girl born in the islands, quite immune from island diseases; loneliness would have no terrors for her. Why not, George?”

“Well, the first place, I don’t suppose she would leave her brother. She is too fond of the hospital and the mission work ever to get married.”

“George, I ought not to say it, but I think I understand women better than you. That young woman is a born mother. She is only devoted to her brother and his work as the best substitute that has come into her life until now. She is perfectly natural and nature would lead her to her proper end, if she had a chance such as you could offer her. Why not give her the chance?”

“And what about my past . . .”

Excitedly the priest pushed back his chair and stood up.

“Oh, George, if it wasn’t too hot, I would get cross with you. I suppose you think that you ought to go and confess that you have been a miserable sinner. You haven’t. You have

Without a word, never thinking of the un-Englishness of his action, he knelt and, like many a better and worse man, was comforted. When he rose, Père Douceret had disappeared.

III. *Stephens*

§I

GEORGE'S walk back was unpleasant. The tide had started to come in and he was obliged to walk on the dry soft sand into which his feet sank and slipped in a maddening way. The sun was well up and scorching hot. The flies were out in millions. Every now and then, in order to avoid getting wet when passing round a point, he had to double up and run under the overhanging branches of the bourao that lines the shore of every island in the Pacific. The annoyance and heat of the walk had kept him from thinking about anything at all. It was only when he had rounded the last point and was in the little bay of Lehili that he realised all of a sudden that this homecoming was different from all others, that there would be no greeting, nothing, nothing.

Harry was waiting on the beach with the dinghy all ready.

"Come along, man. Everything is on board. We'd better get straight off. I don't like the look of the weather much."

George knew that this was a pious lie. The weather was the same as it had been for some weeks and would be for some months. He knew that Harry had realised what an entry into that empty house would mean, the first lunch for more than a year without the little

chap's chair pulled up beside his daddy's, all the fun and ritual that had made life so worth living. So he was grateful to Harry for the kind thoughtfulness which saved him the first of many bad moments to come. He could not bring himself to ask any news of the going-away of the whale-boat. Harry understood. In a pretence to offer George a hand into the dinghy he contrived to give him a grip which he would have been ashamed to give openly ; and they were both satisfied.

George took his seat in the dinghy, Harry giving the boy a hand to push her out till she could float with both their weights and then nimbly jumping in over the stern while the native continued to shove. When there was water enough to float all three the boy, Jimmy, scrambled in too and poled through the shallow brilliant water for the hundred yards that brought them to the entrance of the passage where the *Maope*, a trim little forty-foot auxiliary cutter, was lying.

Arrived on board, Harry began at once the work of getting the dinghy pulled up and made fast. His was the sailor's part. George was no sailor, but having some knowledge of motor engines gained at the time when he had played with cars in England, he had persuaded Harry to let him "run the engine," much to Harry's relief, since he, like a proper sailor, distrusted everything but sails and wind. George had practised on the *Maope's* engine during the

three weeks since she had arrived from the builder's and, though the smell of the little engine-room-cabin made him more than usually seasick, he preferred, particularly to-day, that form of activity to the monotony of doing nothing but feel sick on deck.

So he dived down below and quickly got the engine going, it being in a good temper for once. Very soon came Harry's call "Anchor's up," and slipping in the clutch he busied himself with greasing and generally messing round the engine till he calculated that they were round the point out of sight of Lehili and steering straight for Sakau, which was only about twenty miles' run. Then coming up on deck he seated himself as comfortably as possible in the dinghy and idly watched Harry, who was busy for'ard with the stowing of the anchor-chain.

For some minutes he sat without thinking. The wind was fair, there was practically no sea, the *Maope* was forging ahead with the easiest of motions, so presently he felt brave enough to fill and light a pipe. Then, lying back in the dinghy, idly following with his eyes the procession of the fleecy white clouds under his hat-brim, his thoughts suddenly turned to the last time he had crossed from Tasiko to Lehili. It was the day following the actual transfer of the deeds of *Maope* and their formal *tour de propriétaire*. Callonne, the half-caste vendor, with all a Frenchman's love of petty formality, had insisted on George and Harry drinking a

bottle of nauseatingly sweet champagne. Harry, quite unaccustomed to the heady stuff, had become very voluble and slobbery—literally so—and had annoyed George by waxing eloquent in biche-la-mar, since their host spoke no English, on the superiority of Frenchmen to Britishers. Callonne too had revived memories of his Jesuit education and had become boastful as only a Frenchman can, flaunting all his memorised and entirely false statistics tending to prove the super-excellence of everything French to the detriment of all other nations, particularly the English. All this had annoyed George, who, without intervening in the biche-la-mar duet, had amused himself by composing scathing answers to Callonne's flatulent statements and at the same time comparing this greasy, unhealthy, yellow-eyed half-caste with some of the men of his own kind, young I.C.S. men home on leave, modest officers of the greatest empire in the world's history, with their pleasant manners and clean wholesome bodies. His thoughts had gone immediately to his own little half-caste, so charming in his babyhood, with a shuddering prophetic certainty of what he would be when he was old as the creature in front of him. That mood had lasted even during the next day's return journey to Lehili, had been aggravated by the sea-sickness caused by a long beat to Urua with the engine stolidly refusing to give a kick.

Then upon their arrival at Lehili, the sea-

sickness having disappeared upon their entering on the calm water under the lee of Uma, his ideas had suddenly veered round again. He had found Monday busy fishing in about six inches of water at the edge of the sand, his little brown naked body wet with spray and glittering in the sunlight, a wreath of red hibiscus round his jet-black hair. He had found a dead fish which he had solemnly fastened to his hook, and, as George stepped ashore from the dinghy, had flung himself into his father's arms, fish and all, and simply gurgled with pleasure at seeing once more the only god he knew. "Darling daddy, darling daddy, Monday catcha one good-feller fish for you!"

All George's scorn of half-castes, all his wise determinations of the night before, and of many nights before that, had vanished at the first touch, the first sight, of the little man whom he had made, on whom he had lavished all the pent-up force of his affectionate nature. The battle had been all to fight again.

Sadly he recalled all that now, now that it was too late. But was it too late? Why shouldn't he back out at the last minute from a scheme, a way of life, which said nothing to him at all? Why not go back to it? The question could not be answered at the moment. Turning his head in the impatience of impossible decision, he saw that they were close in to Sakau, and he must go below to give a last lesson to Luke, their intelligent native boat-

swain, on how to manipulate, on coming to anchor, the "puffing Jenny" which Harry stolidly refused to touch. The boy had driven a launch in Pango before and would easily be able to do what was required on the few occasions, such as making an anchorage late at night, when the captain decided that there was some slight advantage in machinery.

The anchor dropped, George doffed his overalls and came on deck, where he found the dinghy already launched and waiting for him to embark. Harry was coming ashore too just to say good-bye, but decided that he would not come up to the house, distant a good mile from the beach.

During the short journey from ship to shore neither man spoke. The arrangements were all made. Harry was going up with the cutter to the island of Pentecost to try and get at least some temporary labour; George was going down to Burumba and would stay there till Harry came and called for him. Sakau was only a convenient half-way house to save the long journey round the coast for the short-handed *Maope*. Arrived at the white sandy beach, their good-byes were soon said: just a shake of the hand, and Harry had pushed the dinghy off again.

George stood on the beach and watched them go alongside the cutter. He saw Harry and Jimmy climb on board and at once begin the job of hauling the boat on deck and lashing it.

Then the two went for'ard and started getting the anchor up. It seemed to come away freely, a lucky chance in those coral-strewn anchorages where sometimes a good half-hour was spent in getting free a foul anchor. When "she" was "up and down" Harry straightened himself and evidently called the news to Luke in the engine-room, for the sound from the exhaust suddenly changed as the clutch went in. Then Luke appeared from down below and took the wheel, which was just at the head of the little companion-way, and the *Maope* forged ahead towards the passage.

Just like that, without any fuss, with scarcely a good-bye, men in the islands went out for one, two, or even three months in search of "labour." Even in these comparatively civilised times the recruiting game held plenty of risks besides the perils of the sea. Harry was not going on a regular recruiting trip, only going to call at various mission stations where he was well known in the hope that he could persuade some of the civilised—and generally useless—Christians to come for a short engagement until they had got the plantation into proper going order. Then he would have to forsake the lazy and expensive mission people and go the round of the regular recruiting anchorages where "man bush," the naked savage, came down to sign on aboard the white man's craft. At such places he could not think of anchoring with only one small dinghy and two boys. There it

was always necessary to send two boats, one to land and parley, the other—the “covering boat”—to lay off with a fully armed crew to guard against the treachery that had caused the death of many recruiters in the past and which could be expected at any time now in spite of Government and men-of-war.

Harry might have luck and pick up his recruits in the first week, or he might have to stop out the whole month and come back empty, lucky in that his boat's crew were not in the least likely to run away. George watched the cutter make the passage and stand away towards the east so as to go up the weather side of Ambrym. Almost immediately after getting clear of the reef the sails appeared, and he guessed from past experience that Harry had ordered the silencing of his enemy the “puffing Jenny” and that the rest of the day would see them under sail only. Well, the sea for those that liked it. George didn't, and he sighed with relief as he turned his back on it and made his way up the road to the house.

§II

The sight of the plantation at Sakau was not calculated to induce bright thoughts about planting in one already half-regretting such a venture. Everything was in an awful condition: coconut trees diseased, the leaves hanging listlessly, brown and withered; coffee

empty tins ; everywhere were fowls, dogs and cats disputing the contents of the tins and dishes.

After three or four knocks Stephens issued from the house. He had evidently been bread-making, for his bare arms were covered with flour. His costume, like Harry's, consisted of a singlet, dungaree trousers and a beard of uncertain age ; unlike Harry, he was bare-footed, a sure sign of "gone native." George had met Stephens in Pango years before and had successfully pleaded his cause with the Resident Commissioner in the matter of a breach of recruiting regulations, so Stephens now greeted him heartily and proceeded to pull out on to the verandah from the living-room two dilapidated basket-chairs, into one of which George gingerly lowered himself while his host went inside for the Island refreshment which, in spite of poverty, is always close at hand.

Stephens knew of the change of ownership of Maope and, busy with corkscrew and glasses, expressed himself as "very glad to have white men as neighbours after that dirty half-caste." George had heard that Stephens and Callonne had been on the usual Franco-English bad terms, but he could not understand why his host should worry about colour, since he was married to a Kanaka and had about a dozen "dirty half-castes" as children. Perhaps he meant Britisher when he said "white," the terms being synonymous and very exclusive in most parts of the Pacific.

Having mixed the drinks and seated himself, Stephens continued.

“So you’re on your way to Burumba to stay with the holy Macs?”

“Yes. Harry said he thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind running me down in your launch. He’s in a hurry to get up to Pentecost before night. That’s why he didn’t come up to the house.”

“Certainly, very glad. I’ve got the engine in pieces, but it won’t take half an hour after lunch. Do you know the Macs well?”

“Yes, pretty well. He was in charge of the Mission Hospital at Pango when I first came to the Islands. Do you see him often?”

Stephens, who had got up to drive a pig off the verandah, replied over his shoulder.

“Yes, he always calls in here when he makes his rounds, about once a month. He was in last week and his sister too; they were talking about you, or rather about Harry. Rum girl that!”

“In what way?”

“Oh well, they’re missionary of course; but she was born in the Islands, and I’d have thought she’s have got used to things a bit.”

“What things, in particular?”

George did not feel really interested, but politeness seemed to demand the question.

“Why, you know, white men living with black women. Of course they don’t count me. I paid their old dad ten bob to splice me and

the missus, and jolly glad I did ; she's been a good woman for me. Anyway, I'm respectable, and my old woman—who can't talk anything but biche-la-mar and is as Kanaka as you could find—is invited to go and stay with the Macs. Of course she never goes ; she couldn't sit on a chair or use a fork if she tried. No ; it was the 'housekeeper' business that Miss Mac was going to market about. It seems that she and Harry had had a row the last time they met. He had stuck up for white men who took native women. Perhaps she had heard about Harry's woman, though I don't think so."

George gave a start at that, eyeing Stephens carefully to see whether he was joking.

"Harry's woman? Why, he's never had a woman!"

Apparently Stephens was quite serious, though not convinced. He continued.

"Oh well, it's none of my business. But I'd heard too that there was a family over on Uma that hadn't paid any missionary's fee."

George had not expected this. Little anxious as he was to discuss his own affairs, at least friendship demanded that he should clear Harry's character, though Stephens was not likely to consider the matter very criminal. He answered lightly.

"But, my dear man, that was my woman, not Harry's at all."

It was Stephens' turn to look surprised.

"Yours? Well I'm damned. And there

was Miss Mac praising you up to the skies ; didn't know how you could be the partner of a chap like Harry who couldn't see how wicked the thing was. Thought he must have a very bad influence for you."

"And what did you say?"

Stephens leered knowingly at the question.

"Oh, I never said anything, you bet. I never quarrel with missionaries ; they're too useful. Besides, it wasn't my business. I like Harry, mind you. He's the whitest man I've struck in the Islands, and he could have twenty native sluts if he liked, for all I care." Replenishing the empty glasses, he went on. "Why, what's a man to do out here? We're not all missionaries with a year's leave on full pay every three years. S'pose I'd brought a white missis out here. What use would she've been to me? She'd have died of fever, and the kids too. No, my old woman's black, but she's healthy ; and I've got ten little Stephenses to carry on when I'm planted. Oh, but you can't expect missionaries to think like other folk. They're paid to be different. But now, look. It's kai-kai time. I'll go and see what the missis is getting ready. She won't show herself, you know. Then when we've had kai-kai we'll go and see to that engine."

Stephens went through the house to the kitchen, leaving George to deal with a new phase of the problem which it seemed impossible to banish even for a moment.

So the Macdonalds might have got wind of his lapse from their standard of virtue. He thought that his isolation at Lehili would have kept the matter from reaching at any rate the ears of Miss Macdonald. Well, he would soon see when he got there. He hoped they hadn't heard anything. But it was rather unfortunate that they should have such a bad opinion of Harry. Poor old Harry! He saw exactly how the thing had happened. The Macdonalds would be condemning as sinners all men who ran a mixed ménage, and Harry would promptly think of him and take up violent cudgels in his defence, though really having just as strong a dislike as the Macdonalds to black missises. Well, it couldn't be helped. The thing was done with as far as he was concerned. Of course, when he was in Pango and had seen a lot of the Macdonalds, he had probably agreed with them. But his ideas had changed a lot since then.

His thoughts were stopped at this point by the reappearance of Stephens with the announcement that kai-kai was ready. He found the table laid only for two, and they were waited on by an old woman. Little was said during the ill-cooked and badly served repast. It was only towards the close that Stephens, moved by repeated attentions to the whisky bottle, seemed to consider that some explanation was due to his guest of the absence of the lady of the house.

"The missis never shows herself when visitors come. She and the kids prefer having their tucker in their own way. Funny thing! After all these years I can't change her. You know, I took her to Sydney once, poor old thing. She was glad when she got back. Same thing with the kids. They're all right with me, but they're as savage as a lot of bush-cats."

George, though not regretting the absence of Mrs. Stephens, felt compelled to display some interest in her family.

"How old is your eldest, Stephens?" he asked.

"Eleven," replied the proud father. "Ten of them in eleven years."

"Aren't you going to send them to school?"

"What for?" demanded Stephens. "To make spoiled niggers of them? No, I'm not. I make them all talk English to me, though their mother can't understand them. By and by I shall teach the boys to write and do enough figuring to read the scale and see that the super-cargo don't cheat them over the weight. What more do they want? I can't make 'em white. They're mine, and this place is mine. When I pass in my checks there's plenty for 'em all."

"But when the boys get old enough to marry . . ."

George put the question doubtfully. Père Douceret had answered it, but sometimes the sharers of a mixed ménage were touchy.

"Well, they'll do as their father did. No,

it's no good talking. Half-caste is black, not white. What about your youngster, boy or girl?"

"Boy. Lescault and his wife have taken him."

"And the best thing for him. I know what you're thinking. I may be a bloody old beach-comber gone native, but I've got more sense than you people who try and mix things that oughtn't to be mixed. I made up my mind when I married the missis, and I've stuck to it."

Yes; George's common sense told him that Stephens was right. But for himself, how could he see his child grow up like a native, to eat on the floor in a hut while his father was eating in his house? Oh, the problem was damnable. He dropped the subject.

By this time the meal was finished and Stephens suggested starting out to set the launch-engine to rights. The sun was directly overhead and the heat was intense. George would willingly have taken a short siesta, but his host seemed "native" in that respect also; no fixed habits, just the idea of the moment. At present his ideas were limited to his engine; perhaps about four o'clock he would feel sleepy, then he would sleep. He took a bridle from the back of one of the seatless chairs and, having wrapped it round his waist as a belt, thrust his feet into a pair of dilapidated boots, which he made fast with various odds and ends of string. Then

putting on a broad-brimmed felt hat more disreputable even than Harry's, that eyesore to George, he called out to his invisible "missis" his instructions for their entertainment upon their return.

"Two-feller 'e go mend 'im machine 'long lannitch. Byumby, time two-feller 'e come back, two-feller 'e drink tea. You, you look out water 'e boil good."

No response coming from the back regions, Stephens, beside himself with sudden rage, strode across the living-room and, flinging open the door with a crash, bellowed his instructions again, adding some obscene threats and ending with :

"You, you hear 'im, you bloody cow?"

Apparently from the back verandah came a sleepy, sulky voice.

"Yiss, me haar 'im. Me no gotta firewood. All time you no want tell 'im one boy 'e cutta firewood . . ."

The end of the excuse was not waited for. With one stride Stephens was out on the verandah, pulling off the bridle from his waist as he went. The ensuing scene was invisible to George, but not inaudible. Two loud whacks—one of which, to judge from the following yell, showed that the blow got home, while the other, apparently coming from leather on wood, signified a miss—were accompanied by more howled obscenities from Stephens and the expression of his revised wishes to his wife.

"You, more all bloody lazy piccaninny 'ere, you go look out firewood. Allez, go on. Races! S'pose water 'e no boil good time two-feller 'e come back, me me kill 'im you."

The order to "races" being apparently obeyed, Stephens regirded himself with the bridle and came back through the house to the front verandah, wiping the sweat from his face on his bare arm and trying to compose his trembling mouth into the semblance of a normal white man's as he spoke.

"They're all alike, these bloody niggers. More you do for 'em, more they want. She's a good woman though, that cow of mine. Only I've got to be firm with her."

George did not feel called upon either to reply or to comment on the scene. Five years before he would have boiled with rage at such treatment of what he would have called "a poor defenceless native woman." He knew better now. The "poor defenceless" one knew her own power and would most certainly get her own back on her brutal lord before long. All that he cared about at present was that the tea should be ready against their return and be made with boiling water.

The two men left the verandah, crossed the small untidy garden and threaded their way through the litter outside on to the main road by which George had arrived. The sun was blazing hot; the high thatching-grass that bordered the road shut out even the faint breeze

that moved the distant tree-tops ; the track made by the few labourers through the tangled, knee-deep grass and scrub on the road was only wide enough for one, so George toiled, Kanaka fashion, behind Stephens, vainly trying to protect his face, neck and back from the mixed swarm of mosquitoes and biting flies.

It was three o'clock by the time they reached the shore and found that Stephens had not at all exaggerated when he said that the launch engine was "in pieces." It was ; and the amount of whisky that its owner had drunk before and during lunch did not tend to make him handy with the operations necessary to restoring the parts to their proper places. By the time everything was ready and a trial had shown that they had been successful, both men were tired out and running down with sweat. It was six o'clock and the sun was already down. Stephens looked doubtfully at the gathering gloom and then at his companion.

"What about it, Donaldson ? Better put it off till morning ?"

Little anxious as George was to spend the night in such company, he felt that there was nothing else to do. He could not turn up at the Macdonalds in such a condition, and he did not relish a trip in the dark with a half-drunken captain and no crew.

"Right-ho, Stephens ! But can you give me a shake-down ?"

"Oh yes, that'll be all right, as long as you're

not too particular. Well, let's get back then and have that tea."

§III

The afternoon's dirty toil in the sun and the long walk back had tired George out. He threw himself into the soundest of the basket-chairs on the verandah and tried vainly, by fanning himself with his helmet, to stop the sweat which was coursing down his face and neck. He could hear Stephens routing round in the back regions, swearing and calling loudly for his wife without result, and then, farther off, a conversation in biche-la-mar. Presently Stephens came through the living-room on to the front verandah, carrying a bottle of whisky and a gargoulette. He was obviously in a violent rage, his face white and twitching, sweat pouring from his chin, but did his best to hide it from his visitor.

"Sorry, Donaldson, we shall have to have a drop of whisky instead of tea. Do you mind?"

George didn't. He wanted stimulant, and preferred whisky to "billy tea" made black and drunk with brown sugar and heaps of condensed milk. Stephens served two liberal doses of whisky and then, sitting down in the other basket-chair, gulped his drink and under its influence gradually mastered his face and voice.

"I guessed she'd do that when I belted her."

"What's that? Your missis?"

"Yes, the cow, run away and taken all the kids with her. I suppose she'll be back in the morning, but she knows there isn't a nigger on the place who can cook; that's her way of getting even with me for cursing her in front of you."

"Does she do it often?"

"Not now. She used to, but now she's got such a lot of finery and things that she can't carry with her and can't bear parting with, that she only does it when she's very wild. She wanted a gramophone, so I bought her that big cabinet thing in the corner there. She loves it more than all her kids, and she can't carry it. Even if it wasn't too heavy, it's screwed down to the floor. I gammoned her that it wouldn't work if it wasn't fixed to the floor. That's better than a Martin's anchor for keeping her at home. No, she'll be back in the morning."

The incident, coupled with the after-lunch affray, gave George very unpleasant food for thought as to what his own future might have been with Topsy in a few years. For some time past he had noticed that she was growing very careless, not only about her personal appearance, but about the household affairs which she had managed so well during the first two years of their liaison. He looked round once again at Stephens' house, noting the indescribable filth and muddle. How long would it have been before his own house got like this? And Stephens too! What an object-lesson!

No doubt drink had a good deal to do with that, but perhaps the drink was effect and not cause in the first place. When he had met the man eight years ago in Pango, he had been a decent fellow enough, certainly very superior to the ordinary run of planter in the Islands. And now he was little better than a Kanaka.

The object of George's meditations, sitting moodily over his second stiff glass of whisky, seemed to feel that he and his house were being criticised ; for at this point he broke the silence.

" Yes, Donaldson, you can be thankful that you've had the sense to stop it."

The man's voice had taken on quite a different tone from that in which he habitually spoke. He seemed to be harking back in memory to some much better days. The subject was a sore one for George, but he felt that thrashing it out even with Stephens might help to settle his own mind.

" Stop what, Stephens ? "

" Stop going native, man. That's what you were doing and this is what you would have come to."

His eyes travelled round the squalid house and came to rest on the bottle at his side. George pressed the subject now, as much for Stephens' sake as his own. Perhaps his host would get comfort from a talk.

" But, look here, Stephens ; tell me this. Is all this neglect absolutely necessary ? Can't one teach these natives our ways ? "

Stephens laughed bitterly.

"No ; you can't. You've got to come down to theirs. And you can see from me what you've got to do to stop it hurting. It's hopeless. Why, when I first started, I was as happy as a kid. I treated my woman as a child and we were children together ; but a man can't do that for ever. He grows old, but these women don't—at least not in mind. They get old soon enough in body. Have you ever seen my woman ?"

"No."

"Well, you haven't missed much. She was fifteen when I married her, and now she's twenty-six, and you'd think she was sixty. Sometimes I feel I could put a bullet through her, she's so damned ugly. And I suppose I shall live long enough to feel the same about my kids. At least I shall if I can't kill myself with whisky."

A long silence ensued. It was dark outside but Stephens made no move to light a lamp. From time to time George heard him give a shuddering sigh and then immediately after came the sound of liquid being poured into a glass. This was evidently the hour of the day when his host was not quite so certain about the superiority of black wives to white, not quite so proud of his brood of Kanaka children. George was on the point of speaking, to try and introduce some cheerful topic of conversation, when Stephens burst out, angrily this time :

"Yes, ugly, slatternly and useless. And that's not the worst. A man, even a white man, could bring himself to put up with that. But what he can't stand is that they are whores by nature. They can't help it."

"Oh, but, is that really true, Stephens? Surely . . ."

From the gathering darkness Stephens interrupted with a hard sarcastic laugh.

"And what do you know about it, Donaldson? You've played the boy and girl part of the game for a year or two. You don't really know anything about them."

"I could speak my woman's language, anyway—and that's more than you can do."

George had retorted rather hotly, but Stephens was in no mood to take offence. He spoke quite calmly now.

"Yes, and the mere fact that you could learn the Omba language shows that you could never understand the people. You are an intellectual white man, and you would make pretty romance out of the mating of two sparrows. That's what I ought to have called them: sparrows, not whores. They think no more of mating than birds do. It's just part of their natural life. And if it isn't you, it's another man. Then, especially if you've got an Omba woman, there's another thing you've got to look forward to."

"What's that?"

"Why, that one day or other she'll get home-

sick and leave you. They never know themselves. They say that they hear their island calling, and go. Just like that. Nothing can stop them. Didn't your woman ever tell you that?"

George recalled sadly the way Topsy had many times spoken of the call of Omba. He had always tried to joke her out of it, but nothing could shake her certainty, that one day she would run away and leave him and the child.

"Yes, Stephens, she did. But what about your wife? She's been a long time hearing the call."

Stephens grunted.

"Oh, has she? I've fetched her back from Omba three times already. And I've got a pull over her in the help of the missionaries, because I'm married. But one day she'll go for good—or drown herself off the reef. But look, I'll light the lamp and see about getting some kai-kai."

The lighted lamp revealed that the whisky bottle was empty, but the alcohol had successfully done its daily task, for Stephens had once more banished his past. He seemed ashamed of having let himself go, and during the rest of the evening strove, by the use of coarse language and extravagant praise of his absent wife and children, to show that he was in reality quite happy. The effort was not very successful, nor very entertaining, and George was glad

when shortly after a picnic meal of bully-beef and bread, washed down with yet more whisky, his host showed him to a tolerably clean bed, and lurching off, left him to his thoughts.

IV. *The Mission Station*

§I

GEORGE slept very little that night. For one thing, there was no mosquito-net and for a long time he was kept awake by the humming and buzzing of the pestering insects. Then, when at last he managed to doze off, the periods of unconsciousness were made hideous by a series of dreams so vivid that he could scarcely tell whether he was sleeping or awake. There came to him with horrifying clearness a succession of loathly native faces, of women, children, old men; and all of them seemed to be threatening him with some vague unnameable terror which made him wake sweating and trembling with fright. In vain he told himself that Stephens' whisky and probably a touch of the sun as he had bent over the job on the launch-engine were the cause of the disturbing nightmares. Over and over again, each time he fell asleep, the horrors returned. Sometimes they were close up, abominably close, pressing on him, stifling him; at others they were, as it seemed, at the end of a long, long road, distant but terribly distinct, all massed together in a beckoning, threatening band.

Once only was the terror mitigated even for a moment. That was when, between his awarances and the gallery of fiends, there appeared, clearly illuminated, the figure of old Père Douceret. The old man was holding out

to him with one hand what looked like a portrait framed in gold ; his other hand was raised in benediction. George felt that, could he just summon enough energy to will the old man to stay, the horrors would surely disappear ; but he was powerless to make the effort. He felt the agony of his helplessness become unbearable ; he saw the face and figure of the priest grow indistinct, fade slowly, disappear and—like a flash—into full view there came the others. He woke suddenly again, clammy with sweat, trembling and exhausted. He dared not face that any more, so, dressing himself hurriedly, he rose and paced the verandah till dawn.

Before it was really light, Stephens appeared from his room, dirty, dishevelled and in the usual morning humour of the drunkard. He greeted George surlily and, after dosing himself liberally with whisky, proceeded to make coffee and cut bread. Evidently the memory of his last night's confidences was still worrying him, for during the early breakfast he remained stolidly silent, occasionally looking doubtfully at his companion as if he would like to ask what indiscreet things he had said, but dared not. George did not feel like talking either, after his night of horrors, so the meal was taken in silence, and immediately after the two men started for the shore.

The walk down from the house was almost as unpleasant in the early morning as it had been in the burning sun of the afternoon. The grass

and scrub were wet with the heavy tropical dew, and by the time they emerged on the beach George was wet to the waist and thoroughly miserable.

It was only after they had cleared the reef and were speeding down the coast of Tasiko that he began to recover.

He always reacted very quickly to Nature, forgetting in the beauty of his surroundings the ugliness of human accident and conduct. At the moment he was travelling comfortably on a perfectly calm, gorgeously blue sea along the shore of a South Sea island. He could, and did, ignore entirely all the nastiness that was hidden behind the beauty. The sun was just appearing over the high mountains of the island, but was not yet hot enough to be a nuisance. The swift motion of the launch caused a pleasant breeze, almost, but not quite, fresh enough to make him think of putting on his khaki Norfolk jacket which was on top of his rüick-sac. Large schools of dazzlingly white flying-fish leaped from the blue water to "plane" their fifty yards or so in their escape from the pursuing dolphin. Every now and then could be seen a half-submerged turtle lazily making its way ashore to see how the sun had been attending to its business of hatching out the season's brood. By his side, Stephens at the tiller smoked in silence. George felt at peace again and wished that the trip could last like that for a long time, indefinitely, for

ever. He had had a short and uncomfortable night. He rested his head against his rüch-sac, closed his eyes, and slept.

§II

He must have slept fully an hour for, when he woke, the launch had already turned and was heading for the passage through the reef opposite the Mission Hospital at Burumba. The Hospital building was set in a large cleared paddock, shaded by several enormous bread-fruit trees, and sloping gently down to the water's edge, where against a trim concrete wharf were lying Dr. Macdonald's smart speedy launch and several native whale-boats. The general appearance of the place from the sea was in striking contrast with the litter and filth of Sakau; everything looked clean and cared for; the road up from the wharf was of sparkling white coral dust and bordered with crotons and scarlet hibiscus; sheep grazed on the fine grass of the paddock; there were palm-leaf shelters for the patients under all the trees.

As the launch drew up alongside the wharf a cheerful-looking native boy in the clean white uniform of a yacht's sailor stood ready with a boat-hook, and, having made them fast, politely gave the passenger a hand to mount on to the wharf. Stephens refused to come ashore, urging as excuse his unshaven chin and adding that he did not feel like talking to missionaries.

He waved his hand in farewell, re-started his engine and gave a surly order to the boy, who cast off the painter and then, shouldering George's rüick-sac, with a confidential "You come, Master," led the way up to the Macdonald's house.

George had visited Burumba once before, but he had almost forgotten how pleasant the place was. Now, as he looked at the house from the shady coral road, he was struck with the extraordinary good taste and suitability of it. It was the ideal tropical residence. Built in a hollow square, wide railed verandahs covered with lovely flowering creepers gave perfect shade to the spacious rooms all opening by large French windows both to the outside and to a large courtyard filled with English roses. The whole house was raised on piles some twelve feet above the ground, thus ensuring breeze and comparative freedom from mosquitoes; both walls and roof were painted white outside for coolness, green inside to rest the eyes. Beyond the house again in a clump of eucalyptus trees stood the pleasant-looking native church, or "school," built solidly of rough-hewn pillars of native teak, roofed thickly with ivory-nut palm thatch.

As George drew near the house, a crowd of natives, smartly dressed and reminiscent of children at a Sunday-school treat, emerged from the church, followed immediately by Dr. Macdonald and his sister, who had just been

conducting morning "serkool." The news of an arrival had evidently reached the congregation during worship and been passed on to the minister, for the Doctor's head was barely round the church door before he shouted out a cheery "Hullo, Donaldson, the top of the morning to you!" and then hurried on in advance of his sister to give George a hearty handshake and repeat his greeting.

"Why, man, it's simply ages since we've seen you. Of course you've come to stay."

"Thanks very much, Mac. Yes, if you'll have me. Good morning, Miss Macdonald, how d'you do?"

By this time Hilda had come up and equally heartily had seconded her brother's invitation. The pair of them were very pleasant to George's eyes as they stood there smiling their welcome, with the shy little crowd of worshippers whose looks said plainly enough that any friend of their "Dokkita's" was their friend too. Dr. Macdonald was about George's age but looked younger. Tall and slim, in his smartly cut white drill he might have been mistaken for a military officer or a Colonial official had not his keen Scots face spoken so obviously of powerful intellect and earnestness. George had often wondered how this man with a brilliant University past and a host of influential friends could waste his talents on this comparatively futile mission work. He explained it to himself by presuming that heredity had been too strong

for the son and grandson of Scots missionaries ; the Islands were in his blood.

But if the Doctor was a very pleasant sight to eyes so long accustomed either to no white men at all or to the kind George had just left, his sister seemed almost a miracle. He found himself echoing Dante's wonder and delight :

“ . . . ogni lingua divien tremando muta,
E gli occhi non l'ardiscon' di guardare . . . ”

He did fall dumb after his first glance and greeting, though his eyes—unlike Dante's—must have spoken their delight and admiration, for Hilda blushed vividly, then smiled kindly at him and led the way to the house. This was the first white woman he had seen for years. On his previous visit to Burumba and during the latter part of his time at Pango Hilda had been at school in New Zealand ; he had only vague memories of her as a pretty vivacious child, very musical and with a seriousness much in advance of her years. Now she was a beautiful young woman and—what seemed really miraculous—a typical British gentlewoman. She would have been remarkable anywhere ; here, in these wild parts where the few specimens of white female were either the slatternly jaundiced wives of French planters or the aggressively “ sensible bodies ” of the ordinary Presbyterian missionaries, she was indeed a miracle. No wonder Père Douceret, with the old Adam still surging in his peaceful breast,

had been struck and had immediately thought of a match for his young friend !

Arrived at the house, Hilda led the way into the delightfully cool shady hall where breakfast was laid on a clothless black oak table decked with roses. The sight of cool fruit in cut-glass bowls and the fragrant smell of coffee made George forget his long years of French habit and he took his seat without remembering the *petit déjeuner* with Stephens. Who could remember such a place here ? He found himself thoroughly enjoying the well-cooled melons and luscious mangoes ; it was only when bacon and eggs appeared that custom proved too strong and he was bound to excuse himself laughingly to Hilda.

"No, thanks, really, Miss Macdonald. You forget, I'm a Frenchman."

"Oh, Mr. Donaldson, how can you ! I'm sure you could never be anything so nasty."

George and the Doctor both laughed at this ; they remembered Hilda's detestation of Frenchmen at Pango and how she had always stolidly refused to try her school French on the over-polite *fonctionnaires* at official gatherings.

"She hasn't altered a bit, Donaldson. There are only two races in the world for her, British and Melanesian."

George turned smilingly to the girl, whose healthy appetite was by now "topping up" bacon and eggs with generous slices of toast and marmalade.

“ And which of the two do you prefer, Miss Macdonald ? ”

Hilda gave him a smile which turned into a grave look, then spoke slowly and firmly.

“ Mr. Donaldson, present company excepted, I think I prefer the Melanesians—in Melanesia. They are at least gentlefolk. Oh, if you only knew . . . ”

George did know. He had only just left a household quite representative of the Europeans in Melanesia. His mind still held the picture of Stephens hysterically thrashing his “ bloody cow ” of a wife. George knew all right, and sympathised.

“ Yes, I know, Miss Macdonald. Perhaps I know better than you. But I don't quite fit in the Kanaka with my idea of gentlefolk.”

“ I wish you wouldn't call them Kanakas, at any rate, Mr. Donaldson. It isn't correct etymologically.”

Hilda smiled this, but George felt that she was really annoyed. He remembered that the word “ Kanaka ” was tabooed in missionary circles, but a desire to draw out this serious young beauty led him to justify his position.

“ Well, Miss Macdonald, what about your friend who wrote *The Future of the Kanaka* ? He knew what he was talking about and was a good friend to Melanesians, besides writing the only sensible book that has ever been written on the subject ? ”

“ Yes, I know. But that title was chosen

just to catch the public eye. The public don't know any better, but you should."

George accepted the rebuke but pursued the subject, partly because he saw the amused look in the Doctor's eye, partly for the sheer joy of hearing the girl talk.

"Well, perhaps I do, you know. But why do you object to the term? Purely on scientific grounds?"

Hilda flashed at this.

"No, Mr. Donaldson. I don't care a hang what the word really means. It's simply because the use of it shows the attitude assumed by all the miserable low-down whites to people whose boots they are not worthy to black . . ."

"Ha, ha, ha! Hilda, you'll be the death of me! But perhaps I interrupted you? You were going to say 'always provided they wore them,' weren't you? But now you two must excuse me. I've got a lot of cases waiting. Operations at ten, girlie."

The Doctor, thus speaking, got up from the table, laid his hand caressingly on his sister's head to soften her wrath at his rude interruption, and went off in the direction of the hospital.

Hilda had finished her breakfast too and got up, turning smilingly to George to show him that she was not yet crushed.

"Isn't he a brute, Mr. Donaldson? But I don't really mind him. Now look here, I've got my flowers to do, and I have to be at the hospital by ten. You sit over there in one of

those comfy chairs and smoke your pipe. We shall have plenty of time to talk before you go."

George would willingly have continued the conversation, but contented himself with watching from the depths of a great "squatter's chair" Hilda's graceful figure as she moved to and fro, first in the hall, then in several of the adjoining rooms, deftly and tastefully arranging the flowers which she drew from two large baskets standing in the porch. It was pleasant also to watch the two native girls who came in to clear the table. They were neatly dressed in white uniform, clean, healthy looking girls, and admirably trained. George's thoughts turned to their house at Maope. How well it would repay the care of a real white mistress, and how different it would be from the squalor of the past five years or even from the bachelor existence at Pango! The picture came clearly to him of Hilda arranging flowers in his rooms, training his servants. It would be very nice.

He had forgotten for the time all about Topsy and his child. They were not purposely put out of mind; only they were something quite foreign to the present picture. He knew himself to be, as Père Douceret had so cleverly diagnosed, an actor of many parts; and yet not an actor, for each part that he played was really himself for the time being and under given circumstances. At present it was a very old self that he was living, the self that he had enjoyed for pleasant years in England until one

other had risen in revolt and driven him out to travel and be unsatisfied.

At ten o'clock when, at Hilda's invitation, he found himself in the spotless operating theatre, it was still part of that old self that ruled. He had studied medicine in his youth and had only relinquished the study late in his course through dislike of surgery. Now as he watched Macdonald skilfully amputate a child's arm, gangrened from a compound fracture brought too late to hospital, he felt no nervousness; his years of rough life had successfully killed that phobis. It was joy too to watch Hilda help. She had evidently been carefully taught and trained by her brother, but there was none of the professional brusqueness and callousness in her manner with her patients. Rather she seemed a mother tending a stricken child, obliged to hurt but clearly showing her tenderness and love. George felt quite sorry when the last operation was over just before one o'clock and they left the hospital for the house.

Lunch was served on the verandah overlooking the courtyard, the sun being well over to the front of the house. In spite of the hour, the hottest time of the tropical day, it was quite cool here, the breeze coming straight through the open rooms laden with the smell of flowers. The meal was as suitable and nice as the surroundings; cold fish, chicken mayonnaise, fruit salad, and—to George's surprise—a skilfully made claret-cup. There was indeed

nothing remotely like the ordinary missionary household in all this. In his official days he had often been obliged to suffer the hospitality of missionaries on his tours round the Group, and he had always been very glad to escape from their well-meant but quite uncivilised efforts. Now he felt that he might be in any nice, well-ordered house in England.

As soon as they were seated, Hilda resumed the conversation which had been interrupted by her household duties and the operations.

“ Now, Mr. Donaldson, if Angus will kindly not interrupt, I’ll tell you why I call christian natives gentlefolk. I’m only talking of christian natives, of course. There’s no need for me to tell you why I *don’t* call your friends the traders gentlefolk.”

George felt bound to protest at that.

“ Oh, please ! They’re no friends of mine, and gentle is the last thing I should call them myself. But go on.”

“ Well. First of all, the natives are gentle ; gentle in their voices, in their manner. You grant that, don’t you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ All right. Then they are unselfish, careful of other people’s susceptibilities. Perhaps you haven’t noticed that. But I have. Once they understand our likes and dislikes—which in most cases are the exact opposite of theirs— they are most careful to respect them. Can

you say the same about white people and native customs ? ”

“ No ; I can't. But it's rather different, isn't it ? Our customs are sanctioned by centuries of civilisation, and naturally when we come into contact with uncivilised races . . . ”

“ Donaldson, that's a very glaring *petitio principii*. Sorry, Hilda.”

Dr. Macdonald launched his remark with exemplary gravity and then, helping himself and George to more claret-cup, relapsed into silence while Hilda triumphantly continued.

“ Yes, I should think it was, Mr. Donaldson. What is civilised ? Is this European war civilised ? But never mind that. You have granted that the white men here show no sort of respect for native custom, haven't you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, I say that the natives do respect our customs, foolish as they consider many of them. Then again, the Melanesian is dignified.”

“ Yes, I grant you that. I remember once seeing an old chief in Pango being cursed in *biche-la-mar* by the little fool of a French Resident. The little brute actually lifted his hand to strike the old man, but he dropped it when he met his look. It was not a threatening look—but just sheer dignity. I remember how horridly glad I felt.”

“ There you are ! And you'll see the same thing often enough on plantations. Then again, the natives are truthful. The few occa-

sions on which they will lie are simply when they are badly frightened and don't understand. And that's the white man's fault. You can't deny that they are strictly honest, can you?"

"No. Nobody could say that they are not honest."

"Well then, you grant that they are gentlemanly, kind, courteous, dignified, truthful and honest. What other qualities would you require for gentleness?"

George smiled. He had not missed in all this enthusiastic defence of christianised natives at least one weak point that he could have turned to carry the war badly into the enemy's country. There was the question of "respect for native customs." Who but the missionaries had abolished nearly all native custom? But he was feeling charitable and willing to be convinced by such an opponent.

"All right, Miss Macdonald. I give in. The natives are certainly gentleness. But even gentleness have their faults. Would you say that the Melanesian, for example, ever shows gratitude for kindness? Would you say that he is ever polite on receiving a present?"

George could see that Hilda's answer was ready, but it was her brother who replied.

"Now, Donaldson, be fair, man. That's two questions; and I can see Hilda committing herself, so I'll answer you myself. Are natives grateful? I say, yes—but with certain limitations. They are only grateful in the way that

children are grateful. You must never forget that they are only children. They don't show, and can't express, gratitude in the same conventional way that you and I would. But I have had innumerable proofs of their real and lasting gratitude. Then your second question. That shows that you've never studied native customs. With them the highest form of politeness when offering a gift is to throw it at the recipient in a careless way, showing that the thing is paltry and of no consequence. The receiver should accept it in the same spirit, meaning to indicate, partly that he is a man of substance and doesn't require gifts, partly that he needs no presents to be sure of the giver's friendliness. I don't think that, if you analyse our giving of wedding presents, you will find there is as good a motive implied. You shouldn't grumble because primitive people have not yet learned much hypocrisy. There, Hilda, our guest is properly crushed. He'd better go and sleep on it."

§III

For a month George revelled in this new life which brought back so insistently old, half-forgotten things. The days were all alike: a morning stroll, breakfast, hospital, lunch followed by a long siesta and a shower-bath, dinner and music afterwards. It was perhaps the music that disturbed him most, awakening

memories of days long since counted as dead, but now shown to be merely sleeping, disconcertingly alive. The first night Hilda played some Chopin and then, at George's special request, Liszt's "Liebestraum." That was too much for him ; he was obliged to escape to the verandah and struggle for mastery with an outburst of hysterical tears. There Hilda came to him, bringing whisky and soda, showing by her frank glance of sympathy and her firm hand-grip on saying good night that she understood and was sorry for this poor voluntary exile from all life's pleasantness.

Each day showed the girl to him in a new and charming light. They had long talks about the natives, making enthusiastic plans for the installation of a small hospital at Maope, drawing up a scheme whereby a reasonable, decent life with its proper respect for native custom could be made to fit in with the necessary business aspect of a plantation that had to pay. He felt himself growing keener every day about the life at Maope, every day thinking less about Topsy and his child. And each time that the picture of his new life came to him most vividly Hilda was an essential part of it. He could literally see her there ; without her the place seemed meaningless and non-existent.

Then came the night when, after dinner, Dr. Macdonald was obliged to go and watch a serious case and Hilda confessed to George that her heart was breaking at the thought of leaving

the Islands. Her brother had received and accepted a flattering invitation to a University chair and an important hospital appointment in New Zealand. His departure was only waiting till he could find a suitable substitute for Burumba; probably next mail-steamer would bring either the news of his successor or even the man himself. And she would have to go.

That seemed to clinch things for George. By now he felt certain that he had only to propose to Hilda, and she would come and work with him at Maope for the good of her beloved natives, that she would give herself to him in sympathy and trust. He had risen from his chair and was standing beside the girl on the verandah, looking over the moonlit sea; he felt that she was on the verge of tears, waiting for the comfort that he could so easily give. The past, the squalor and the folly—what did it matter? The future might be bright. Why not?

* * * * *

Half an hour later Dr. Macdonald arrived to break the spell. His patient had died, and he, dog-tired, was for bed at once.

§IV

George decided to stop up a little longer. He wanted to think, but thought would not come. He wanted to define his position, to

analyse his feelings, to search himself. There was no other way. Many times before when thought had resolutely eluded him, he had been able to capture it by writing. Once again John must be inflicted with a new problem. So, settling himself in a comfortable chair under the lamp on the verandah, his writing-block on his knee, he wrote.

BURUMBA,
TASIKO.

June 3rd.

It is only a week, John, since I posted my last letter to you. This one won't leave for another five weeks, but I simply must write—or burst.

I told you in my last that we were on the eve of departing from Lehili, that affairs were all wound up, that I wasn't wildly enthusiastic about the new life at Maope. Well, I think I'm much keener now. I will tell you how the change has come about.

We duly left Lehili—but as yet have not arrived at our new home. That wouldn't surprise you if you knew the Islands, and knew Harry. You see, we had no labourers for our vineyard, so my worthy partner went straight out to seek some. He is like that. I could have sat down very comfortably for a week or so and just revelled in a nice house—for it is very nice, John—letting the plantation go rip for a bit. But that wouldn't suit Harry. The

sight of anything green showing its head above the carefully hoed bare ground between lines of coconuts would have given him mental and moral toothache. I knew it was no use arguing. I knew he was burning to get out and try the sailing powers of that pestilential cutter, dying to have a gang of Kanakas to "drive" while he toiled alongside harder than any six of them. He didn't want me; so I gracefully acquiesced. He took with him our two house-boys as boat's crew and, as I did not exactly relish entire solitude at Maope for an indefinite time, I came to stay at the above address.

This place is the Mission Hospital; the man is a Dr. Macdonald. . . . But I told you all about them in a former letter from Lehili, to say nothing of several times in letters from Pango. He used to be Health Officer there. . . . And, anyway, I'm funking the real subject of this letter. Quite baldly then, John—I'm going to marry Hilda Macdonald, the Doctor's sister.

Yes; it does give you a shock, doesn't it? It gave me one when I realised it a few minutes ago. You see, I only thought of "proposing" to-night. And now the part of me that's writing to you is doing its best to congratulate the other "engaged" part, but the job is damn difficult.

Hilda and her brother have gone to bed, and I am sitting on the verandah, alone with the sea and the Southern Cross and you, trying to get things straight in my mind. That's why I'm writing. Perhaps something definite will

come uppermost—and stay there—while I write.

All I can tell you at the present moment is that the proposal seemed inevitable. From the minute that I landed here and got a charming welcome into the first nice house I've seen for donkeys' years, one part only has had the upper hand. It has been in abeyance for a long time ; in fact I thought that it had received a mortal wound when I left respectable England and started this dreadful ne'er-do-well existence. But one never knows. You may remember that I have occasionally said that all our "selves"—even our very existence—are due to suggestion from other people. I really believe that firmly, up to a certain point. Therefore, I hold old Père Douceret responsible for the resuscitation and its result.

I went to see the old man on the morning we left Lehili. He was charming as usual and gave me a little stocktaking account of myself and some advice. He pointed out to me my various selves, fairly correctly, laying stress on this particular one that craves for the smuggest of respectability. He advised me to marry Hilda and raise up a worthy family at Maope. I suppose I was in a particularly "receptive" psychic condition at the time. *Hine illæ . . .* No! That's not right. I'm not weeping. I'm not regretting at all. For she is really charming, John. She is young—only twenty-two—quite beautiful, a musician, a wonderful

housewife, a very competent hospital nurse ; she seems—for some quaint unfathomable reason—very smitten with me.

And there's the rub, John. What can they know of George Donaldson who only his present know ? I don't mean that my past has been so lurid as to require more than burial. I thrashed out that question with Père Douceret, and he gave me sound, if unorthodox advice upon it. No ; it is rather the future that worries me. How can I tell that this phase is going to last ? My kaleidoscopic stunts didn't really matter when I was unattached ; but what would be Hilda's feelings at finding that she hadn't married me at all but some person she detested at sight ? I am quite sure she would detest practically all the other variations of me. You see, John, I know them fairly well ; I have seen the reaction of them on other people too. Oh dear ! It's very puzzling. But it was, it was quite inevitable. I could not help myself. I was quite honest, quite in earnest. I seemed to see, as through an opened gate into a magic city, Hilda and me in the house at Maope, happy in our children, happy in our mutual love, an ideal life. I felt forced to ask her if she would play her part in the piece. I seemed to know for certain that she would say " Yes."

And now, John, I am beginning to fear—even more strongly than when I started to write this—that the new life of the " me " that imagines this charming suburbo-arcadian existence is

only a flash in the pan, a just-before-death flicker, a fraud. You see, it isn't as if I had any variety of so-called "love" for Hilda. The love that comes—or is supposed to come—from community of tastes, from deep sympathy, from great respect, could scarcely be expected even after a month's acquaintance. I had never really met her before, and don't pretend to know her now. That love may come—or it may not. The other kind, the common kind, based—whatever the English hypocrites may say—on quite natural and entirely praiseworthy sexual urge, does not seem to enter into the question at all. I don't know.

No; it is simply that Hilda fits in, almost makes, the picture that that one part of me longs for so violently. If the picture can possibly be realised and made permanent, all will be very well. But I am so afraid, John. For me it does not matter. One more smashed dream on my rubbish-heap will not be noticed. But I am afraid for the girl, horribly afraid. I have seen enough of her to know that she would be quite happy with the simple "me." She would make a delightful wife, and a lovely mother; for she is very obviously cut out for motherhood. But I am also certain that she is simple, entirely simple, and she would never, never understand that I am not simple too.

Then, in spite of Père Douceret, who pooch-pooched pre-nuptial confessions, there is always the question of Topsy which must be settled.

I need not tell you, John, that I have not any real regret for having taken her, for having "lived with" her. I cannot honestly feel any sense of "sin." I was at my last gasp, physically and mentally, when she turned up. She saved my life and my reason—though you may think that she botched the latter job. No; my only sense of shame over that episode came in the leaving of her. But there it is; and there will she be, only a few miles away on the next island. Any evil chance might bring the news to Hilda. Even if the blow never fell, I should never feel honest. And if I told her now, there could only be one result. For she is "missionary" of the missionaries in that and all other kindred subjects. Narrow? Pharisaical? Possibly; but quite inflexible.

Well, there you are, John. I don't know where I am. I hoped this letter would clear my head and the outlook. It hasn't. Yes; it has—on that one point. I shall tell Hilda about Topsy in the morning. The solution may come that way. Good night.

GEORGE.

v. *Is it Well with the Child?*

§I

GEORGE'S resolution to put his fate to the touch of confessing to Hilda was still strong when he got up next morning. It had to be done, and the sooner the better. He even fixed the time. He would catch her at five minutes to eight, when she went out to morning "school," and get her to go for a walk instead.

At a quarter to eight then he stepped out on to the verandah and was about to seat himself in one of the large basket-chairs at the head of the steps to wait for her when a chance look out to sea scattered all his plans. For, just coming into the passage, all sails set, an ensign flying, was the *Maope*. George could not mistake her, landlubber as he was, for, even if he had had any doubts as to the craft, he could see Harry standing at the wheel waving his dreadful old hat. There was nothing for it. He must go down to the wharf and meet Harry and hear his news. The confession would have to be made later in the day.

By this time the *Maope* had neatly come to an anchor about a cable's length from the end of the wharf, so George strolled slowly down to wait, well knowing that Harry would not imitate him and come ashore the instant anchor was let go. There were sails to be furled, chain to be stowed, a whole heap of little sailor's jobs

when a craft was anchored that had to be seen to first. So he leaned against the capstan at the head of the wharf, lit a pipe and waited for the dinghy to be lowered. Harry was not visible on deck, but Luke and a boy he did not know were busy with the sails.

Evidently then, Harry had got at least one recruit, probably there were more than one, to judge from the ensign flying so boastfully. He knew that recruiters—at least Britishers—only announced in that manner a really good haul. Well, that was something. But he wished Harry would hurry up and show himself. The usual ten minutes had long since passed; he had come to the end of a pipe and filled another before the head and shoulders of his partner pushed back the slide of the little scuttle-hatch and were followed by the rest of his long bulk. Then he understood. Harry had come in in his ordinary working costume but had been below in the smelly little engine-room to shave and put on his “Sunday clothes” in honour of the Macs. The effect of the change was scarcely an improvement on his ordinary appearance. An ill-fitting suit of whitish “slops,” a very tight celluloid collar bound somewhere about the top by a ready-made tie, and a perfectly absurd little pork-pie hat, certainly disguised the rough sailor, but George could find no simile to express the result.

However, it didn't matter. Harry was evidently bursting with news. He began to

talk while the dinghy was being unlashd and lowered, and kept up his shouted communication till he reached the wharf, where he seized George's hand and wrung it with painful enthusiasm. Then after giving some directions to the boys, he turned once more to his partner and went on with his tale.

"Yes, wasn't it a bit of luck? Captain Andrews and Johnny Ancelin were just behind me and would have been in easy first, only the breeze turned off-shore and they hadn't either of them an engine. Luke got the old 'Puffing Jenny' to work and we slipped in and got the lot signed on."

"But where was all this, Harry? And how many? I didn't catch a word you said till you got in the dinghy."

"Why, at Batnapne. You see, it was one of the villages whose gardens had been burnt up by the volcano. They hadn't got any tucker, and Ancelin had promised to take them all up to Santo. I heard about it at Bushman's Bay and thought I might get in first. And I did. Forty men, and their women and kids. A good strong-looking lot too; a bit poor in condition, but we'll soon feed 'em up."

"But what about Andrews and Ancelin?"

Harry laughed heartily at George's simplicity.

"Well, what about 'em? They knew it was no good coming in after me. I never saw them again."

"Yes, but if the natives had promised?"

This time the answer was a little impatient. Really, a "new chum" would know better than that.

"Oh lord, George! There aren't any promises in recruiting. They'd have done the same to me."

George didn't pursue the subject. Undoubtedly it was good to have got a haul like that, but the method seemed to border on the questionable: to take advantage of the wretched natives' starvation, and then to take advantage of a couple of fellow-planters. However, it was no use arguing.

"Well, Harry, it's a dam good stroke and I congratulate you. Now do the same to me."

"Why, what have you been doing? Got some recruits from here?"

"No, old thing, got a wife; that's all."

Harry started, seemed about to speak, but seized George's hand violently and made him wince with the grip. Finally he managed to stammer out a few words of congratulation, but not at all to the extent that George had expected, and feared. He could see that something was worrying Harry, so he turned and led the way up to the house in silence. The Macdonalds had not yet arrived from "school," and, even as the two men seated themselves on the verandah, George suddenly remembered that Hilda had warned him the night before that breakfast would be an hour later that day, as she and the doctor were going to hold "school" up in the

village instead of in the Hospital chapel. For some minutes Harry smoked silently, then he broke out.

“George, I’m afraid I’ve got some bad news for you. Of course it may not be as bad as they make out, but they said it was dysentery . . .”

Instinctively George knew at once to whom Harry was referring, but he forced himself to ask.

“Who, Harry? Who’s got dysentery? And who’s they?”

“Why, the little chap. You see, I gave two Uma boys a passage down to Lescault’s place from Bushman’s Bay, and Lescault came aboard. I’m afraid he’s very bad.”

That settled it. The blow had fallen. George spoke calmly, though his head had suddenly grown light and his heart seemed to want to stop.

“When was this, Harry?”

“Day before yesterday. You see, I had to go into Maope to land the crowd and set them to work building their houses. Then I came straight on here.”

George could have cursed Harry for having, as he saw it, so dully done his duty to the plantation and the recruits instead of flying straight to Burumba with the news. What did all the plantations in the world matter against his child’s life? And perhaps it was too late now. He had seen dysentery carry off

children in forty-eight hours. Anyway, they would be off now, this minute. He would leave a note for the Macdonalds saying that he had been sent for urgently by Lescault. What would Hilda think? That couldn't be helped. He turned to Harry.

"How long will it take us to get to Lescault's?"

Harry looked at the sky, then at the sea, finally at the *Maope* lying snugly at anchor.

"About three hours if the breeze freshens, and it looks as if it will in about an hour. It's blowing full trade."

"Got benzine on board?"

"Yes, plenty."

"Right-ho, Harry. Then we'll start straight off. I'll just scribble a note to Mac to make my excuses."

Harry did not seem in the least surprised. He just got up, knocked his pipe out, and said simply:

"Well, I'll go and get the anchor up, then. By the time you get down, she'll be ready."

"Right you are, Harry. Thanks very much. We'll have coffee on board. I shan't be five minutes."

With that George turned into the house. He went first to his room, where he hastily threw his clothes and toilet gear into his rick-sac and strapped up the medicine-case that Dr. Macdonald had—so providentially—filled up for him with drugs and instruments the day before.

Then into the hall for his note, which, on second thoughts, he wrote to Hilda.

“DEAR MISS MACDONALD,—

“Harry has come in with an urgent summons for medical aid for Lescault’s kiddy at Craig’s Cove. It seems that the child is dying of dysentery. I know you will understand that every minute is precious. I know that your brother could not possibly go to-day, so am going myself. I hope to be back to-night, or at latest to-morrow morning.

“Yours sincerely,

“GEORGE DONALDSON.”

For the life of him he could write no lover’s phrase. He put the note in an envelope, addressed it and left it on the hall table. Then, seizing his rüch-sac and medicine-chest, he bolted from the house and down the road to the wharf, fearing every minute that he would see the white forms of Hilda and her brother emerge from the bush at the end of the bay where the path to the village came out. He reached the wharf in safety, jumped into the waiting dinghy, and was rapidly sculled alongside the cutter by Luke. Five minutes later the engine had started without trouble and they were heading for the passage.

§II

Directly they were outside, George came on deck and found that Harry’s opinion of the

breeze had been correct. It was blowing fresh from the south-east, so that they would have the fairest of fair winds for the passage. The engine was working sweetly; the tide was running strongly with them; every stitch of canvas was drawing; the *Maope* was doing its utmost to speed him to what he longed for so hungrily, and dreaded so sickeningly.

Harry seemed to understand that conversation was not wanted during the passage. He busied himself first in making coffee, and then, when that had been drunk in silence, with writing up the log of the *Maope's* recruiting voyage for despatch to the authorities at Pango.

George had taken up his position in the dinghy, lashed as usual athwart-ship just aft of the scuttle-hatch, where he remained, smoking furiously, quite unable to think or to make any attempt at realising the possible results of this new complication. All that he longed for at present was speed and the passing of time. He tried to get properly arranged in his mind the various steps in the treatment of dysentery in children, the precautions against possible emergencies; but his mind refused to work. He knew that in the medicine-case was all that was necessary. He would have to wait for inspiration till he actually saw the case.

Further than that his thoughts simply would not go. The realisation that it was his own child who was suffering agony, who might even now be dying, dead, buried, refused to come to

him. He tried to think of Hilda, but she seemed thousands of miles away, quite indefinite, outside his life. Speed, speed, was all that mattered now. Couldn't he manage to get a bit more out of the engine? He got up with the idea of going below, but Harry, who was sitting on the cabin skylight, seemed to have divined his thought.

"Not much use, George. It's a good ten-knot breeze. She's going faster now than the engine could shift her. Besides, we're close up."

George looked ahead—he had not dared before, for fear of disappointment—and found that they were indeed close up. His stupor must have made him unconscious of the passing of time, for now, as he glanced for the first time at his watch, he saw that it was eleven o'clock. The details of the island could easily be made out. Away to the right was Lehili—he could even see the deserted little white house on its stilt-like piles. At the far point beyond Lehili was Liro, Père Douceret's house invisible, but smoke rising above the trees. Between those two points, straight ahead, was Craig's Cove. A little later he could see the roll and break of the surf on the barrier-reef, with the calmer patches which showed where were the passages; isolated patches of reef and Turk's Heads began to show up.

Harry was already busy with the down-haul of the mainsail, and Luke had gone for'ard to

stand by the jib and foresail. Now they were beginning to feel the long swell which broke on the barrier with uninterrupted roar. The new recruit at the wheel was shading his eyes with one hand, peering ahead to get the leading-posts in line. Round went her head for the passage, down came the main-sail bulging and flapping over the skylight. Luke had let the foresail down with a run, Kanaka fashion, and was now busy with the anchor. George had stood stupidly still during these manœuvres, and it was only at Harry's quick look and sharp "Engine, man!" that he realised that he too had his part to play. He jumped to the scuttle-hatch, down the companion and stood, head out, ready for Harry's orders. "Half speed." "Stop her." "Half speed astern." "Stop her."

And then the sudden cessation of all noise, all movement, the precious moment that ends a passage. They were at anchor in deep clear water, among patches of coral that looked like marvellous flower-gardens and round which circled and flashed shoals of little brilliant blue fish. On the beach Lescault awaited them, bowing politely, hat in hand, saying something which was inaudible above the swish of the wavelets on the white sand.

What was he saying? With feverish energy George helped to unlash the dinghy and push it into the water, barely waiting for Harry to get in too before he started sculling vigorously

from the stern the fifty yards that separated him from what he dreaded but would not believe.

“ Il est mort ? ”

George did not recognise his own voice that shouted this as soon as he thought he could be heard. Involuntarily he stopped sculling and leaned forward to hear the answer.

“ Non, monsieur, pas encore ; mais le pauvre petit n'en est pas loin.”

Quite suddenly his brain began to work. There was something to do, something to fight. The three hours of agony were over. He knew now that his child would not die. Dropping the scull and seizing his medicine-chest, he leaped overboard into the knee-deep warm blue water and splashed and scrambled ashore, past the astonished Lescault, whose outstretched hand remained unnoticed, up the steep bank of white sand, across the level patch littered with coconut husks, up the verandah steps of the small ramshackle weather-board house, and into its one dirty room.

§III

The room was stifflingly hot and so filled with women that George, fresh from the sun's glare, had great difficulty in making out the scene as his eyes searched out his baby boy. He spotted Topsy first. Cigarette in mouth, she was occupied in plaiting a grass basket, while beside

her was braying a cracked gramophone. Everywhere there were women, all squatted on the floor, some smoking, one playing a mouth-organ. George knew that this was native fashion, a sign perhaps of sympathy, but a certain forerunner of death. At last he found Estelle Lescault, on the floor in the far corner, and, lying on her knees, his little head lolling horridly backwards, a swarm of flies hovering over him, his child.

Barely shaking the mutely outstretched hand of the woman, he seized the boy and went out with him on the verandah. He was deathly cold, so cold that George scarcely dared to feel whether his little heart had already stopped; his face and neck were clammy with sweat; his whole body reeked with it; even his little night-shirt was wet through. George felt for his pulse and found it feeble, wiry, intermittent. Already his suspicions were aroused, and he was scarcely surprised when, pushing back the fallen eyelids, his diagnosis was immediately confirmed. He shouted angrily for Estelle to come out and questioned her sternly in French.

“What medicine have you been giving him?”

The woman looked sulky and frightened, but she knew that when a white man spoke like that it was best to tell the truth and tell it quickly.

“Oh, monsieur, he has had all the best remedies. Ever since the first signs I have

given him Chlorodyne and Dover Powders, nearly every hour. I assure you that he has lacked nothing . . . ”

That was enough. His fears were amply confirmed. His child was dying, not of dysentery, but of poisoning by opium given in all good faith. At least that gave him something to go on, and, knowing Monday's magnificent constitution, at any rate a little hope. If he was not already too late!

Rapidly he opened his medicine-chest and gave orders to the frightened woman, first to clear everybody out of the house and stop all the noise, then to have plenty of hot water always ready, towels, all the alcohol they had in the house. Then he began his work. Fortunately he was no novice at it, this poisoning of children with stomach aches being very common in a place where the deadliest of poisons could be got in any quantity from any store. He himself had treated successfully several such cases and, only three days ago, he had watched with interest Dr. Macdonald and Hilda rescue a doped baby from what looked like certain death.

But it meant work. This case was really dangerously far gone; probably one more dose of the "remedies" would have finished the poor little patient; certainly he would have died before night. Now he was not going to die. With never a moment's pause from watching, holding, struggling, George toiled

on through that day, in the burning heat, tormented by flies and mosquitoes, hungry, dropping with fatigue, but filled with a grim determination and an ever-growing hope.

At five o'clock, just as the sun was beginning to dip and the reflection of heat from the leaden sea on to the verandah was unbearable, the boy opened his eyes, recognised his daddy, smiled in his old cheery, cheeky fashion. He could not speak, but he so obviously wanted to that George could resist no longer. Lifting the little man from the mat on which he had been lying, he took him in his arms, restraining himself with difficulty from crushing the frail life in the wee body, and sat down on the floor close against the wall of the house, holding his little patient with one hand while with the other he fanned him and drove away the clouds of pestering insects.

The battle was won. Every minute now the child's pulse was fuller and more regular; his breathing was normal; his eyes had regained their human look. He was still weak, but very soon he had strength enough to move his head and nestle into his favourite position with his chin on daddy's shoulder, one little arm round daddy's neck. George could feel the hot breath strike his cheek; he felt the little fingers begin to tap his neck, to play feebly with his hair. There surged over him the knowledge, the certainty, that this was all that mattered. Let life, success, work, effort, all

go hang. He would keep and live for his child.

He had paid no heed to the comings and goings all the day. Harry had stayed a little while, then had taken Lescault off to lunch on the cutter. Estelle Lescault had waited on him; he had not seen Topsy since his order to clear the house had been executed. He had had no time to think of food or drink; he had not even smoked since the battle started. Now, leaning back with his eyes closed, he realised that he was deadly tired, faint with hunger and fatigue, but happy as he had never hoped to be again. Each look into his child's rapidly improving face showed his love and trust and gratitude. What did hunger and fatigue and renounced prospects matter?

The sun had dipped by now, lighting the water with a gorgeous crimson glow and causing the mast and spars of the *Maope* to stand out black and sinister, while the shadow of her hull on the water stretched shorewards like a pall. Presently the dinghy came creeping round the bow of the cutter, Harry standing in the stern sculling himself slowly ashore. George smiled as he saw the infinite precautions against a noise which could never have been heard above the booming of the surf. Besides, nothing mattered now. He watched his partner pull the boat a little way from the reach of the tide and tiptoe up to the house, where he stood in mute inquiry. George re-

assured him with a smile, showed him the resting child and asked the news. Harry beamed his delight and whispered :

“ My word, George, that’s good ! You ought to have been a doctor, you know. Look, the *St. Michel’s* just going across to Tasiko. She’ll go into Maope for certain and I want to run over and meet her. I don’t like her going in when all our crowd’s there alone ; they wouldn’t be above pinching some of them. Lescault and his missis want to go on board too to buy some goods. Will you be all right here ? Topsy will look after you. She’s about somewhere.”

“ Right you are, Harry. Yes, I’ll be all right. You must find Topsy and tell her to get something cooked. I’m hungry. When’ll you be back ? ”

“ Oh, first thing in the morning. Sure you’ll be all right ? Well, old man, good-bye and good luck.”

With a hearty hand-grip Harry turned away, going round to the back of the house in search of Topsy, then reappearing and making his way, still on tiptoe, down to the dinghy, which he sculled quickly back to the cutter. George heard the anchor come up, the engine start, and could just make out in the dying twilight the dark mass of the *Maope* turn and make off towards the passage.

§IV

It was now quite dark on the verandah and still George felt no desire to move. Presently he felt Monday move his head and put his lips close up to his ear. Faint but cheerful came the whisper. "Darling Daddy! Monday 'e wanta sleep *too* much." Anxiously George examined him, but there were no signs that could worry now; the desire for sleep was a child's, and natural, no longer the deadly lethargy of opium, not the sleep of death. He kissed the boy gently on his forehead, settled him comfortably on his knees and presently saw the little bright eyes close and felt the regular healthy movement of the little chest in real, life-giving sleep.

And still George sat on there. Tired as he was, he had no desire himself for sleep; he would not lose one minute of this bliss. He closed his eyes, leaned back, and wandered on in thought through realms of happiness, weaving romance, painting pleasant pictures, at peace with life.

Suddenly a slight noise made him turn his head to the right in the direction of the door. He could see nothing, but supposed it was a dog; and when he felt a slight touch on his outstretched leg he was sure that it must be Lescault's terrier, Flo. He gently disengaged a hand from the sleeping child and stretched it out in offering to the dog; so happy did he

feel that even dumb animals should share his joy.

To his surprise his hand encountered on the floor, close to his knee, not the rough hair of Flo, but the soft wool of a native head. He let his fingers rest on it. He knew it must be Topsy and, angry as he felt at what looked like her heartless behaviour of the morning, he craved for even her company. Slowly the little woolly head was pushed nearer until it was resting on his very knee, close to his baby's feet; then it began to shake convulsively and in the pitch darkness came the sound of stifled sobs. This was more than George could stand. He let his hand pass down from the woolly head to the poor little face, so wet with bitter tears, patting it, mutely showing that all was right again, telling her not to cry.

Presently the spasmodic sobbing stopped; a hand from the darkness seized George's; certain scrubbing movements on his knee told him that his trousers were serving as pocket-handkerchief. Finally came a whisper, low and plaintive, part of the night itself.

"Oh, George, why did you go away to the white woman? Why did you leave your man-child to die? Am I no longer young?"

George was honestly astounded. All day the thought had tortured him that Topsy was worse than heartless, just the ordinary Kanaka woman of his hasty judgment. By now she had raised herself—she had apparently been

lying full-length before with her head bent in supplication and grief—and was sitting with her back against his knee, his hand, still imprisoned in hers, resting over her shoulder. George turned his head and, leaning over with infinite precautions against waking the sleeping child, answered her close to her ear.

“But, Topsy, I thought you were tired of him. To-day when I came to the house you were playing and not being sorry. Why did you do that?”

He felt his hand roughly thrown aside and a sudden movement against his leg that told him that Topsy had slewed round on her little behind. In the darkness he could see her eyes glaring at him. Close to his face came the heated whisper, in *biche-la-mar* this time, showing her sudden anger.

“Wha’ name! You speak me no sorry nothin’! Wha’ name! Who ’e bin give bloody piccaninny ’ere ’long Estelle? Time ’e piccaninny b’long me, me look out ’im good. Time ’e piccaninny b’long Estelle, me no want ’im nothin’. Now ’ere me sorry *too* much.”

Then in a flash there came to George the knowledge that Topsy, the savage, had been right, and he, the ultra-civilised white man, had been horribly wrong. She had acted all along according to the dictates of her nature. He had violated both her nature and his own. The callousness which he had so bitterly resented was based on two very strong founda-

tions: her anger and humiliation at having her dearest possession taken from her and given to another; the unfathomable Melanesian gift of being able to renounce at will every natural passion, hate, love, hunger, the very desire to live. But the affection, the love, for him and for her child had never been lost; it had merely been put aside. Now it had seized her again, and she was giving it full play according to her lights.

George's thoughts, half bitter, half sweet, were broken into once again by Topsy, who by now was standing up struggling with a hurricane lantern that hung from a bracket over her head. Her anger had gone; she spoke softly in her own liquid tongue.

"George, are you hungry? Do you want to eat yam?"

"Yes, Topsy. I am very hungry. Is the yam ready?"

"Not yet, George. I go now to finish it. Soon I will come."

She had succeeded now with the lamp, and by its light George saw her moving off to the kitchen, comely as ever, neatly dressed in his honour, humming gently to herself.

From the mother he turned his look down to the sleeping child. It was hard to believe that even a child's magnificent recuperative powers could have effected the change that had taken place in less than twelve hours. Now his face, though slightly pinched, looked

really healthy once again ; his breathing was normal ; his whole attitude in sleep spoke of recovery.

George pulled up the little chap's night-shirt and examined that body which had given him such joy and delight so many times before. He had lost flesh considerably ; that, however, might have happened during the last three days, when doubtless the dope had prevented him from eating. But he was dirty and neglected ; on one little shin was the beginning of an ulcer ; his long hair, which George had tended so carefully every day, was matted and unkempt. Never mind. To-morrow morning he should be restored to his ordinary condition of cleanliness and jolliness.

The night air on the verandah had suddenly grown chilly, so George laid the child down beside him on the mat, covering him with a blanket, and stood up to stretch his own aching legs. He was about to light a longed-for pipe, the first since he had landed, when a fragrant smell coming from the kitchen made him stop and realise how enormously hungry he was.

For many a long day he had not smelt anything so delicious as those roasting yams, and he waited impatiently till Topsy appeared had brought a bundle of them in a large banana along two drinking-coconuts carefully balanced on his small head.

The calabash preparation was needed for the sented w George sat down on the veranda'

Topsy beside him, and fell to ravenously, holding the yam in his fingers, washing down the lovely flaky mouthfuls with deep draughts from his coconut. Never had he tasted food like it. His appreciation was so manifest, so many times did he return to the dish, that Topsy herself could scarcely eat for purring her satisfaction and proclaiming in whispers the well-established fact that only "woman Omba" knew how to grow and to cook yams.

George smiled his agreement with the self-gratulation, and then, as he ate, amused himself with appraising the quaint little figure by his side and contrasting his surroundings with those of yesterday. Last night he had worn dress-clothes; he had dined sumptuously with fine linen and silver on a tastefully decorated table; after dinner there had been music, Grieg, Chopin, the "Moonlight Sonata." And—he had been bored. After that he had followed Hilda on to the verandah . . . But perhaps that was best not thought about. Now he was sitting on the floor of a hut with a native woman, eating yams with his fingers. He glanced at Topsy. She had finished and was daintily licking her fingers, like a cat. Without a thought George licked his fingers too, then leaning back with a sigh of content he lit his ready-filled pipe. No; it was no use denying the fact; he was happy. He was alone with his woman and his child.

From Topsy his gaze wandered down to the

beach. The moon was well up, throwing black shadows of coconut trees on the white sand, turning the placid sea into a pool of shimmering light. The surf-song on the barrier-reef was sweeter and gentler than he had heard it for many months. Even outside the reef the water was calm. There was magic in it, invitation, a resistless call. Drawn up on the beach was Topsy's canoe, a present from old Maggi in early Lehili days. The sight of it decided him. Mad or sane: reprehensible or praiseworthy: what did it matter? For once he was going to act on impulse, follow his instinct, and—satisfy his intelligence.

“Topsy, have you carried away all your things from Lehili yet?”

Topsy, busy rolling cigarettes, looked up curiously.

“No, George, not yet. Lescault has been ill and could not go with his large boat to fetch them.”

Slowly George let fall his next fateful question.

“Topsy, if we three went back to live at Lehili?”

“Who 'ere three-feller?”

The question, again in *biche-la-mar*, was put with averted head, fingers never ceasing from their job, studied indifference in the tone of every word, in every line of the small body. George smiled; he was not deceived now. He answered carelessly, playing her own game.

“ You, more me, more piccaninny 'ere.”

Topsy could not keep it up. She was grovelling at his feet now, rubbing her head on them, clasping his knees, her little body shaken with sobs.

“ Oh, George, George ! ”

* * * * *

Without another word George stopped, rolled the blanket round his sleeping child, took him in his arms and set off down to the shore.

Five minutes later the canoe was heading through the gleaming phosphorescent water of the lagoon for the passage in the reef. In the bow the woman, holding tight to her breast her precious regained child, crooned softly her delight. In the stern the man, his gaze fixed contentedly on the line of white foam, paddled steadfastly to his long-sought lotos-land.

VI. *Native*

SI

LEHILI.

June 10th.

JOHN, this letter will arrive by the same mail as the one dated June 3rd from Burumba announcing my engagement. I will label the envelope of this "No. 2," for your head would turn too violently if you chanced to read this one first.

This letter announces my elopement and marriage. I have eloped with Topsy, John. I have married her in so far that I do not intend to part with her until one stronger than I comes and takes her from me.

I don't think I am going to bother to excuse myself to you. You have known all along what I wanted; perhaps you knew it better than I did.

At any rate, I realised all of a sudden the other night that I had been making a fool of myself for years. I may be making a worse fool of myself now, but the feeling of having reached my "far haven" is so enormously strong—and that for the first time in my life—that I can only hope that this is not another mistake. I suppose I must treat the affair historically for your benefit. *Voici donc.*

I told you in my last that I had not got a scrap of even physical affection for Hilda

Macdonald. Well, I suppose I ought to have felt that first. I don't know.

We were bound to have got to a statement of our ideas on the fundamental values of life—and then the fat would have been in the fire. As you well know, I can never tell which part of me is coming uppermost at any given moment. The cussed luck of things might easily have ordered the wrong part to show itself—and then what would have been the horror of the gentle, obstinate, entirely simple-minded daughter and grand-daughter of missionaries?

I was not purposely deceiving the Macdonalds. You know quite well that there is a part of me, an atavistic remnant, that really desires simple goodness, simple faith, the English bourgeois life. Yet another part is easily and strongly touched by the artistic pleasures of nice civilised life. I told you that, when Hilda played the "Liebestraum," I made an hysterical ass of myself. I could not help it. I was rather angry with myself, but, at the same time, I thoroughly enjoyed my tears.

Well, those two of my phases were enormously pleased at Burumba. For many years past my life has been squalid, sordid, repressed. This storekeeping at Lehili has really been one long horror. How could I take an interest in selling threepen'orths of sugar to Kanakas? Much less could I enjoy trying to swindle them over weights of copra. And Harry—

good fellow as he is—would always do that. I suppose he belongs to the retail division of the human race. And all the life was on that level. I acquiesced in his doings, Jesuitically, because I thought that, the sooner we amassed money, the sooner I should get away to what I wanted so strongly but so vaguely.

And then the Topsy incident was sordid too. The adventure of her coming pleased me—and, as you know, she came miraculously *au bon moment*—but after that I merely treated her as a housekeeper. You remember my little poem on the subject? I could never have kept her if it hadn't been for the kiddy. In him I have always had joy. I deliberately and insanely soiled and spoiled my joy by imagining vain mixtures; but that came from the manner of life I was leading.

Anyway, those five years were squalid. The few people with whom I came in contact—except dear old Père Douceret—were also squalid. The horror of them was burned into me for all those five long years. What unspeakable creatures they all were, mere nasty combinations of all the mean vices fortuitously transplanted to a way of life where mean vices can be allowed free play!

You can imagine then that the contrast between such squalor and the pleasant life at Burumba dazzled me, made me forget that in the past I had sampled that pleasant life and found that it was hopelessly unsatisfying. I

forgot that, and allowed myself pictures of a nice house at Maope, nice little white children, nice little trips to Europe. I even felt enthusiastic about "ministering" to the natives. I was quite honest. I had not deliberately left out of the picture all those parts which would have been bound to spoil the whole. I was simply groping, blindly, desperately, and I seized what I thought was solid ground.

The awakening came quite miraculously. Harry turned up as per arrangement. He told me that my baby was dying. Just like a flash there came to me the realisation that, whatever else was false, my one true enduring feeling was my love for that child. I simply cleared out from Burumba—on the cutter—and bolted straight to the kid. He was desperately ill. The poor fool of a woman who was acting mother to him had just that little knowledge of the French half-caste; she had mistaken a child's tummy-ache for dysentery and doped the poor little man with the most deadly forms of opium. I think he would have been dead in another hour. Certainly another dose of the poison would have finished him. By great good luck I had with me a bag of medicines prepared for me by the worthy Mac; and I arrived in time.

Then, having saved his life, I found myself by chance alone in the house with him and Topsy. I suddenly realised that I hadn't been fair to Topsy; I had never given her a chance.

I had treated her as a quite negligible minister to my physical needs, when really there was in her probably all that I want. My decision took only a few seconds. There was a canoe waiting on the beach. The sea was gorgeously calm and flooded with moonlight. The house at Lehili was just as we had left it ten days before. *Allez! En route!* And here we are.

Now what am I going to do, John? I can hear you asking a little scornfully, a little hopefully too. Well, I can't quite tell you. I know better what I am *not* going to do. Let me tell you a little of that. Firstly, I am not going to lead here any sort of "colonial life." I am not going to toil and make others toil to grow things for other people to eat. Honestly, quite honestly, I don't care a dam whether all the world goes hungry except just my "family." That, John, is the foundation of all righteousness: keep yourself to yourself.

Secondly, I am not going to attempt to import here any of the necessary luxuries of civilisation. You consider that Jacobean furniture is a necessity. So it is. You consider the latest books, the latest plays, the latest quips of nimble minds absolutely necessary. So they are. But they are not fundamentally necessary. And I am going to try to be fundamental. I think that probably my trouble is that I don't really want badly all the things that modern civilised, educated man ought to want. Per-

haps it is that I am merely degenerate, lacking in all urge ; perhaps—and I lean to this—I am merely a long, long throw-back. I may be the elemental man, horribly out of place in your world ; just as badly out of place in the world of these money-grubbing, mean-minded swindlers of natives ; most of all out of place among the poor, mistaken, earnest folk who are trying to infect primitive world-children with the joylessness of Calvinistic Christianity.

Yes, I am going to try to be fundamental. I am going to grow and to breed what I need to eat—and no more. I am going to raise children and teach them to do the same. I shall teach them to protect themselves and their goods from the possible attacks of creatures as strong and as cunning as themselves—and no more. If I have not got far enough away from the grinding wheel, and if there come into my Eden creatures more subtle than mine, with arts of destruction of soul and body, with arms to rob and destroy—*tant pis*. I shall not at once capitulate. I have in my mind other and remoter places to which I can retire with my tribe, a more distant Promised Land. But I am hoping that for quite a long time we shall be immune here. This island, on account of its hilliness, will never attract planters. It is too small to be of much use even to traders. The enterprising Maxwell will doubtless, now that the Lehili store is closed, open one of his pestiferous branch-stores on the island, but it

won't affect me. The whole of this bay belongs to me, and right inland to the top of the highest hills. Even the next bay is as remote from me as are the Balkans from you. I don't intend to employ labour; I shall want increasingly little from the outside world; so the Pango Government will have no excuse to interfere with me. If by chance H.B.M.'s Resident Commissioner takes it into his fat and bureaucratic head to pay me a paternal visit in his yacht, I shall take off all my clothes and go and offer him a coconut. He won't come again.

“ Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.”

That's what I want, John, and that's what I am going to have. If you object that twentieth-century I can never be content with mere vegetation, let me retort:

‘ Eating the lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;
To muse and brood and live again in memory . . . ”

And where could I do that better, John? I shall go down to the water's edge at night, lie on the warm sand, my feet in the warmer sea, and lend my heart and spirit wholly to the gentleness of the Island world. Out on

the reef will be Topsy and Monday, vague brown figures moving in the light of the coconut torches that they carry to attract the fish. Their voices will come softly to me, mingling with the soft murmur of the little lapping waves. And far away, at the limit of our world, the surf will thunder out its diapason on the barrier reef.

And I shall know that all this is mine. And if, as may happen to a quaint creature like myself, melancholy oversteps the bounds of mild-mindedness, I shall creep silently along the reef and pinch Topsy's bottom as she stoops to peer for fish. She will then push me into the warm, deep pool, and we shall all three play the child till, like children, we are tired and go up to sleep under our mosquito-net.

§II

LEHILI.

June 13th.

I've been having the deuce of a time since I wrote that last fragment: mental and moral stocktaking, plus a little bit of basely material ditto. Incidentally, I hope you will be able to read those pages. I wrote them down on the sand by the light of the moon, as, in the hurry of our departure from Lescault's, we quite forgot to bring a lamp. But I had to write just then, and just that.

Now I am going to give you a more or less

coherent account of what has happened in the last forty-eight hours. Firstly, our journey here was nothing in the way of an adventure, just a couple of miles through calm sea in a canoe. There was not even much of a picnic in our arrival. Very fortunately Lescault had not removed any of the gear which I had bequeathed to Topsy; so we had the kiosk (where I am writing at present) and the kitchen ready furnished and stocked. What more could man want? Topsy would never use a bed; she had a large mattress, *par terre*, covered with a colossal mosquito-net. In addition there was the kiddy's cot with all its trappings.

And just in that connection I took the first step in my new existence. Obviously I had to sleep somewhere when I had finished writing to you; so I turned in with Topsy. Now, that was a thing I had never done before—and it made just all the difference. Funny thing, isn't it? You know what a fussy creature I have always been about sleeping; some sort of subconscious antagonism would never allow me to sleep in contact with another. That night I was so dog-tired that I was off without a thought. I must have got pretty close up to my bed-fellow too, for, when I woke, I found myself with one hand holding one of hers and the other resting on her little woolly head.

Sorry to inflict such details on you, John;

but they are important. Can it be that, while we sleep, there takes place some subtle interchange of sympathy for which bodily contact is necessary? Why not? Anyway, the instant that I woke I seemed to see Topsy and my relations with her in quite a new light. Many a time she had amused and interested me before, but there had always been a little gulf between us. I had loved her and envied her for her perfect child-likeness, but could never let myself rise quite to her level. That morning everything seemed changed. I seemed to see things more as, I am sure, Topsy sees them. And, try as I might, I could not feel that I had sunk. It was only a difference of angle, not of level.

For once, too, I did not want to get up immediately and make tea. I felt quite content to lie there beside my woman and look out peacefully on life. I did get up though—just for a minute. Master Monday was sleeping in the latest thing in cots; and that did not please me; it didn't seem to fit the picture. So I hiked him out and put him in between us. The little beggar didn't even open his eyes, but seemed to sense where he was, for out went an arm and grabbed his sleeping mother until he had fairly wriggled on to her breast. That made me think too. I had been so dam clever before, never allowed the kid to sleep with his mother even from the day of his birth—unhygienic!

Do you follow, John? Do you see the three-year-old primitive man disliking his new home because of the absence of game? What about his rating of woman? I chuckled at the scene of Estelle (Lescault's half-caste wife) wanting to chastise my savage infant and being "fright" when his sharp teeth met in her leg. Serve her dam well right too. That kid would take anything from me, but let any woman dare to lay a hand on him! Is that all too primitive for you, John, too beastly? I confess unashamedly that I love it.

But I must switch off from the "fond father" line and tell you what I have been doing.

First of all, I have written to the Macdonalds and sent the letter over in old Maggi's whale-boat. I did not shirk anything, simply told the whole joyful truth. Of course I shall never hear another word from them. I can't help it. Hilda will go with him to New Zealand, meet some young earnest missionary and live, I sincerely trust, extremely happy ever after.

Then I had to settle with old Harry. That was much harder. He got back with the cutter to Craig's Cove early on the morning after our flight and was, naturally, somewhat upset. He suspected, though, where I was and came on here. I had an awful job to convince him that I intended to stop. Of course he proposed immediately that I should bring my family over to Maope and live a life of

comfortable leisure while he worked the plantation for our mutual benefit. He could not see that that was not at all what I wanted. I don't want comfort in that sense. Most certainly I don't want the worry—and I should get it—of a big plantation. Neither could I quite see myself living in idleness while he worked. Neither did I want him at all. I had to put that point very delicately, for, in spite of certain little failings, he is such a good chap. Of course I could never make him see what I'm really after. Preaching to fishes would be an entirely unstartling piece of reasonableness in comparison. However, I did make him understand that I am in earnest. Finally he went off vowing that a half of every penny of profit from the plantation should be paid into my account at a bank in Sydney. I'm not bound to touch it, though, Master Harry! I persuaded him not to come over unless I sent for him.

So that's that. With the Macdonalds (as type) I lose the anchor that held me to the stolidly respectable part of Island life. With Harry I cast free from the worries and foolishness of money-making in a spot where no money is needed. The really beastly parts of European life in the South Seas—as exemplified by traders, recruiters, drunkards—I have never really known, only touched them disgustingly *en passant*. Thank goodness they will never enter my life again!

And now there remains only the very old—and you. But you must try and see the matter from my point of view, John. I am not—whatever you may think—ass enough to say that European civilisation contains nothing good. I merely say that, such as I am and such as I have proved myself to be, it is no good to me. I am so made that I see too clearly all the bad part of the modern, hustling battle of life, without being able to appreciate or profit by its undoubted benefits. Well then, surely I am wise to take what I think suits me. But we won't argue all that out again. I have made my choice, and I am going to abide by it.

You may be curious as to how I propose to live. Well, it's going to be the "four acres and a cow" life in a nicer form—and very little more. We can grow all we want to eat. Topsy's garden—just ready now—holds a year's supply of yams, taro, manioc, bread-fruit and so on. We have a few pigs; we also have fowls; we have goats for milk-giving. You may have heard that "there are more fish in the sea, etc." Very well then. Tobacco I can grow. The only books that I want, I have already. We shall want a little money from time to time for kerosene oil, and for my decency's sake. That will come from making and selling a little—a very little—copra occasionally. This property is well over five hundred acres in extent, and is fuller even

than the ordinary Island bush with coconut trees. Between us with a very few hours' work we can make a ton of copra, which will sell for about twenty quid, enough money for a whole year.

Intercourse with civilised men ? Thank you, John, I've had some. Also I've done without it for a good long time. Then I shall always have you to write to when I feel that something must be said. There is old Père Douceret too. I shan't cut myself off from him, though he is a little disturbing at times. At least he has sound views on what is and what is not essential.

For the rest, let me remind you of what used to be our joint and is now my private and particular credo.

“ Why are we weighed upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness ?
All things have rest : why should we toil alone,
We only toil, who are the first of things

Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last ?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil ? . . . ”

Yes, John ; I don't want to “ make a for-

tune ”; I don’t want to “be read ”; I don’t want to crush the German, or any other Emperor. I am just off to play Simon with Topsy.

Good-bye,
GEORGE.

PART III : THE CONCLUSION

I. *Shame*

§I

THE sun was just dipping into a pool of fiery red as the trading steamer *Tulagi* limped slowly round the point that shut in the little bay of Lehili and dropped her anchor well outside the barrier reef. In the small evil-smelling saloon the steward had lighted the swinging oil-lamps and was busy arranging at intervals along the dingy cloth of the long table the cards which told the officers and the few passengers under what high-sounding names he intended to serve up the two or three varieties of tinned food which had been their fare since leaving Sydney a month ago.

Macpherson, the Australian-Scot supercargo, sweltering in the copra-laden atmosphere of Number Four hold, which served him as store, office and state-room, swore aloud as he heard the splash of the anchor. He had been ashore at ten different "stations" that day and was tired of the job of sitting on a packing-case in the hot sun while sweaty Kanakas hooked, one by one, sacks of copra on to the steelyard suspended from the overhanging branch of a bourao tree. There had been no break that day in the monotony of small traders with their few trumpery bags of copra ashore and their return to the inferno of a trade-room to select Manchester prints and tinned salmon for the needs of their native customers. He had hoped

that Donaldson's flag would not be flying and that the *Tulagi* could therefore pass on without a breach of contract to her anchorage at Maope where the night would be spent in comfort preparatory to a long and busy day on the morrow. Now he would miss "tea" in the saloon and have to trust to his own Kanaka servants to get him a scratch meal on his return. This Government contract that obliged them to call on any Britisher, however unimportant and profitless, provided that he signalled to the slowly passing steamer with a flag, was the bane of Macpherson's existence, and he was in a justifiably bad temper as he took his seat in the launch that scurried for the passage in the reef, snorted across the placid lagoon and grounded on the soft coral sand before Donaldson's house.

The scene that met his eyes as he was being carried ashore on the back of a Kanaka sailor did not tend to make him more amiable either. The reflection from the sun already set, showed him just what he had expected, just what had made him fume and swear ten times a year for the last four years. Yes; there were the three: Donaldson, his native slut and his half-caste brat, squatted on the sand in front of the miserable half-dozen bags of copra for which the *Tulagi* had to drop anchor, and he, Macpherson, had to lose his tea.

He had no patience with Donaldson at all. When he had first heard four years ago that the

man had thrown up his newly bought plantation and jilted the only pretty girl in the Group in order to grub along like a Kanaka, he had prophesied speedy and well-merited disaster. And here it was. The very sight of the man was disgusting; that beard sticking out in lumps from his yellow, bony face; that filthy long hair under that abominable remnant of a helmet; that tattered loin-cloth; and bare feet! Ugh! Macpherson spat noisily as he descended from the broad back of his human horse and walked across the sand to where the group was sitting. The man got up and came slowly forward.

“Good day, Mr. Macpherson.”

“Good day, Donaldson. We’re giving threepence this trip. Do you want anything on board? If you do, you’d better go and get some clothes on while I scale the copra. There are ladies on board.”

George Donaldson started in sudden anger. He had been forced to put up with a lot during the last four years, but that was too much. To be told by this bumptious swindler of Kanakas and bully of the poor what clothes he was to wear! He made a step forward to where Macpherson was already seated in front of the scale, and then drew back. What was the good? What did it matter? What did anything matter? He turned and went into his house.

When he emerged in the white drill uniform

of respectability and with his swollen feet crushed into a battered pair of pumps, Macpherson had finished his weighing and was making up the reckoning. He looked up from his book.

“ Three-fifty kilos, Donaldson. That makes four, seven, six I owe you. Look sharp, I haven’t got all night to waste.”

Without speaking, George signed to Topsy and the boy to follow and shuffled painfully along behind the hurrying supercargo to where the launch was being held by the waiting crew. Here Macpherson, having jumped nimbly on to the politely offered back of one of his myrmidons, was carried quickly through the knee-deep water, leaving his despicable customer to wade as best he might. George was used by now to the studied neglect and scarcely concealed insolence of these steamer “ boys ” egged on by their contemptuous master ; he was not strong enough now to command respect ; so, naturally, he had to suffer at the hands of both black and white. He had grown accustomed to that and to Macpherson’s temper, but to-day there was worse to follow.

“ Here, you two niggers, out of that ! Donaldson, the Company doesn’t provide launches for your family. Come aboard yourself, if you like, but not them.”

Topsy and his boy were standing at the water’s edge looking to him for support, frightened at the bullying tones of the supercargo

who, already in the launch, had spotted the offending would-be passengers. They always went on board the steamer, their one little treat in the round of monotonous weeks ; surely George would let them go to-day ; he had promised them that they should each choose a new mouth-organ from the trade-room as a reward for having got the copra made in time for the steamer. But to-day they were to be disappointed. With a hopeless shrug of his emaciated shoulders their white man signed to them to stay where they were while he humbly paddled through the water and climbed into the already moving launch.

Arrived on board, George followed Macpherson aft to the still sweltering trade-room, received the payment for his copra and made his monthly purchase of the few necessaries of life. Then, knowing that it was only with the worst of grace that the Kanaka launch-driver would wait to take him and his goods back to the shore, he gave himself the small satisfaction of ignoring the supercargo's patronisingly outstretched hand, and hurried to the gangway. He was about to descend, having made sure that his goods were already in the launch, when a touch on the shoulder made him start and turn.

"Hullo, Donaldson, and how are you after all these years ?"

The voice brought blood to George's head and pallid face, but memory failed for a moment.

He peered forward at the tall white figure standing in the shadow of the deck-house. Then came remembrance and a sudden rush of shame.

“Why — why — it’s — it’s Dr. Macdonald, surely . . .”

“Yes ; and it used to be Mac once. Well, and how are you, man? Come on, give us your hand and don’t be an ass. I was asleep in my cabin when we got here, or I’d have come ashore and had a crack with you. Come and sit down for a few minutes.”

“No, thanks, really . . . the launch . . . waiting.”

George tried to push past, but the other barred the way with smiling face.

“Oh, that’s soon arranged. Tom, the launch-driver, is an old friend of mine. I’ll tell him to wait.”

A few quick words over the side, the cheery shouted reply of “All right, dokkita, me wait,” and Macdonald led the way to the small smoking-room on the boat-deck, his companion meekly following, apparently unable to refuse the invitation, cowed and listless, obedient to the stronger will.

There was no one else in the room when they entered and the doctor, having rung for the steward and ordered two whiskys, plunged at once into a cheery account of his doings of the past four years, while George sat silently over his glass, not daring to speak for fear of

showing the emotion that was well-nigh choking him.

Macdonald had fulfilled his four years' engagement at Dunedin, longing all the time to get back to his beloved hospital; then, when the time came to decide whether or no he should contract for another period, the call of the Islands had proved too strong. He had applied to the Missions Board to be sent back to Burumba and his offer had been thankfully accepted.

"And here I am, Donaldson, back to the old grind. But I'm alone this time. Hilda has taken a post in the China Inland Mission and went out six months ago."

"Really? Well, I hope she'll be very . . ."

But that was more than George could say. That word, which he had so boastfully spoken and written four years ago, which he had banished for so long in the depths of his deadened consciousness, threw open, even as he tried to frame it with his trembling lips, the long-closed flood-gates of memory and remorse. In one clear flash of vision he saw all that he had lost, all that he could never, never now regain—his birthright, his manhood, his very soul.

Happy! Oh God! His head fell forward on the table; his outstretched hands groped blindly for the saving grace that they could never find; his body shook with agonising sobs. Happy!

Macdonald watched him silently, his own

eyes wet with tears. He knew that such an outburst would do more good than harm; might even save this degraded wreck from the worst madness that was so plainly threatening him. Then, when presently he saw that the first dreadful crisis of self-abasement was passing, he took the outstretched twitching hands in his, and, holding them firmly, spoke in his ordinary cheerful way.

“ Look here, old man, I’m not going to insult you with platitudes. You’re nearly down and out and it’s no good pretending you’re not. But nearly isn’t quite. Just get hold of that and bite on it. Nearly isn’t quite. I may be able to help you yet. When you get back, think things out a bit and see if there’s anything—never mind what—that you would like to ask me. Then get Maggi to bring you over in his boat. Bring your woman and the kiddy too, if you like. There’s plenty of room in the house for everybody. And now I’ll go out and tell Tom you’re ready for the launch. Make a rush for the gangway; nobody’ll see you. Good-bye, and good luck ! ”

§II

Half an hour later, as the *Tulagi* was plodding at its painful eight knots through the fast-running tide-rip between Uma and Tasiko, Dr. Macdonald strolled aft to have a talk with the supercargo. He had been fearfully shocked

at Donaldson's appearance and wanted to hear the story of how he had come to such a sorry pass. Macpherson knew all the gossip of the Group and was never averse to talking when the business of the day was over. He welcomed the doctor cordially now. True, "Mac" was one of the hateful tribe of missionaries, the declared enemies of traders, but he was at least human, he smoked and would take a drink and didn't make a nuisance of himself on board.

"Hullo, Doc, come for a drink? Take a pew."

"I don't mind, you fat old reprobate. Here, half that, though. I've got some respect for my liver if you've none for yours. Cheerioh."

For some time Macdonald let the conversation wander on in the usual "board ship" way, the doings of the passengers, the temper of the "old man," the laziness and incompetence of the Kanaka crew. Then, when he felt that Macpherson had reached the proper stage of communicativeness, he opened the subject of George Donaldson's lamentable state.

"How long have you known Donaldson?" Macpherson sniffed.

"You mean, how long has he known me? When he was a swanky official in Pango he didn't acknowledge my existence. Even when he was keeping store with his mate at Lehili, he never had much time for me, used to come on board as if he owned the Group."

"Oh, come, man. He wasn't really like that."

"Not to you, perhaps, Doc, but . . . oh well, no; perhaps he wasn't, but he always made you feel rather a worm. And look at him now."

"Yes; and that's what I want to know. What's the matter with him?"

The supercargo tapped his glass.

"That."

"What, drink? He didn't look like it."

"Yes, drink, Doc. But you'd never see Mr. George Donaldson turn a hair. Why, in the old days at Pango, on the King's Birthday and shows like that, I've seen him drink the whole Club under the table and walk out smiling. Not that he ever drank in the ordinary way. He didn't. His mate Harry has told me that all the years they were together at Lehili Donaldson never drank more than one tot of whisky a day."

"Well, how do you know he drinks now?"

For answer Macpherson rose, pulled down from the shelf his "Spirits Ledger" and pushed it across the table.

"There you are, Doc. If you care to look, you'll see that every trip for the last three years I've delivered three cases of whisky to Mr. George Donaldson. That means thirty cases a year. And that works out at precious near a bottle a day. And that's drinking all right in this climate."

The doctor declined with a smile the documentary evidence. Macpherson evidently knew what he was talking about.

"Yes, that's drinking, as you say. But he's only been doing it for three years?"

"That's all. For the first year he never bought a bottle. Used to come on board every trip and buy finery for those two niggers. He looked well on it too. Then all of a sudden he changed, gave up shaving, gave up dressing like a white man and began buying booze."

"Where does the money come from?"

"Oh, he has a good bit banked with our firm. You see he never spent a penny before and they simply coined money in that store. If it wasn't for that the old *Tulagi* wouldn't call on him. He's not a trader, so we're not bound to. Have another drink?"

"Well, if you've got nothing to do . . ."

Macpherson got up and replenished the glasses, then turned again to his visitor.

"No, I'm up to date with everything. Cheerioh."

"Cheerioh. But look here, Macpherson, tell me about Donaldson. What do you think has made him take to drink?"

The supercargo smiled.

"Well, Doc, I think that's more in your line than mine. But I know what I should do if I lived alone in a cock-eyed island with a black woman. And I shouldn't have waited a year either."

“ Good heavens ! Poor devil ! What happened to the family ? ”

“ Oh, they’re carrying on much the same as when he was alive. She’s married again to a buck nigger and is probably happier than she was with Stephens. But look here, Doc ; we’re close in to Maope now. Why not have a talk with Harry ? He knows far more about Donaldson than I do, and I know he wants to try and do something for him. He’ll come on board for his mail as soon as the hook goes down.”

“ Right-ho, Macpherson, I will then. Well, I expect you want to turn in now. You’ve got a long day to-morrow. Good night.”

“ Good night, Doc.”

§ III

Dr. Macdonald got no chance that night of a private talk with Harry Graham, for Harry’s wife—an old flame of his seagoing days—accompanied him on board and would not let her husband out of sight. Also the lady was, if possible, more voluble than her husband. Where she was, there was talk and plenty of it. Then Harry insisted on drinks all round in the smoking-room to welcome “ Dokkita ” back to the Islands and to celebrate his own record shipment of copra from the plantation. Things had been going even better than he had hoped ;

produce was plentiful ; prices were extraordinarily high ; labour was to be had for the asking. Naturally Harry had seized an early opportunity to pop over to Sydney and see whether he was still remembered in a certain quarter. He was ; and the inevitable followed. Very soon, he confided in a whisper to the doctor, he would be sending an interesting maternity case down to Burumba—and, might it be a son !

It was nearly midnight before the shore-party left and only when they were at the head of the gangway was Dr. Macdonald able to communicate to Harry his desire for an interview on board some time in the morning. For an hour after the visitor's departure he paced the small boat-deck of the *Tulagi*, trying to formulate some plan for the rescue of his fallen friend. He had always looked on George Donaldson as a friend, even after the shock of four years ago. That had not really surprised him. His own knowledge of men had made him see clearly that George was not meant to live alone, probably never had lived alone until the first two years at Lehili. He could see too—especially after that party in the smoking-room—that Harry's companionship was worse than solitude for a man of Donaldson's temperament. It was probably as result of the constant daily annoyance of the sailor's flow of chatter that George's nerves, already strained to the tautness of the tropics, had threatened to give way and

he had thrown himself into the adventure of the native girl as a relief. Then naturally enough he had been attracted by Hilda. He could not be blamed for that, though it was fortunate that the episode had gone no further. Macdonald smiled to himself as he thought of his fastidious sister sharing a house with Mr. and Mrs. Harry, eminently worthy people both of them but quite impossible out of their own milieu, which was neither his nor Donaldson's.

Four years ago when George's letter, brutally self-accusing, had arrived and told them that he was convinced that his true happiness lay in that idealised "back to Nature" scheme, Macdonald, in spite of his natural anger at such treatment of his sister, had answered with assurances of continued friendship and good wishes. He had had no reply and, during his absence from the Islands, no leisure to pursue the matter. Now he was determined to do what he could.

His talk with Harry next morning made him more hopeful too. Harry alone was very much better than Harry with his chattering wife. And it was easy to see that even the desertion by Donaldson at the very start of their new venture had in no way diminished the honest sailor's affection for his friend and partner. Moreover, he threw fresh light on George's present condition.

"No, Doctor," he shouted to make himself

produce was plentiful ; prices were extraordinarily high ; labour was to be had for the asking. Naturally Harry had seized an early opportunity to pop over to Sydney and see whether he was still remembered in a certain quarter. He was ; and the inevitable followed. Very soon, he confided in a whisper to the doctor, he would be sending an interesting maternity case down to Burumba—and, might it be a son !

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would have made his garden for nothing.”

“What was the matter, then?”

“Oh, George’s ideas. Talked about ‘the thin end of the Capitalistic wedge.’ Said that if a man couldn’t support himself, he had no right to live.”

Macdonald smiled at Harry’s obvious scorn. George, he knew, was full of wild theories, but he didn’t think he would have persisted for so long in such a particularly foolish one.

“H’m! I wonder how he reconciles it with his conscience to drink whisky, then. He couldn’t make that for himself. But neither can we, Harry; and the sun’s well over the yard-arm. Let’s get aloft to that smoking-room. There’ll be nobody there now.”

Over their apéritif Harry talked while the doctor listened, and, listening, began to understand. He could see now how George had started out, how the seeming impulse of a moment which had upset all his months of self-analysis and careful argument had been really the expression of a deep desire, possibly a morbid one but, undoubtedly, lodged in the very depths of the man’s soul. His was nothing but a case of tainted genius, of that revolt against civilisation which craves for a return to the primitive state, which expresses itself sometimes in mere self-exile, sometimes in violent Bolshevism. But what a pitiful waste of good material, what a wreck of a fundamentally good man’s life!

Harry told him how at first, before his health gave out, George had seemed really happy in his simple life. He had cleared a large patch of ground and made a garden where he and the girl had planted yams and other Island food-stuffs. He had busied himself with his fowls and pigs. There was always a store of smoked fish. The house had been kept very nice too, and George had always been pleased to see him, though deaf to all appeals to come and live at Maope.

"I really think, Doctor, that if he hadn't gone down to a fever like that he'd have gone on quite contented. You see, he was mad about that little chap, taught him to speak English, taught him to write, couldn't do enough for him. Now he seems to be sick of everything. The youngster runs wild like a native, goes about with all the nigger kids on the island, and poor old George sits in the house all day long and boozes. I don't know what he gets to eat either. You know what natives are and I don't suppose Topsy's any better than the rest. If a man's sick, they leave him to die—like cattle."

Macdonald was horrified. This was a side of the question that had not struck him, for, in spite of his long association with the natives, he had had little real intercourse with them. He interrupted Harry's discourse.

"Look here, Harry; this has got to stop. What are we going to do? Couldn't you get

him to come to Maope now that he's really ill?"

Harry hesitated before answering.

"Well, you see, it's like this, Doctor. Of course I'd love it; but there's the missis. She's been brought up very strict and . . . of course if George was married to Topsy . . ."

Dr. Macdonald regretted for a moment that he was a missionary. His face flushed and he was about to make a savage retort, but stopped himself in time. After all, the woman had a perfect right to her petty, conventional scruples. But that settled it. He turned quietly to Harry.

"Yes, Harry; I understand. Well, I must try and get him to come to me. I've got a big house all to myself and nobody to bother about but myself. I'll have to go on to Burumba in the steamer now and see Doctor Scaife off to Sydney. Then as soon as that's done I'll run over to Lehili in the launch. Hullo, there's the lunch bell. Are you going to feed on board?"

"No, thanks, Doctor. The missis'll be waiting for me. Besides, the stuff'll all be on board by two o'clock. I'll just get off and find the mate and sign up. You'll let me know what you do, won't you? I'm afraid he won't agree, though. Well, good-bye, Doctor."

"Good-bye, Harry. Send the missis down in good time for that event."

A painful squeeze of the hand and Harry

had bustled off on his business, leaving the doctor to meditate over his lunch on the reactions brought about by both unsuitable and suitable mating between females and males of the human race.

II. *Rats*

§I

WHEN Topsy was left on the beach watching the launch go alongside the *Tulagi*, she was in a very bad temper. It was not only that particular disappointment, though it was bad enough ; but the dashing of one hope after another for a long time past seemed to culminate in George's pusillanimous acceptance of the supercargo's rudeness. Little by little, for three years, she had been losing faith in her white man ; and this was the last straw. She did not really mind that for many months he had neglected her. Her adaptable child's nature was incapable of abstract worry. She lived in moments ; and if a moment was pleasant, so much the better ; if not, well, one could always roast a yam, or swim, or sleep. But far down at the back of her primitive little mind lurked the absolute necessity of exercising trust and worship ; and the natural object of such feelings was a man. Now that her man was failing her so badly, she began to feel, vaguely but insistently, that some radical change of life was necessary ; something must be done.

She turned away from the beach, ignoring the weeping of her disconsolate son, and went up to the house. Perhaps she was hungry ? No ; a large piece of lap-lap brought no comfort. Possibly a good rummage in her box and a

handling of her store of treasures would still the nasty sense of undefinable longing? But she knew it all by heart. And what was the use of having things and no one to show them to, no one to talk . . . Ah! That was what she wanted! She wanted to talk, her own language, about things she knew, to some one who could understand. She must go and see Charlie. It was a long time since she had seen him. At first, when he had left George's service and gone to live in the little house that he had built in the next bay, they had swum together every night. But George had been very angry about something, had told Charlie never to come to Lehili again and forbidden her to talk to him. Well, it didn't matter now. George was on board the steamer and, when he came back, would be too busy drinking his new supply of grog to worry about where she was. Monday could fend for himself; there was plenty to eat in the house.

She had chosen the time for her visit well, for, when she reached Putokai Bay, Charlie had just finished his evening swim and was quite ready to sit on the beach and talk the long night through. He too had been craving for the sound of his own language; he too had long since grown tired of this foreign land, though he lacked the energy and initiative to depart. The two malcontents were well met.

Politely Charlie made a cigarette and handed it and the fire-stick to his visitor. Then he

began to talk, rolling the words round his mouth in unaccustomed pleasure, pouring them out, revelling in the sound. He had been wanting to see Topsy for a long time, but had feared the strong *tambû* of the white man. Only two months ago the whale-boat from Putokai had been up to Omba to sell pigs. He would have liked to go with them, but the ill-bred savage of a chief had asked such an absurd price for the passage that it was out of the question. The boat was just back yesterday, and was off again to-morrow to Santo with more pigs. He had heard news from Omba.

Eagerly Topsy drank all this in. She felt now that for all these years she had been living in a dream. Here, once again, was real life. She must hear all about this.

“Tell me, Charlie, did the boat go then to Pulagalaga?”

Charlie had paused to take breath and roll more cigarettes. When they were made and lighted he continued.

“Yes, *Ouéla Kohkon*, at Pulagalaga they sold many pigs. *Tari Tagowa* is dead; and *Tanga*, his son, has been buying pigs and is getting ready to marry a wife.”

Topsy noticed that Charlie addressed her by her native name. That was correct; for she was now a widow and, if she went back to Omba—ah! Omba!—she would doubtless very soon be married again. She was still young enough to be worth quite a fair number of pigs. And,

after all, that transaction with a white man didn't really count. Naturally, she did not grieve at the news of Tari Tagowa's death at this distance. If she had been there, seen his dead body, helped to wrap it in ten full yards of beautiful white calico from the store at Nduindui, of course she would have known how to conduct herself with decency. But here, in a strange land, with the man already eaten by the crabs, she could not be expected to weep. Charlie evidently agreed with her, for he went on almost without a pause.

"And your mother is now very old and has no one to feed her. Ouéla Kilukilu is too busy working for her old man. And the yams this year on Omba! Oh, Ouéla Kohkon, my heart was very sad when these savages came back and told me of our gardens."

The two kept silence for a time. Far in the bush could be heard the tom-toms of "man Uma's" evening dance. Round them the strident chirping of the crickets, the soft splash of the rippling wavelets on the moonlit sand, the lapping of the water against the sides of the anchored whale-boat, were the only sounds. And they all sang now one loud, insistent song. It was Charlie who broke the silence.

"Tell me, Ouéla Kohkon, about your white man. Will he not die soon?"

Topsy sighed. In real consciousness she had been far away. Now she was brought back to dull reality.

“ I do not know, Charlie. He is not old, but I think he is very ill. And always now he is sad. Never does he talk to me as he did. He is a good man, though, and not cross ; but he does not eat. All day he drinks the white man’s grog, but he never sings like the white men did at Colombe Bay. When he has drunk much grog, sometimes he sleeps ; but sometimes at night, when the moon is large, he goes down to the sea and talks to his devils. Then I am very frightened, Charlie ; and so is Monday. And he does not want me any more. Many times have I told him that I was shamed to have given him but one man-child. But he says foolish things that I do not understand. He sleeps alone in the house, and I am glad of that ; for at night he talks loudly to his devils. I think that the white woman at Burumba must have made a strong poison for him. He calls her name ‘ Ilda, Ilda ’ many times, and then he weeps. Yes ; she must have made a poison. And, Charlie, I am very sad.”

The thought of her own sadness set her weeping, and Charlie with her. And all the time the distant tom-toms, the crickets and the sea, sang on their maddening song. And the meaning was becoming definite now ; its call impossible to ignore. It was Charlie who, after a long silence, gave the interpretation.

“ Ouéla Kohkon, Omba is fair ; and you and I are far away. My heart is sad for Omba, and yours too. Why do we stay ? ”

Topsy had stopped crying. Into her heart had come the aching, but with it and the now acknowledged cause came too the old spirit of adventure, the longing for change from the monotony of her dull days, the resistless call of Omba.

“Charlie, how can we go? For go I must.”

For answer Charlie rose and, with cautious glance at the bush behind and at the empty moonlit beach, pointed to the Putokai whale-boat so temptingly near. Topsy did not need any further explanation. But there were horrible difficulties in the way.

“Oh, Charlie, but Omba is far distant and we are but two. How can we row for many days, we two alone?”

The tempter grunted his amusement. Really, this Omba woman was talking like a child.

“Row, Ouéla Kohkon? Of course we could not row. But there are sails in the boat, and food ready for the voyage. I saw the savages carry all the things down while the sun was yet hot. And their chief, the one-eyed Maggi, laughed at me because I have no woman and no pigs; that thief who took the pigs that George gave me and then tried to cheat me with an old woman, dried up and ugly. Yes, Ouéla Kohkon, and he shall know that I am a ‘man Omba.’ Can I not sail a boat better than all these untattooed sons of flying-foxes? Is not the wind favourable? Can I not read the stars that point out plain the road to Omba over the

great water? To-morrow before the sun sets we shall see our island."

Breathlessly had Topsy listened to all this. Before the speech was over her mind was made up. All else had faded instantaneously. Omba had called and she must answer. It was Charlie who brought her back to the dull level of practical things.

"But, Ouéla Kohkon, what about your man-child? Can you hasten back to Lehili and fetch him?"

Topsy hesitated for a moment. Great would be her glory if she arrived at Pulagalaga with a son, even though he were only the offspring of a white man. And then her box, her treasures? But all that seemed of no account now. Omba was calling. She shook her head decisively.

"No, Charlie; I will leave him. He is well grown now and no longer needs me. And George would never let him go. He would get a white man's boat and come in search of us. Me he no longer wants, but even when he is most possessed by his devils his heart is hungry for his child. And my box, Charlie, my beautiful box and all my clothes, I must leave them too."

The thought of the great renunciation drowned for a moment even the imperative summons of her home and she began to cry softly, but Charlie had still another surprise to cure her grief.

“ Do not weep, Ouéla Kohkon. In my house here I have twenty pounds in dollars in a bag. We will go first to the white man’s store at Nduindui and buy many presents for all our people. Then shall we not return to Omba with shame empty-handed. Wait here while I go to my house. Then we must hasten lest some of these savages come down after their dancing to see that their boat is safe. Oh, how glad my heart is at the thought of the anger of that one-eyed dog ! ”

Thus speaking, Charlie slipped away noiselessly into the bush behind him, bound for his house a hundred yards distant. In a few minutes he was back, wearing new dungaree trousers and a beautiful red military tunic, carrying in one hand a small canvas bag which gave out a heartening chink as he deposited it proudly on the sand at Topsy’s feet. Then in whispers they discussed the plan of campaign. They would have to strip to swim off to the boat. They could do it on that ledge of coral that ran out into the lagoon. Charlie would bind the bag of dollars round his waist. Topsy would take charge of the bundle of their clothes. Once on board the whale-boat they would be safe. The wind was strong and dead off-shore. They would make the passage with no difficulty and be out at sea in no time. The Putokai men had no canoes and their guns could do no damage at that distance. Charlie did a few steps of the Omba war-dance in his joy. Not

only was he going home, but he was going to revenge himself for years of insult too.

But they must get to work. Quickly they stole across the dazzling beach and along the spit of rock that ran far out into the lagoon. Arrived at the end, they set about their preparations for the swim. Stripped of his tunic and trousers, Charlie was carefully fastening to the waistband of his nambas the precious price of their honourable return; Topsy, her brown skin flashing in the moonlight, was folding her clothes and Charlie's preparatory to making a neat bundle in her pari-pari for the journey, when suddenly the sound of footsteps on the shore made them start guiltily and clutch one another in terror.

"Man Uma!" But no, the tom-toms were still booming from the village and no one would miss a minute of the dance. And no native with bare feet could make a noise like that walking on coral. Ah! There he was just coming round that coral boulder into the moonlight. A man in white clothes! A white man! George!

Without a word Charlie plunged silently into the deep water and started swimming strongly for the boat, while Topsy, with one wild grab at what she could reach of the scattered clothes, leaped after him. In two minutes they had reached the far side of the anchored boat and scrambled hastily in over the gunwale.

A minute to recover breath and two heads

peered cautiously over the side. What could the man be doing there? He was kneeling motionless on the very ledge of rock from which they had plunged, hatless, his face covered with his hands. He could not have seen them, then! But they had got away only just in time. And if it had been "man Ūma" with their quick ears and nasty guns!

Silently they started to get under way. They were only in a few feet of water and the anchor, coming freely, was soon in-board. Then while Topsy, panting still, but glowing with success, went to the tiller, Charlie hauled up the large lug-sail—and they were off. Omba had called and they had answered.

§II

If Topsy had ventured another glance at the despised land that she was so gaily leaving, she would have seen the white man still motionless on the coral ledge, his face still covered with his hands.

George had come there for privacy after his interview with Macdonald. The beach at Lehili held too many bitter memories, and he wanted to be alone. He feared that Topsy would be about and tearful at her disappointment of the afternoon. She was not on the shore when he returned, but she would certainly be waiting for him somewhere. He had found Monday asleep in the house and had

kissed him and covered him with a blanket before going out again. He did not want to eat ; he did not even want to drink, in spite of the three new cases of whisky lying on the beach. He just wanted to get away somewhere and think—as Mac had told him to do.

The meeting with the doctor had been a terrible shock to him. For three years now he had devoted all his energy to the drowning of thought. The first year of his new life had passed pleasantly enough. It was only during the long prostration with malarial fever that he had begun to realise the ghastly mistake that he had made. He had seen with sickening clearness the awful gulf that stretched between him and the little savage woman whom he had fondly hoped could be his mate. During the early days of his illness she had waited on him cheerfully, but very soon her primitive instincts had got the upper hand. This man was sick, likely to die, and therefore useless to the herd. She had neglected him, as cattle will forsake a stricken beast. For days at a time, when he was almost too ill to move in bed, she had absented herself on fishing and gardening expeditions, taking Monday with her.

When he had, in spite of neglect and through the strength of his own constitution, avoided death, she had seemed to settle down once more. But George could never forget. And he was tied to this for life. Many times he had meditated suicide, but was withheld by the

very horror of dying in such condition. Then he had deliberately set himself to drink, getting at least occasional respite from his torture, some moments when he could forget. He had felt himself sink lower and lower, getting slowly but surely down to the real "gone native" level, where, perhaps, he might find peace. The open contempt of the steamer people once every six weeks no longer hurt him. They were not people of his own social and intellectual kind and he had never cared for the opinion of that class. Let them think what they liked, as long as they brought him his whisky regularly. But the meeting with Macdonald, so totally unexpected, had been very different. It had brought before him in a flash his utter degradation, his misery and his hopelessness. And now he had got to think.

He had wandered on half-consciously, urged by the necessity of thought that would not come; his memory leading him blindly to this spot where years ago he used to stand to fight that battle with himself which he had won and lost, and which he must fight again.

He had been vaguely conscious of a movement in the water in front of him, but his own misery had prevented conscious appreciation of his surroundings. His one craving was for solitude, for peace, for a moment's respite from the din of mocking voices that racked and tore his head. Perhaps here, wrapped in the still, bright night, soothed by the murmuring song

of the lagoon, he would find strength to fight.

Vainly he strove to think. The moonlight on the water dazzled him ; the distant beating of the tom-toms dinned in his ears with maddening monotony. He was intolerably weary. And ever jabbering, just behind his throbbing temples, were those voices, whispering, giggling, jeering. Curse them ! Would they never stop ?

Despairingly he sunk to his knees, stopping with trembling hands the awful torture of his eyes, crouching with bent head in hopeless, agonised appeal. " Oh, God ! Oh, God ! Oh, God ! " The words were forced from his parched throat and trembling lips. " Oh, God ! I want the way. I want the way. Oh, give me, give me rest ! " But no rest came, no peace to his tormented soul. Only he heard, louder than his harsh words, the never-ceasing voices. Lower and lower he crouched, as if by suppliant attitude he might perchance touch that remote, unhearing Pity.

And then his mood changed. Leaping to his feet, with outstretched arms, he cursed, first silently, then in loud screams, the Fate, the Force, that mocked him and would not let him be. His head was bursting ; he could no longer stand. Crouching again, he beat his fevered hands on the hard coral, whimpering with the pain. Hopeless, alone, and oh ! so deadly tired. Exhausted with his outburst, his

head dropped lower, the mocking laughter died within his brain and for a blessed space he was granted the peace that comes with sleep.

§III

For a few brief, awful seconds when George woke his mind refused to work. He was no longer alone. The moon had set and in a red glow all around he could see vague moving horrors of white forms that were not men, beings on legs, with monstrous heads and loathsome, staring eyes. They were close to him, touching him, and jabbering loudly. Swiftly he registered the thought: "Ah, this is Hell—and the parsons have won!" Then a chance shouted word brought him to full consciousness. What a fool! They are "man Uma" in their horrid dancing-masks, their bodies smeared with lime and ashes, ghastly in the light of the torches that they carried. He rose quickly to his feet, for, though these might be humans, they were none the less fiends of hell when frenzied with dancing and "trade" gin. He felt that he was in danger, quite possibly of death, and in an instant, as if by a miracle, his head was cleared, his troubles vanished.

But what was it the men were saying? No one seemed to be directly addressing him, but alternately they stared at him and then out to sea; and every minute the babel was getting

more furious. It was a long time since George had used the Uma language, and at first the meaning of the shouts escaped him. Then one of the grotesque figures moved from the group and spoke less loudly, addressing him by name. Ah, that must be Maggi, the one-eyed chief, and usually a friendly enough ruffian. He was saying something about their boat, something about a woman.

It was impossible to see the man's eyes through the repulsive mask, but he seemed to be fairly quiet, certainly less angry than his jumping, howling companions. From the recesses of his enormous headgear his words were most difficult to catch. Only the two words "boat" and "woman" were constantly repeated. In vain George tried to still the tumult by lifting his hand, by shouting in their language all the pacific phrases that he knew. That only seemed to infuriate the savage crowd and make the din worse. And all the time from out of that great cavernous red-painted mouth were barked those guttural phrases about a woman and a boat.

George was getting angry. This was his first experience of being screamed at by Kanakas; and even "man Uma" in their war-paint were Kanakas after all. He was just meditating running amok among the brutes, even if it did mean being bludgeoned to death, when Maggi, with uplifted club and bellowing voice, managed to still the tumult.

“Bring here the things and show them to the white man.”

In the sudden hush from the howling chorus the words were easy to understand. Obedient to the order, two men advanced, one with a garment of some sort which he hurled contemptuously at George's feet, the other with a small object which he handed to his chief. Stooping first to pick up with his club the fallen garment, Maggi waved it before him, speaking rapidly.

Ah, yes; George caught that: “The coat of Charlie.” By the fierce light of an outstretched torch he recognised the scarlet tunic that he himself had given to the boy years ago and that had been worn with so much pride. But what was there in that soiled relic to make “man Uma” mad with rage? And what was the small object that the horrible old chief was now thrusting before his eyes? Mechanically George took it in his hand and examined it. A necklace of Indian work, carved elephants strung together, outstretched trunk to tail! Of course he knew that: a present to Topsy soon after her arrival at Lehili, cherished by her ever since as a strong talisman. The Putokai whale-boat—Charlie's coat—Topsy's necklace—and this infuriated band of savages howling about a woman and a boat and pointing out to sea. He'd got it now! Those moving objects in the water; those clothes relinquished on the ledge! He'd nearly caught them; must have

scared the lives out of them ! Topsy had stolen Maggi's boat ; cleared out and left her rotten man to die !

* * * * *

And then the chattering, painted crowd of infuriated man-apes took to their heels and ran, dropping their torches, jostling one another in their sudden frenzied rush, never stopping till the shelter of the village and the grim shadow of the sacred tree brought courage to discuss the horrid thing. For there, upon that ledge of rock before their eyes, the foolish white man had become the dwelling of a devil-devil. He had laughed and laughed. Oh, how he had laughed ! He had smacked them on the back, poked bony fingers into their ribs, and yelled with laughter, the tears streaming down his face. And from his eyes the devil-devil had looked out and eaten up their hearts, and they had run.

III. *Evil*

§I

DAWN was just breaking when George returned to Lehili from his vigil on the Putokai reef. After the first outburst of hysterical laughter which had so startled the savage dancers, when he had indeed been for some time—as they said—possessed, he had grown calmer. At first he had felt nothing but hot anger against Topsy, at her callous forgetfulness of the years when he had done his best to make her happy, refused her nothing, sacrificed all for her. If at least she had ever asked him to let her go back to her own people, he could have understood ; but she had never done so. And she had always appeared content, never complained. No ; it was sheer heartlessness, utter incapacity of feeling. But, as he paced the deserted shore, alone with the immensity of the star-sown sky, saner thoughts had come. He had tried to see things from her point of view ; and, hard though it was to eliminate his own sentimentality, he had succeeded. After all, her life with him, far from all the things that she counted dear, with none, even, of the little distractions of life on a big plantation, must have been horribly dull. He had expected her to settle down to an idealised form of simple life which he, with all his boasted philosophy and mental distractions, had badly failed to stand.

It was more difficult to forgive her abandonment of Monday. But even that, when looked at from the point of view of a primitive woman, was really natural. Her mother-instinct lasted only while the child was helpless and dependent on her. After that she had merely treated Monday as a companion, irked even in her friendship by his heritage of tastes and ideas which she could not share. If she had had other children, she would have been wholeheartedly devoted to each in turn, until the time came for one to be supplanted by the next. That was the natural way.

As soon as he began to reason clearly too, George knew enough about natives not to be surprised even at the manner of her going. He had heard of so many cases of men and women, apparently perfectly happy on plantations, being suddenly seized with that irresistible craving for their own island. Without a moment's thought of the consequences they had stolen the nearest boat, and gone. And the Omba people were the worst of all, apart, as they were, from all the rest in language, custom and even race. It was the logical sequence of the way she had arrived.

Bit by bit he argued all this out. The mere necessity, too, of facing a problem outside himself brought him, in some measure, the relief that he had implored. And, with the relief, there began to insinuate itself the thought that, possibly, this was the beginning of the way out. Perhaps his heart-broken, hopeless prayer had

not gone utterly unheeded after all. The thought brought with it hope, hope that his courage was not dead, trust that he still had strength to fight. He walked home briskly enough beneath the paling stars.

When he arrived at the house, Monday was still sleeping on the mattress under the mosquito-net. George thought for a moment of turning in himself, but it was not sleep that he needed most. He was going to try and cleanse himself, and could at least begin with externals. That beard was coming off. The operation was extremely painful with dulled razor and trembling hands, and the yellow, bony face with its new-white cheeks and chin that stared at him from the glass was not exactly handsome. But at least he was clean for the first time for years. Then a short swim followed by a sharp friction and clean clothes, and he began to feel more and more like a white man. His hair he could not manage; that would have to wait.

When he came back from his swim Monday was standing in the doorway, rubbing his eyes and looking round lazily as if in search of his missing mother. He did not seem at all upset by her absence, asking no questions, but expressing his entire approval of the improvement in the appearance of his beloved daddy. George kissed him good morning.

“Come on, sonny; you and I will make the tea this morning. Got some firewood?”

This was delightful ; a treat almost beyond belief.

"Yes, Daddy, plenty. I cut it last night when you were on the steamer. Topsy had gone somewhere. I don't know where."

Monday had always spoken of his mother by her name, and George had never checked him. It made him feel somehow as if the boy were more completely his. H'm! That was another problem to be faced—but not just yet. For the present they were good friends, and that was all that mattered.

It was not till they were seated on the verandah at their modest morning meal that Monday showed any curiosity about his mother's absence.

"Where's Topsy, Daddy? I expect she's cross because you didn't take us on the steamer yesterday. Has she run away?"

Just for a moment George was horrified at the question, with its so obviously native outlook on women and its shrewd knowledge of their ways. But it was no good feeling like that. The boy was what he was ; and, after all, it was better that he should not feel any need of a mother who could so light-heartedly desert him. In any case he must know the truth.

"Yes, sonny, she has. She was tired of you and me and has gone away to Omba, where she came from. I dare say we shall manage to get on all right, we two."

“ Oh, Daddy, tell me all about it. How did she go ? ”

And that was all. Just curiosity like a native's, like Topsy's ; just eagerness to hear a tale ! Would he have been equally delighted to have heard of his father's departure in a stolen boat ? George's heart, which, after the struggle of the night, had been feeling so curiously light, grew suddenly heavy. In truth he had not finished yet. The worst part of the battle was to come.

He was fortunately spared for the present the necessity of replying to the boy's eager questions, for the sound of footsteps on the coral path made them both start and look up. A young native boy was approaching the house and, on seeing the two on the verandah, came hurrying up and addressed George volubly in French.

It was one of Père Douceret's Mission boys, sent by the old priest to ask the “ monsieur ” at Lehili to do him the favour of a visit.

George was glad both of the interruption and of the prospect of a talk with his old friend, whom he had badly neglected lately. He did not, however, like to leave Monday alone, so decided that they would all three go round by canoe. It would take little longer than walking and would be much more comfortable. Monday hailed the decision with delight. For many months he had not been out with his daddy in the canoe in which so many exciting fishing

trips used to be made when he was quite little. He and the Mission boy would sail the canoe ; Daddy could smoke his pipe and look out for turtles.

§II

It was more than a year since George had seen Père Douceret and he was immediately struck with the frail appearance of the old priest. He had had a slight stroke two years ago, not serious enough to make him relinquish his beloved Mission work, yet sufficient to make more difficult the carrying-on of his manifold activities. He could no longer walk, but that was easily got over. His carpentry pupils had fashioned him a kind of sedan-chair in which, carried by four of his willing helpers, he still visited daily each department of his still-growing domain. But during the last year he had aged enormously. He was still cheerful, but he looked inexpressibly weary, quite ready to lay down at last the arms which, in his own whimsical fashion, he had borne during the heat and the burden of so many lonely days.

He had seen the canoe coming through the pass and had had himself carried down to the shore to welcome his visitor. Monday was sent off to play with the other lads and George walked up beside the old man's chair to the kiosk where, four years ago, he had listened to

that sound advice which, had he followed it, would have saved him so many days and nights of bitter anguish.

As soon as his visitor was seated and provided with refreshment, the preparation of which had now—alas!—to be left to other less-skilled hands, Père Douceret explained the reason of his summons.

“George, you are a bad lot! You neglect your friends.”

George smiled a little bitterly. He was certainly guilty with regard to this old friend; but what others? What friends had he? The old man guessed his thoughts.

“I know what that smile means. Ah, but it is not right, my son. The good God sends us few friends; we ought to cherish them. What of your friend John Trevor? By this steamer I get a letter from him, written in such good French too, asking if you are dead. What do you mean by it, George? Poor Mr. John Trevor, who loves you so well!”

George blushed. Yes, it was quite true. He had not written for three years. He hastened to excuse himself.

“Yes, Father; I am very sorry. You know, though, that for the last three years I have been as good as dead. What, then, was the use of writing? But I will write by next steamer. Something has happened, and to-day I feel more like myself.”

Briefly he told the priest the story of his

encounter with Macdonald on the *Tulagi*, of the sudden shock that had roused him from his lethargy and plunged him into such an abyss of remorse, finally of Topsy's flight.

Père Douceret listened sympathetically. When the tale was told, he leaned forward and took George's hand in his frail grasp. Then he spoke solemnly.

"My son, the ways of the good God are sometimes hard, but always wonderful. You have been very rebellious, very certain of yourself. He has had to bring you very low, but He has been very good to you. No, my son,"—the old man raised his hand to check the protest that he divined—"do not tell me how you have suffered. I know. I know, too, that a great deal of that suffering you have well deserved. I must speak hardly now, for, George, I love you as my own son and I feel that we shall never meet again. You told me four years ago that you felt mean at escaping without punishment for your folly. I told you then that you could not escape. Be logical. Don't grumble at receiving what you asked for. I won't give you any more advice. I am too near the grave now to try and interfere with the plans of the good God. Trust Him, George, and be true to your best self."

A long silence followed. Then the old man resumed in lighter tone.

"George, you must be careful about that old heathen Maggi. I have lived thirty years

among these people and I know that such a thing as the loss of their boat will anger him dreadfully. He is a terrible old man."

George laughed, glad of the change of subject.

"But, Father, I did not steal their boat. Why should old Maggi have any grudge against me?"

"No, George, but your woman and your servant did. And Maggi will hold you responsible. Be careful. Don't leave your house open at night. And go armed if you have to pass through Putokai. You know what we say in French: *Un homme averti en vaut deux.*"

"All right, Father. I'll look after myself."

Again the two men sat silent. To-day it seemed to George that there was less sympathy between them than in the past. Perhaps it was that the old man was really so near the end that he could no longer enter into the feelings of less spiritually minded folk. He did not want to go; he felt that Père Douceret still had something to say, but that the words were difficult to find. How peaceful the old priest looked, with his bright, kindly eyes and long white beard. What secret had he by which to live in such an exile with so much quiet enjoyment? From the gentle face of his old friend his gaze wandered round the kiosk to the open door. Just outside he could see a group of native lads, children of the Mission, husking coconuts, squatting, native fashion, on their

heels, and Monday with them. At that distance there was nothing to distinguish his son from those others, sons of such creatures as had howled and danced round him last night. Attitude, colour, features even, seemed all the same. And was there really any difference in mentality, to judge from that episode on the verandah? Four years ago George would have been wildly indignant if anyone had suggested that his boy could ever get to look like that. And now?

Once more Père Douceret seemed to have read the younger man's bitter thoughts. He broke the silence.

"My son, you have a hard road to tread yet. But something tells me that it will not be for long. I said I would not give you advice; but one thing I must say. George, you must leave the Islands, as soon as ever you can, and never, never return. I have never liked to speak to you of this before, because the subject is one that I would not think about myself. I, too, have lived a lonely life. Before you came to Lehili I didn't see a white man more than once a year. But now my time is so nearly over that I am no longer afraid."

The old man paused, as if in doubt whether after all he should reveal himself. His manner was so impressive that George, in spite of his own tormenting thoughts, was interested.

"Go on, Father."

Père Douceret passed a thin hand over his

eyes as though he would dispel a mist, then continued, speaking slowly :

“ George, we have sometimes talked about what are called occult influences ; and I have often laughed at what I used to call your superstition. Well, perhaps you will be surprised to hear that I laughed only through fear, because I would not admit to myself what I knew to be true. And that is why I tell you that you must leave the Islands.”

“ But what do you know to be true, Father ? ”

George spoke a little impatiently. He, too, felt that this was one of the things he would rather not discuss just then.

“ Oh, nothing very definite, my son. Only that I am quite, quite certain that there is some sort of emanation of evil from these savages at certain times, and that people of a receptive, sympathetic nature—people like you and me, George—are very liable to be aversely affected by it.”

George was honestly surprised. This had been one of his own pet theories and the one, above all others, that Père Douceret had scoffed at in the past.

“ But, Father . . . ”

The old man raised his hand with a sad smile.

“ Yes, my son. *Confiteor. Mea maxima culpa.* But what would you, George ? Even a priest is human, you know. And if I had ever allowed myself to confess openly that I believed in such madness . . . Well, you can

guess what might have happened. Sometimes at night, George, when I heard those dreadful tom-toms in that dark, evil bush, when I knew that these semi-human animals were giving rein to all the bestiality that is dormant in them, I have been driven from my bed to my little chapel and have passed the night there before the Sacrament. There only could I feel safe. I have fought with myself, George, to try and dispel my dreadful certainty. But it is hard to be quite sane when one is quite alone. You know that too, my son. And you have not the refuge that our Church offers . . . Yes ; you must go from these Islands."

Père Douceret stopped, evidently tired with the unaccustomed effort of long talking, and George rose to take his leave.

"Well, Father, you've been saying something that I would rather not discuss to-day. But I will come and have a talk with you another time."

"No, George ; this is our last talk. Tomorrow the mission schooner will come, bringing my successor, and I go down to our headquarters in Pango to make my end. It will not be long, and it will be very, very welcome. Good-bye, my son. May the good God protect you against all evil. Just one last word : remember that salvation comes through sacrifice ; only through sacrifice. Good-bye."

IV. *Sacrifice*

SI

GEORGE was sitting at the rough deal table before the open window, smoking, gazing out into the dark bush behind the little house at Lehili. The door on to the verandah was wide open too, with the vain purpose of catching a chance draught that might make the stifling steaminness more bearable, if only for a moment. But to-night there was no vestige of breeze from either hills or sea. The galvanised iron roof, which, during the day, would have been impossible to touch, seemed to have conserved its fiery heat, sending down wave after wave of hot air that beat upon his head and caused the sweat to run in streams from his gaunt face.

As far as he could judge it was well past midnight. The moon, between first quarter and full, had sunk into the still, oily sea, leaving a blackness that the stars seemed powerless to lighten, an all-enveloping, impermeable cloud.

He had been trying to read, but the heat of the unshaded lamp and a swarm of mosquitoes and gigantic moths attracted by the light had made it impossible. He preferred even the darkness and his own thoughts to that intolerable, never-ceasing pest. Mosquitoes he had grown accustomed to, but he had never been able to overcome his repugnance to those great

velvety black moths. They seemed, in some nasty subtle way, to personify the spirit of the dark, mysterious bush from whence they came. And their death, when they dropped, singed and stinking, around the lamp, was as horrible as their life ; for, immediately one fell, a waiting train of cruel soldier-ants would seize upon the still-struggling body, dismember it and bear off the fragments in triumphant proof of Nature's inexorable law.

Inside the room now the only sound came from the corner where sleeping Monday tossed and moaned under the mosquito-net. Before he had been obliged to put out the lamp, George had turned from time to time to watch his child lying there, naked, his small hands clenched and unclenched in unconscious anger at the tormenting heat. The picture was still vivid before his eyes, as he sat peering out into the dark home of Nature's mysteries and savage man's primeval horrors. It was there that his child belonged. For months now, even on his numbed mind and alcohol-dulled sensibility, the realisation had been slowly and relentlessly impressed. The baby prettiness was long since lost ; the hair was growing coarser, showing a tendency to kink ; the nose, at first an amusing infant's shapeless pug, was fast developing into a negroid horror with wide-gaping nostrils ; even the eyes, though bright and intelligent as yet, had already the unmistakable Kanaka slant. George closed his own in horror,

trying vainly to shut out the sight or what a few years must inevitably bring.

And there was no escape from the dilemma. Either he must stay on here to sink to his son's level, to infinitely worse, to depths of which last night the horror had sprung suddenly upon him, to the full consciousness of advancing madness; or—Sydney, Auckland, Nouméa, tied to a thing like Callonne, the scorn of his own race. Père Douceret had said that he must save himself by sacrifice. But how? It was easy for an old man so near to death to talk like that. What sacrifice could he make? True, he might kill himself and leave Monday to the care of the Lescault family, only too anxious to get back the child that he had first given and then so rudely snatched away.

But no; George could not face the thought of self-inflicted death. Tired as he was, physically and mentally weary, his mind revolted from the thought of such a fate to his body. He saw it all too clearly, how he would lie there a prey, the moment after death, to those ferocious ants until the loathlier crabs should scent him out and scramble, rustling and obscene, to their foul, ghoulish task. It was unthinkable. And if he gave up his child once again to Lescault and went away, he knew too well that never for a moment would he have peace from a remorse that was far worse than death. Oh God! Oh hell! What could he do?

He was dead tired now and longing for sleep.

Last night he had only had a few minutes' troubled rest, and such an awakening. All day, too, he had not touched whisky and his tired nerves craved with a fierce aching for their accustomed stimulant and dope. He would have just one drink and then turn in and trust to luck. Oh, curse it! He remembered suddenly. There was no whisky. This morning he had laughed when he had got back from Liro and found his three cases gone. On the sand where they had been left by the lazy crew of the *Tulagi's* launch the marks of naked feet showed plainly enough who were the thieves. Monday had even tracked the footprints to the path behind the house, the bush-road that led to Putokai. It was his own fault for going away and leaving such a prize unprotected on the beach. He had even felt glad then that temptation had been so irretrievably removed and had smiled at the thought that the old one-eyed chief had wasted no time in beginning to exact payment for the loss of his boat. But now he would have given all he owned for just one gulp of fiery spirit and the ensuing calm.

He got up angrily and hunted in the packing-cases that served as cupboard, well knowing that he had drained the last bottle over a week ago, unable to refuse the fruitless search. No; not a drop! He sat down again, panting and sweating from the effort. Oh, how he loathed those monstrous brutes! And, hark! There was their wretched tom-tom beginning now.

Doubtless they had already drunk the last drop of the stolen whisky and were worked up to the right pitch for their ferocious dance.

Involuntarily there came to him the remembrance of the confession of Père Douceret. Evil abroad when in the dark, whispering bush those grim, gruesome rites were celebrated? Of course there was. Did he not know it? Had he not lain awake on many such sweltering nights as this and fought against the intolerable urge to rise and commit some savage, bestial act? Evil? The place reeked of it. He could feel it, smell it, touch it now. And this is Lotos-land! He laughed aloud as he thought of the fatuity of his young man's dreams. And not so long ago—when was it? twenty years? a lifetime?—he had still talked like that. Again he laughed, loud and bitterly.

And all the time through the still, stifling night came that insistent booming. Every now and then it was punctuated by raucous, inhuman yells that told of the completion of a stage, some culminating point in the unholy orgy: the clubbing of the victim; his dismemberment; the giving of his still warm and palpitating heart to the Chief's son; the lighting of the fires.

George shuddered and laid aside his pipe. Presently the distant, monotonous drumming began to fade. A light breeze had sprung up from the west and was carrying the sound inland. The palms began to rustle their long

leaves against the iron of the roof. Once more he could hear the breaking of the long rollers on the reef, the soft splash of rippling waves. The house was cooler now. He would try and sleep.

§II

His scream of terror was ringing in his ears as he awoke, his heart was thumping furiously, his whole body ran with sweat. Oh God! Where am I? Has it gone? Ah! now he was awake. One outstretched hand touched the mosquito-net, the other the warm body of his sleeping child. The wild galloping of his heart died gradually down; the sweating ceased. Still shaking with the horror of his dream, he turned and looked round the room. The dawn was nearly come. A dim grey light was faintly visible against the door and—but God! was he awake, or dead, or mad? Framed in the open window there! A grinning, leering face! Two black misshapen hands, and something that glittered in the coming dawn! Vainly he strove to rise, battling against his paralysing fear, then rushed the consciousness that this was human evil; a blinding flash, a loud report, a stinging stab of red-hot agony, a child's scream in his ear—and consciousness was gone.

§III

For some minutes after George recovered from his swoon he lay still, feebly grasping

at reality. His head ached vilely; his first attempt to move brought with it tearing pain that made him close his eyes again in agony.

When he reopened them he noticed that it was broad daylight. Turning his head painfully he could see that his pyjama jacket was drenched with blood. He moved his hand, his forearm, then his whole arm, and found that save for a stabbing pain in the right shoulder he was all right. No bones broken, but he felt deadly weak, and something was pressing on his legs, preventing him from moving. Craning his neck, he peered down curiously to see what the obstruction was; and, in a second, heedless of the pain, he was sitting up. Across his knees lay Monday, face downwards, his hands gripping the mosquito-net.

* * * * *

His heart was beating still. George turned him carefully and laid him down free of his own legs, then, kneeling, began his examination. A gaping, puckered wound above the left hip, from which the blood was slowly oozing, showed plainly where the bullet had entered. Slipping his hand cautiously behind, he felt a hard lump in the child's leg, just below the buttock. Ah, there it was. The fiends! He turned his eyes wildly to the window, thinking out the deed. The bullet, meant for him, had only touched his shoulder as he rose, and passing on had completed its foul work on this poor innocent little body.

Stifling his rage and his mad longing to fall weeping on his wounded child, he clenched his teeth and turned again to the unconscious boy. His first fears were only too well founded. The wound was serious and, far from the possibility of aid—he *had* to think the words, against his will—probably fatal. The bowel must be pierced; experience told him with relentless certainty what must be the result of that.

His mind was working better now, although his head was swimming and each movement gave him pain. What did that matter? He shuddered as he recalled his thoughts of a few hours ago. Once more, if only for a few agonising hours, this was his child that he had worshipped, that he still loved with all the savage longing of his starved heart. And with returning love came grim determination to do at least his best. Once before he had snatched his boy from Death. Why not again? But this was surgeon's work, and even if he dared, he had no instruments, no chloroform, no help . . . Oh, what a hopeless fool! Why hadn't he thought of that at once? Macdonald—Burumba—at least a hope! Of course! in the canoe! A risky voyage, and long, but better than a ghastly waiting here for certain death.

First he must dress the wound. He pulled aside the mosquito-net and rolled it up to give free room. Then across to his medicine-chest in the far corner, staggering as he went, the

whole house whirling round. He must have lost a lot of blood himself; and his shoulder hurt most damnably. Never mind that for the present. He would do his job. Yes; everything was there: hypodermic syringe, probes, alcohol, gauze and bandages. Swiftly he made his preparations, holding his mind forcibly to the thought that this was just a case, that there was hope, though faint, if he could keep going.

Only when all was ready did he trust himself to turn once more to the bed on which his patient lay. The boy was conscious again, his staring, fear-filled eyes fixed on his father, his lips moving. Gently George bent over him and stroked his burning forehead, until with joy he saw the terror fade away and trust return.

"Daddy, what is it? Daddy!" A scream of agony broke from him as he tried to move.

"Never mind, sonny. Don't try and move. You're very sick, and Daddy's going to make you better. Just lie quite still and don't be frightened."

The effort of this speech came very near to making him break down. Hastily he turned from the bed and seized his syringe. Thank God, he could at least give merciful deliverance to that poor stricken mite.

After the injection Monday lay very still, but, in spite of the certainty that the dope had done its work, the cleansing and bandaging of the wound was awful work for George. The

child's eyes, fixed on his, no longer held the look of trust which would have made his task less dreadful; but, in its stead had come a frightened, savage helplessness which he had seen so many times before in tending natives, the primitive distrust of white man's medicine, the readiness to die.

At last the dressing was finished, and George raised himself from the floor with a sigh of thankfulness. Now for the next step. He tried an investigation of his own wound, but his jacket was tight glued to it by congealed blood and he dared not risk fresh hæmorrhage. It would do like that. They might be a long time on the journey, so he mixed a bottle of condensed milk and water for the boy. That, with a coconut for his own thirst, would do. Then loading himself with blankets and pillow, he hastened down to the shore. The work of pulling the canoe to the water's edge caused him excruciating pain in his shoulder and set his head swimming in most unpleasant fashion, but he would be able to rest on board. The wind was fair for Burumba and, once through the reef, the sail would do the rest. When he got back to the house, he found that the morphine had completed its beneficent work and Monday was sleeping soundly. So much the better. Taking the little child carefully in his arms, he carried him gently down, and laid him tenderly in the bows of their frail craft. Then, setting his teeth, he pulled until, wading knee-

deep, he knew that she would float with his weight on board and he could scramble carefully in.

§IV

The struggle, stroke by stroke, for the passage, against the stiff breeze and incoming tide, tried George to the last ounce of endurance. Time and time again, during the ten minutes that it took him to cross the lagoon, he felt that the next stroke must be his last; he could not hold out for one more against that sickening pain, that awful giddiness. But, each time that his bent head went wearily, mechanically up, his eyes fell on the outstretched, helpless body of his wounded boy, and courage came again. One last despairing effort at the reef and they were through, out in the open sea, sail hoisted, heading straight for Burumba and help.

He reckoned that, if the breeze held, he could make the hospital in about four hours. But it was going to be ticklish work. There was far more sea outside than he liked; the canoe was none too seaworthy, and it was an awful job with the paddle to keep her up to the wind. His shoulder, too, was throbbing violently. The strain must have reopened the wound, for a warm stream of blood was running down his arm, leaving a track of crimson in its wake, bringing from near and far the great grey following sharks. He wondered grimly how

long he could hold on, shuddering at what would be their fate should they capsize.

An hour passed like that. He felt that he was growing weaker, scarcely able to exert the necessary pressure on the paddle ; but he was not going to give in. They were in the tide-rip now which ran strongly between Uma and Tasiko, and in spite of all his efforts they were shipping water fast. Monday was lying in a pool of it ; he had not moved, so probably the narcotic still held him in its kindly power.

But things were growing desperate. Each splashing wave that came over added to their load and made the work easier for the next. He dared not leave the paddle for fear that the canoe should broach to and, as she surely would, capsize. He shifted his position from the board nailed thwartwise on which he was seated and moved as far back as he could, to bring the water aft away from Monday. That was better, but still they had a nasty stretch of that broken sea to cross.

Would they do it ? or would those ravenous brutes, growing each moment more audacious have their meal ? He raised his eyes to scan the distant coast of Tasiko, trying to calculate the distance. It was a long way yet and there were white-caps everywhere. Well, it couldn't be helped ; he would have done his best. But, hullo ! what was that ? His gaze fixed on the far hills had missed that white lump not a mile away. A boat ? Yes ; he could see the splash

of foam before its bows. No sail, or he would have seen it long ago. And, judging from the white foam, it was moving fast towards them ! He scarcely dared allow himself the thought for fear of bitter disappointment, but reason told him what that boat must be. A launch, Mac's great white speedy launch, coming to save them !

The reaction was too violent. His head dropped suddenly ; the paddle slipping from his nerveless grasp, went scurrying away behind. He crumpled forward in an inert mass. But only for a moment. Even as he fell the sheet tearing through his hand roused him to the knowledge that he must bestir himself or now, with safety speeding to them, they would be lost. He raised himself and saw that the canoe, broadside to the waves, was swamping rapidly. A wild glance out to sea showed him their deliverer leaping over the intervening space. Mac must have seen that there was a craft in difficulties and was coming " all out " to their rescue. But could he reach them in time ?

He crept forward and lowered the flapping sail, then with a careful heave raised Monday and laid him with his head and shoulders jammed in the narrow prow so that only the boy's legs were covered by the invading sea.

But they were filling fast ; each wave now lessened their chance of floating till the launch arrived. She could not reach them for some minutes yet ; and in one, or less, almost at

once, they must sink, to be seized and torn by that rapacious horde. Without his weight the canoe could still float easily till help arrived; his child, at least, be saved. There was only one thing to do. He did it. And as he left the side and struck out savagely but hopelessly for the onrushing launch, Père Douceret's words sang in his mind like a refrain: "Salvation . . . sacrifice."

THE END