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# THE TAPU OF BANDERAH

By Louis Becke

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**I ~ THE "STARLIGHT"**

As the rising sun had just begun to pierce the misty tropic haze of early dawn, a small, white-painted schooner of ninety or a hundred tons burden was bearing down upon the low, densely-wooded island of Mayou, which lies between the coast of south-east New Guinea and the murderous Solomon Group—the grave of the white man in Melanesia.

The white population of Mayou was not large, for it consisted only of an English missionary and his wife—who was, of course, a white woman—a German trader named Peter Schwartzkoff and his native wife; an English trader named Charlie Blount, with his two half-caste sons and daughters; and an American trader and ex-whaler, named Nathaniel Burrowes, with his wives.

Although the island is of large extent, and of amazing fertility, the native population was at this time comparatively small, numbering only some three thousand souls. They nearly all lived at the south-west end of the island, the rendezvous of the few trading ships that visited the place. Occasionally a surveying vessel, and, at longer intervals still, a labour-recruiting ship from Hawaii or Fiji, would call. At such times the monotony of the lives of the white residents of Mayou was pleasantly broken. Once a year, too, a missionary vessel would drop anchor in the little reef-bound port, but her visit was of moment only to the Rev. Mr. Deighton, his wife, and their native converts, and the mission ship's presence in the harbour was taken no notice of by the three white traders; for a missionary ship is not always regarded by the average trader in the South Seas as a welcome visitor.

Almost with the rising of the sun the vessel had been sighted from the shore by a party of natives, who were fishing off the south end of the island, and in a few minutes their loud cries reached other natives on shore, and by them was passed on from house to house along the beach till it reached the town itself. From there, presently, came a deep sonorous shout, "*Evaka! Evaka!*" ("A ship! A ship!"), and then they swarmed out of their thatched dwellings like bees from a hive and ran, laughing and shouting together, down to the beach in front of the village.

As the clamour increased, the Rev. Wilfrid Deighton opened the door of his study and stepped out upon the shady verandah of the mission house, which stood upon a gentle, palm-covered rise about five hundred yards from the thickly clustering houses of the native village. He was a tall, thin man with a scanty brown beard, and his face wore a wearied, anxious expression. His long, lean body, coarse, toil-worn hands, and shabby clothing indicated, too, that the lines of the Rev. Wilfrid had not been cast in a pleasant place when he chose the wild, unhealthy island of Mayou as the field of his labours. But if he showed bodily traces of the hard, continuous toil he had undergone during the seven years' residence among the people of Mayou, his eye was still full of the fire of that noble missionary spirit which animated the souls of such earnest men as Moffat and Livingstone, and Williams of Erromanga, and Gordon of Khartoum. For he was an enthusiast, who believed in his work; and so did his wife, a pretty, faded little woman of thirty, with a great yearning to save souls, though at times she longed to return to the comforts and good dinners of semi-civilisation in other island groups nearer the outside world she had been away from so long.

The missionary stepped out on the verandah, and shaded his eyes from the glare with his rough, sun-tanned hands, as he looked seaward at the advancing vessel. Soon his wife followed him and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"What is it, Wilfrid? Surely not the *John Hunt*. She is not due for months yet."

"Not her, certainly, Alice," he answered, "and not a trading vessel either, I should think. She looks more like a yacht. Perhaps she may be a new man-of-war schooner. However, we will soon see. Put on your hat, my dear, and let us go down to the beach. Already Blount, Schwartzkoff, and Burrowes have gone; and it certainly would not do for me to remain in the background when the newcomers land."

Mrs. Deighton, her pale face flushing with gentle excitement at the prospect of meeting Europeans, quickly retired to her room, and making a rapid toilette, rejoined her husband, who, white umbrella in hand, awaited her at the gate.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said the reverend gentleman, a few minutes later, as, accompanied by Mrs. Deighton, he joined the three white traders, "what vessel is it? Have you any idea?"

"None at all," answered Blount, with a short nod to Mr. Deighton, but lifting his leaf hat to his wife, "we were just wondering ourselves. Doesn't look like a trader—more like a gunboat."

Meantime the schooner had worked her way in through the passage, and, surrounded by a fleet of canoes, soon brought up and anchored. Her sails were very quickly handled, then almost as soon as she swung to her anchor a smart, white-painted boat was lowered, and the people on shore saw the crew haul her up to the gangway ladder.

Presently a white man, who, by his dress, was an officer of the ship, followed by another person in a light tweed suit and straw hat, entered the boat, which then pushed off and was headed for the shore. As she approached nearer, the traders and the missionary could see that the crew were light-skinned Polynesians, dressed in blue cotton jumpers, white duck pants, and straw hats. The officer—who steered with a steer-oar—wore a brass-bound cap and brass-buttoned jacket, and every now and then turned to speak to the man in the tweed suit, who sat smoking a cigar beside him.

"By jingo! she's a yacht, I believe," said Charlie Blount, who had been keenly watching the approaching boat; "I'm off. I don't want to be bothered with people of that sort—glorified London drapers, who ask 'Have you—ah—got good shooting heah?'"

Then turning on his heel, he raised his hat to Mrs. Deighton, nodded to the other white men, and sauntered along the beach to his house.

"I guess Blount's kinder set again meetin' people like these," said Burrowes, nodding in the direction of the boat and addressing himself to Mr. and Mrs. Deighton. "Reckon they might be some all-powerful British swells he knew when he was one himself. Guess they won't scare *me* a cent's worth."

"Id was brober dadt he should veel so," remarked the German; "if some Yerman shentle-mans vas to come here und zee me dresd like vom dirty sailor mans, den I too vould get me home to mein house und say

nodings."

"My friends," said Mr. Deighton, speaking reproachfully, yet secretly pleased at Blount's departure, "no man need feel ashamed at meeting his countrymen on account of the poverty of his attire; I am sure that the sight of an English gentleman is a very welcome one to me and Mrs. Deighton."

"Wal," said Burrowes with easy but not offensive familiarity, "I guess, parson, thet you and Mrs. Deighton hed better form yourselves inter a committee of welcome, and tell them so; I ain't much in the polite speechifying line myself, neither is 'Schneider' here," nodding at the German, "and you can sling in somethin' ornymental 'bout me bein' the representative of the United States—a gentleman a-recrootin' of his health in the South Sea Islands doorin' a perlitercal crisis in Washington."

By this time the boat had run her bows up on to the white, sandy beach, and the straw-hatted, tweed-suited gentleman jumped lightly out Taking off his hat with a graceful, circular sweep, which included every one on the beach, white and native, he said with languid politeness—

"Good-day, gentlemen; I scarcely hoped to have the pleasure of meeting Europeans at this place—and certainly never imagined that pleasure would be enhanced by the presence of a lady," he added as he caught sight of Mrs. Deighton standing apart some little distance from the others.

"I am pleased to meet you, sir," said the missionary, constituting himself spokesman for the others; "you are welcome, sir, very welcome to Mayou, and to anything that it lies in our power to furnish you with for your—schooner, or should I say yacht, for such, by her handsome appearance, I presume she is."

The visitor, who was a handsome, fair-haired man, with a blonde moustache and blue eyes, bowed his thanks, and then said, "May I have the honour to introduce myself. My name is De Vere."

"And I am the Rev. Wilfrid Deighton, missionary in charge of this island. My two——" (here he hesitated a moment before the next word) "friends are Mr. Peter Schwartzkoff and Mr. Nathaniel Burrowes."

"Delighted to meet you," said Mr. de Vere, bowing politely to the lady, but extending a white, shapely hand to the men; "and now I must tell you that I shall be very glad to avail myself, Mr. Deighton, of your kind offer. We are in want of water, and anything in the way of vegetables, etcetera, that we can get. We intend, however, to stay here a few days and refit. Having been in very bad weather coming through the southern part of the Solomon Group we must effect repairs."

"Might I inquire, mister," asked Burrowes, "ef your vessel is a trader, or jest a pleasure schooner, as the parson here says?"

"Mr. Deighton is quite correct," said Mr. de Vere, with another graceful bow; "the *Starlight* is a yacht I can quite understand your not being able to make her out She was originally built for the navy as a gunboat, but was sold in Sydney, after some years' service. I bought her and had her altered into a yacht to cruise about these delightful and beautiful South Sea Islands. My friend, the Honourable John Morcombe-Lycett, accompanies me. Our English yachting experience had much to do with our determination to make a cruise down here. In fact," and here Mr. de Vere showed his white, even teeth in a smile, and stroked his drooping blonde moustache, "we left London with the intention of chartering a vessel in Sydney for a cruise among the islands. Mr. Morcombe-Lycett is, however, very unwell to-day, and so has not landed, but here am I; and I am very happy indeed to make your acquaintance."

Then, turning towards the boat, he called out to the officer who had brought him, "Come ashore for me at dinner-time, Captain Sykes."

## II ~ A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

A few hours later Mr. de Vere was on very friendly terms with Mr. and Mrs. Deighton, who had carried him off to the mission house, after the boat returned to the schooner. Before he accompanied them, however, he told Messrs. Burrowes and Schwartzkoff, as he shook hands, that he would not fail to visit them later on in the day at their respective houses. And both Peter, and the American, who on any other occasion would have been justly indignant at any white visitor not a missionary himself foregoing, even for a short time, the pleasure of their society for that of a "blarsted missionary," shook hands with him most vigorously, and said they would be proud to see him. Then they hurried off homewards.

Peter's house and trading station lay midway between that of Charlie Blount and the American's, but instead of making for his own place, Peter, to the surprise of Blount, who was now standing at his door watching them, went inside Burrowes' house.

"That's d——d curious, now," said Blount, in English, to one of his half-caste daughters, a girl of eighteen; "those two fellows hate each other like poison. I've never known the Dutchman go into the Yankee's house, or the Yankee go into his, for the past two years, and here they are now as thick as thieves! I wonder what infernal roguery they are up to?"

Charlie Blount's amazement was perfectly natural, The German and American did dislike each other most intensely. Neither of them had lived so long on Mayou as Blount, but each was trying hard to work the other man off the island by accusing him to the natives of cheating them. As a matter of fact they were both scoundrels, but Banderah, the chief of Mayou, who was fond of white men, managed to keep a hollow peace between them. *He* was perfectly well aware that both of them cheated himself and his people, but as long as their cheating was practised moderately he did not mind. In Blount, however, he had the fullest confidence, and this good feeling was shared with him by every native on the island.

Perhaps, had Blount been a witness of what occurred when the boat landed, his suspicion of his fellow-traders' honesty would have been considerably augmented. For while the missionary and Mr. de Vere were

bandying compliments, the German and American were exchanging signs with the officer who was in charge of the boat, and whom De Vere addressed as "Captain Sykes." The American, indeed, had started down the beach to speak to him, when Mr. de Vere called out to him to return to the ship, and Captain Sykes, with a gesture signifying that he would see Burrowes later on, swung round the boat's head and gave the word to his Kanaka crew to give way. As if quite satisfied with this dumb promise, the American returned to the group he had just left, and then the moment the missionary, Mrs. Deighton, and De Vere had gone, he and the German started off together.

The moment they entered the American's house, Burrowes sat down on the table and the German on a gin case.

"Wal, Dutchy," said Burrowes, looking keenly at his companion, "I reckon you know who the almighty swell in the brass-bound suit is, hey?"

"Yaw," replied Schwartzkoff, "it is Bilker, und I thought he was in brison for ten years mit."

"Wal, that's true enough that he did get ten years. But that's six years ago, an' I reckon they've let him out. Public feelin' in Australia agin nigger catchin' ain't very strong; an' I reckon he's got out after doin' five or six years."

"Dot is so," asserted the German; and then he leaned forward, "but vat vas he doing here in dis fine, swell schooner mit?"

"That's jest what you and me is goin' to find out, Dutchy. An' I guess that you an' me *can* find out darned easy. Bilker ain't going to fool *me*; if he's on to anything good, I guess I'm going to have a cut in."

"Veil, ve see by und by, ven he comes ashore. Von ding, I dells you, mine friend. Dot fine shentleman don't know vat you und me knows about Captain Bilker."

The American gave an affirmative wink, and then going to a rude cupboard he took out a bottle of gin and a couple of tin mugs.

"Look hyar, Peter, I guess you and me's goin' to do some business together over this schooner, so let's make friends."

"I vas agreeable," said the German with alacrity, rising from his seat and accepting the peace-offering. He nodded to Burrowes and tossed it off.

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By lunch-time Mr. Morcombe-Lycett had been brought ashore and had accepted Mr. Deighton's invitation to remain for the night. He was a well-dressed, good-looking man of about thirty-five, and was, so Mr. Deighton sympathisingly announced to his wife, suffering from a touch of malarial fever, which a little quinine and nursing would soon put right. Mr. Deighton himself, by the way, was suffering from the same complaint.

At noon, as Charlie Blount was walking past Burrowes' house, he was surprised to see that the German was still there. He was about to pass on—for although on fairly friendly terms with the two men, he did not care for either of them sufficiently well to enter their houses often, although they did his—when the American came to the door and asked him to come in and take a nip.

"Are you going to board the schooner?" asked Burrowes, as Blount came in and sat down.

"No, I'm going down to Lak-a-lak. I've got some natives cutting timber for me there, and thought I would just walk along the beach and see how they are getting on. Besides that, my little girl Nellie is there with her uncle."

"Why," said Burrowes, with genuine surprise, "won't you go aboard and see if they have any provisions to sell? I heard you say the other day that you had quite run out of tinned meats and nearly out of coffee."

"So I have; but I don't care about going on board for all that." Then looking the two men straight in the face, he drank off the gin, set the mug down on the table, and resumed, "I saw by my glass that that damned, cut-throat blackbirder, Bilker, is her skipper. That's enough for me. I heard that the infernal scoundrel got ten years in gaol. Sorry he wasn't hanged."

"Vy," said the German, whose face was considerably flushed by the liquor he had been drinking, "you vas in der plackpird drade yourselves von dime."

"So I was, Peter," said Blount quietly, "but *we* did the thing honestly, fairly and squarely. I, and those with me, when I was in the labour trade, never stole a nigger, nor killed one. This fellow Bilker was a disgrace to every white man in the trade. He is a notorious, cold-blooded murderer."

The conversation fell a bit flat after this, for Mr. Burrowes and Mr. Schwartzkoff began to feel uncomfortable. Six or seven years before, although then unknown to each other and living on different islands, they each had had business relations with Captain Bilker in the matter of supplying him with "cargo" during his cruises for "blackbirds," and each of them had so carried on the trade that both were ultimately compelled to leave the scene of their operations with great haste, and take up their residence elsewhere, particularly as the commander of the cruiser which arrested Captain Bilker expressed a strong desire to make their acquaintance and let them keep him company to the gallows.

"Wal," resumed the American, "I guess every man hez got his own opinions on such things. I hev mine—Why, here's Mr. de Vere. Walk right in, sir, an' set down; and Mister Deighton, too. Howdy do, parson? I'm real glad to see you."

The moment the visitors entered Blount rose to go, but the missionary, with good-natured, blundering persistency, pressed him back, holding his hand the while.

"Mr. de Vere, this is Mr. Blount, a most excellent man, I do assure you."

"How do you do?" said Blount, taking the smiling Englishman's hand in his, but quickly dropping it. There was something in De Vere's set smile and cold, watery-blue eyes that he positively resented, although he knew not why.

However, as the somewhat dull-minded Deighton seemed very anxious for him to stay and engage in "doing the polite" to his guest, Blount resumed his seat, but did so with restraint and impatience showing strongly in his sun-burnt, resolute face. For some ten minutes or so he remained, speaking only when he was spoken to;

and then he rose, and nodding a cool "good-day" to the handsome Mr. de Vere and the two traders, he strode to the door and walked out.

Before he was half-way from Burrowes' house to the mission station, he was overtaken by the Rev. Mr. Deighton.

"Mr. de Vere has gone on board again," he said in his slow, solemn way, "gone on board to get me some English papers. A most estimable and kind gentleman, Mr. Blount, an aristocrat to the backbone, but a gentleman, Mr. Blount, a gentleman above all. His visit has given me the most unalloyed——"

"He may be very kind," said Blount, "but my judgment has gone very much astray if he is what he represents himself to be."

"Mr. Blount!" and the missionary looked genuinely shocked. "You are very unjust, as well as very much in error. Mr. de Vere is a scion of one of the noblest of our many noble English families. He told me so himself."

"Ah, did he! That just confirms me in my opinion of him. Now, look here, Mr. Deighton," and his tone became slightly irritated, "I'm not surprised that this Mr. de Vere—who, whatever he is, is *not* a scion of any noble English family—should impose upon men like Burrowes and the German, but that he should impose on you does rather surprise me. And yet I don't know. It is always the way, or nearly always the way, that those whose education and intelligence should be a safeguard to them against imposture, are as often imposed upon as the ignorant and uncultured."

"Imposture, Mr. Blount! Do you mean to say——"

"I mean to say that this man De Vere with his flashy get-up and imposing name is *not* an English gentleman. He may deceive you and the men we have just left, but he doesn't deceive me. I once lived in England a long time ago, Mr. Deighton," here Blount turned his face away, and then added dreamily, "a long time, a very long time ago, and met some fairly decent people. And I no more believe that Mr. de Vere comes from a good family than I do that Nathaniel Burrowes, a low, broken-down New Orleans wharf-loafer, comes from one of the 'first families in Virginia' that American newspapers are always blathering about" "What is wrong with him, Mr. Blount?" "Nothing from your point of view—everything from mine. And, so far as I am concerned, I don't mean to have anything to do with these two English gentlemen and the yacht *Starlight*. Well, here we are at the mission. Good-day, Mr. Deighton; I'm going to Lak-a-lak to see how my timber-getters are doing." And with a kindly nod at the troubled missionary, the big, dark-faced trader strode along the beach alone.

### III ~ BANDERAH

Banderah, the supreme chief of Mayou, was, *vide* Mr. Deighton's report to his clerical superiors, "a man of much intelligence, favourably disposed to the spread of the Gospel, but, alas! of a worldly nature, and clinging for worldly reasons to the darkness." In other words, Banderah, although by no means averse to the poorer natives of the island adopting Christianity in a very free and modified form, and contributing a certain amount of their possessions to the missionary cause, was yet a heathen, and intended to remain one. For Mr. Deighton he had conceived a personal liking, mingled with a wondering and contemptuous pity. During an intertribal war he had received a bullet in his thigh, which the missionary had succeeded, after much difficulty, in extracting. Consequently, his gratitude was unlimited, and he evinced it in a very practical manner, by commanding some hundreds of his subjects to become Christians under pain of death. And, being aware that polygamy would not be tolerated by Mr. Deighton, he went a step further, and ordered all those of these forced converts who had more than one wife to send them to his own harem. This addition to his family duties, was, however, amply compensated for by the labour of the surplus wives proving useful to him on his yam and taro plantations.

In his younger days Banderah had once made a voyage to Sydney, in the service of a trading captain, one Lannigan, whose name, in those days, was a name to conjure with from one end of Melanesia to the other, and for whose valour as a fighter and killer of men Banderah had acquired a respect he could never entertain for a missionary. This captain, however, died in Sydney, full of years and strong drink, and left the chief almost broken-hearted, to return a year later to Mayou.

In his curious, semi-savage character there were some good points, and one was that in compliance with the oft-expressed wishes and earnest entreaties of Blount and Mr. Deighton, he had agreed to put down the last remnants of cannibalism which had lingered among the coast tribes on the island down to the time of this story. And although the older men, and some of the priests of the heathen faith, had struggled against his drastic legislation, they finally gave in when Mr. Deighton, weeping tears of honest joy at such a marvellous and wholesale conversion, presented each convert with a new print shirt and a highly coloured picture of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

An hour after Blount had walked along the beach to Lak-a-lak, Banderah saw the captain of the schooner come ashore and walk up the path to Nathaniel Burrowes' house, where he was warmly greeted by Burrowes and the German. He remained there for nearly an hour, and then came out again, and looking about him for a few moments, made direct for Banderah's house, which stood about three hundred yards back from that of the American trader.

When close to the chiefs house the captain of the *Starlight* raised his head, and Banderah caught sight of his features and recognised him.

"How are you, Bandy?" said the seaman, walking smartly up to the chief, who was sitting on a mat inside his doorway, surrounded by a part of his harem and family, "you haven't forgotten me, have you?"

"Oh, no, sir. I no forget you," said the native, civilly enough, but without warmth. "How are you, Cap'en Bilker?"

"Sh', don't call me that, Bandy. I'm Captain Sykes now."

"Yes?" and Banderah's face at once assumed an expression of the most hopeless stupidity. "All right, Cap'en Sike. Come inside an' sit down."

"Right, my boy," said Bilker genially, fumbling in his coat pocket, and producing a large flask of rum, "I've brought you a drink, Bandy; and I want to have a yarn with you."

"All right," and taking the flask from the captain's hand without deigning to look at it, he passed it on to one of his wives. "What you want talk me about, Cap'en? You want me to get you some native for work on plantation?" and he smiled slyly.

"No, no, Bandy. Nothing like that I don't run a labour ship now. I'm a big fellow gentleman now. I'm captain of that yacht."

The chief nodded, but said nothing. He knew Captain "Sykes" of old, and knew him to be an undoubted rascal. Indeed, about ten years before the cunning blackbirder captain had managed to take thirty of Banderah's people away in his ship without paying for them; and the moment the chief recognised the sailor he set his keen native brain to work to devise a plan for getting square with him. And he meant to take deadly vengeance.

"Banderah, old man," and the captain laid one hand on the chiefs naked knee, "I meant to pay you for those men when I came back next trip. But I was taken by a man-of-war," here Bilker crossed his wrists to signify that he had been handcuffed; "taken to Sydney, put me in calaboose—ten years."

"You lie," said Banderah quietly, but with a danger spark in his eye, "man-o'-war no make you fas' for a long time after you steal my men. Plenty people tell me you make two more voyage; then man-o'-war catch you an' make you fas'."

"Don't you believe 'em, Banderah," began the ex-blackbirder, when the chief interrupted him—

"What you do with my brother?" he said suddenly; "he die too, in Fiji?"

The white man's face paled. "I don't know, Banderah. I didn't know your brother was aboard when my mate put the hatches on. I thought he had gone ashore. I never meant to take him away to Fiji anyway."

"All right; never mind that. But what you want talk to me about?" And then, as if to put his visitor at his ease, he added, "You dam rogue, me dam rogue."

"Yes, yes," assented Captain Bilker cheerfully; "but look here now, Bandy, I'm not only going to pay you for those men I took, but give you a lot of money as well—any amount of money; make you a big, rich chief; big as Maafu Tonga.\*} But I want you to help me."

*\* Maafu of Tonga, the once dreaded rival of King Cacobau of Fiji. He died in 1877.*

"You speak me true?" inquired the chief.

"I swear it," answered the captain promptly, extending his hand, which, however, Banderah did not appear to see.

"All right," he said presently, after a silence of a few moments; then making a sign for his women and slaves to withdraw to the further end of the room, so that their muttered talk might not disturb the white man and himself, he lit his pipe and said, "Go on, tell me what you want me to do, Cap'en."

"Look," said the ex-blackbirder, laying a finger on the chiefs arm and speaking in a low voice, "these two white men on board the yacht have got any amount of money, gold, sovereigns—boxes and boxes of it They stole it; I know they stole it, although I didn't see them do it."

Banderah nodded his huge, frizzy head. "I savee. These two fellow rogue, all same you an' me."

"See, now, look here, Banderah. I mean to have that gold, and I want you to help me to get it. As soon as these men on board are dead I will give you a thousand golden sovereigns—five thousand dollar. Then I'll go away in the schooner. Now, listen, and I'll tell you how to do it. The Yankee and Peter are going to help."

Then Captain Bilker, *alias* Sykes, unfolded his plan as follows: Banderah was to entice De Vere and his friend some miles into the interior, where there was a large swamp covered with wild-fowl. Here they were to be clubbed by Banderah and his people, and the bodies thrown into the swamp. Then Bilker, accompanied by Schwartzkoff and Burrowes, were to go on board the schooner and settle the mate and the white steward.

"How much sovereign you goin' to give Peter and Missa Burrowes?" asked Banderah.

"Five hundred," answered Bilker; "five hundred between them. But I will give you a thousand."

"You no 'fraid man-o'-war catch you by and by?" inquired Banderah.

"No. Who's going to tell about it? You and your people won't."

"What 'bout Missa Blount? What 'bout mission'ry?"

Bilker grinned savagely. "Peter and Burrowes say they will kill Blount if I give them another five hundred sovereigns."

"What 'bout mission'ry and mission'ry woman?"

For a moment or two Bilker, crime-hardened villain as he was, hesitated. Then he raised his head and looked into the dark face of the native chief. Its set, savage expression gave him confidence.

"Plenty missionaries get killed. And, all the man-o'-war captains know that the Mayou bush-men{\*} are very savage. Some day—in about a week after I have gone away in the schooner, you will take the missionary and his wife to the little bush town, that Peter and Burrowes tell me he goes to sometimes. They will sleep there that night. You and some of your people will go with them and sleep in the same house with them. You do that sometimes, Banderah, eh?"

*\* "Bushmen," a term applied to natives living in the interior of the Melanesian Islands.*

"Yes, sometimes."

This was perfectly true. The bush tribes on Mayou, although at war with Banderah and his coast tribes, yet occasionally met their foes in an amicable manner at a bush village called Rogga, which had been for many decades a neutral ground. Here Banderah and his people, carrying fish, tobacco, and bamboos filled with salt water, would meet small parties of bush people, who, in exchange for the commodities brought by Banderah, would give him yams, hogs, and wild pigeons. At several of these meetings Mr. Deighton had been present, in the vain hope that he might establish friendly relations with the savage and cannibal people of the interior.

*\* Having no salt, the bush tribes of Melanesia, who dare not visit the coast, buy salt water from the coast tribes. They meet at a spot which is always sacredly kept as a neutral ground.*

"Well," resumed the ruffian, "you will sleep at Rogga with the missionary and his wife. In the morning, when you and your people awake, the missionary and his wife will be dead. Then you will hurry to this place; you will go on board the man-of-war and tell the captain that the bad bushmen killed them when they were asleep."

"I savee. Everybody savee Mayou man-a-bush like kill white men."

"That's it, Bandy. No one will say you did it."

"What 'bout Peter an' Burrowes? Perhaps by and by those two fellow get mad with me some day, and tell man-o'-war I bin kill three white man and one white woman."

"Banderah," and Bilker slapped him on the shoulder, "you're a damned smart fellow! There's no mistake about that. Now look here, I want you to get another thousand sovereigns—the thousand I am going to give to Burrowes and Peter. And after the man-a-bush have killed the missionary and his wife, they are coming down to the beach one night soon after, and will kill the two white men. Then there will be no more white men left, and you'll be the biggest chief in the world—as big as Maafu Tonga."

A curious smile stole over the grim features of the chief.

"By God! Cap'en, you savee too much; you dam fine man altogether."

"Well, look here now, Banderah. Are you going to do it?"

"Yes, I do it right enough."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow will do. And, look here, Bandy, I'm going to give you ten sovereigns each for the men I took away from you."

"All right," answered the chief, "now you go away. I want go and look out for some good men come along me to-morrow."

"Right you are, Banderah. Take plenty good men. You know what to do—white men walk along swamp to shoot duck, then *one, two,*" and Captain Bilker made a motion with his right hand that was perfectly comprehensible to the chief.

Banderah sat perfectly quiet on his mat and watched the captain return to Burrowes' house, from where a short time after he emerged, accompanied by his two fellow-conspirators. Then the three of them hailed the schooner. A boat put off and took them on board.

An hour or two later Blount returned along the beach from Lak-a-lak, and walked slowly up the path to his house. Just as he entered the door the sounds of revelry came over to him from the schooner, whose lights were beginning to glimmer through the quick-falling darkness of the tropic night. Some one on board was playing an accordion, and presently he caught the words of a song—

"Remember, too, the patriots' gore That flecked the streets of Baltimore; Maryland, my Maryland."

"Burrowes only sings that when he's very drunk," he said to himself, as he sat down to drink a cup of coffee brought to him by his eldest daughter Taya. "No doubt he and that anointed sweep Bilker are having a very happy time together."

"Father," said the girl in the native tongue, as he put down his cup, "Banderah is here. He came but now, and will not come inside, but waits for thee in the copra-house, lest he be seen talking to thee."

"What the devil is wrong?" muttered Blount, as without waiting to touch the coffee prepared for him he went outside to the copra-house.

In half an hour he and the native chief came out together, and as they stood for a minute in the broad streak of light that streamed out from the lamp on the table in the big room, Taya, who sat in the doorway, saw her father's face was set and stern-looking.

"Shed thou no blood, Banderah," he said in the native tongue, "not even that of these two dogs who have eaten and drunk in my house for four years."

"Challi, that is hard. Already are my people thirsty for the blood of this dog of a captain—he who stole thirty and one of my people. And because of my brother, who was stolen with them, have I promised them vengeance. But the other two who are with him on the ship I will spare."

*\* Charlie.*

"As you will. And as for these two dogs who have planned to kill me, with them I shall deal myself. If, when the schooner saileth away from here, these men go not with her, then shall I shoot them dead."

"Good," and then grasping the white man's hand, the chief pressed his nose to his, and vanished in the darkness.

## IV ~ "DEATH TO THEM BOTH!"

Early on the following morning Messrs. de Vere and Morcombe-Lycett—the latter being now quite recovered—informed Mr. and Mrs. Deighton that, having heard from the two traders there was good shooting at the big swamp, they were going there under the guidance of Banderah and a party of natives; and shortly after breakfast the chief, accompanied by a number of his people, appeared.

"I will send with you two of my best men," said Mr. Deighton, indicating a couple of his pet converts, who stood by dressed for the occasion in white starched shirts and black coats, but minus trousers, of which garments the pet converts had divested themselves, knowing that they should have to wade through the swamp.

But suddenly, to the missionary's astonishment, Banderah, with a savage look, bade them stay where they were. He had, he said, plenty of men, and did not need Mr. Deighton's servants.

Presently the two yachting gentlemen, arrayed in a very stylish sporting get-up, appeared with their breach-loaders and cartridge-belts, and waving their hands gracefully to the missionary and his wife, disappeared with Banderah and his dark-skinned companions into the dense tropical jungle, the edge of which was within a very short distance of the mission station.

For about an hour the Honourable Morcombe-Lycett and Mr. de Vere, with Banderah leading the way, walked steadily onward through the jungle. Not a word was spoken among the natives who followed close at their heels, and Banderah himself, in answer to their frequent questions, replied only by monosyllables.

At last they came out of the stifling heat of the thick jungle, and saw before them a great reedy swamp, the margin fringed by a scanty growth of cocoanut and pandanus palms. Out upon the open patches of water, here and there showing upon the broad expanse of the swamp, they saw large flocks of wild duck feeding and swimming about, betraying not the slightest fear at their approach.

"By Jove, Baxter," said Mr. de Vere to his friend, "looks good enough, doesn't it? I wonder if these blasted niggers will go in for us."

"Of course they will. But let us have a drink first. Here, you, bring us that basket. I wonder what sort of tucker old Godliness has given us. He's not a bad sort of an ass. His wife, too, isn't bad."

"Bah," and Mr. de Vere twirled his long, yellow moustache, "you're always finding out something nice in the face of every woman you come across. Wait until we get up to Japan; then you can amuse yourself with a new type of woman. Be a bit of a change for you after the Melbourne and Sydney peroxidized-hair beauties. Here, nigger, give me that corkscrew."

"I say, Dalton," suddenly remarked his friend, "'pon my soul I believe we are making a mistake in going to Japan. You may be sure that we'll have a lot of trouble awaiting us there."

"Not a bit of it. Before we get there every one will have read the cable news that we have been seen in Callao, and no one in Yokohama will ever think of associating Mr. Herbert de Vere and the Honourable Morcombe-Lycett—just arrived from Manila *via* Singapore in the Spanish mail-steamer—with—er—hum—the two gentlemen who arrived at Callao from Tahiti, after successfully diddling the Australian financial public of thirty thousand quid."

"But what are we going to do with the schooner at Manila?"

"Sell her, my innocent! Sell her to our esteemed friend, Mr. Moses Steinberg, who has assisted me in previous financial transactions—before I had the pleasure of meeting my present valued colleague, the Honourable Mr. Morcombe-Lycett—and who is now taking care to inform the world that we are living in South America."

"And how are we going to account for our boxes of sovereigns? Two mining speculators don't usually carry about heavy sums in gold."

"All managed, my boy. My friend, Mr. Moses Steinberg, will see to that. The ten thousand sovereigns will be valuable gold specimens from Queensland, and will be placed on board the North German Lloyd's steamer at Singapore for safe conveyance to London, where you and I, my dear boy, will follow it. And there also we shall find, I trust, an additional sum of fifteen thousand lying to our credit—the proceeds of our honest toil."

"What are you going to do with Sykes?"

"Give him £500 and tell him to hold his tongue. He's a thundering rascal, and we must pay to shut his mouth."

Then the two proceeded to discuss their lunch, and as they ate and drank and talked and laughed, Banderah and three or four of his men whispered together.

"Seize them from behind and bind them tightly," said the chief, "but kill them not, for that I have promised to Challi."

The Honourable Morcombe-Lycett had just finished his last glass of bottled beer and wanted to smoke. He had taken out his cigar-case, and, wondering at the sudden silence which had fallen upon their native guides, turned round to see where they were, and saw swiftly advancing upon himself and his companion some half a dozen stalwart natives. In that momentary glance he read danger, and quick as lightning—for he was no coward—he seized his loaded gun, which lay beside him, and fired both barrels one after another, at not ten yards' range.

A chorus of savage yells answered the shots, as two of the natives fell, but ere he could reload or Dalton could fire there came a fierce rush of all the dark-skinned men upon them, and, struggling madly for their lives, they were borne down.

And then the lust of slaughter overcame their fierce assailants, and despite Banderah and two or three of his most trusted men, a club was raised and fell swiftly upon the white, fair forehead of "Mr. de Vere" as he sought to tear away his hands from the vice-like grasp of two huge natives who held them.



"Death to them both!" cried a thin-faced, wrinkled old man named Toka; "*hutu*:{\*} for the lives of the thirty and one." Then springing out from the rest, he swung a short-handled, keen-bladed hatchet over his head, and sank it into the brain of the wretched Baxter.

\* *Synonymous with Maori utu—revenge.*

"Stand thou aside, Banderah, son of Paylap," screamed the old man, waving the bloody hatchet fiercely at him. "I, old Toka, the priest, will to-day again show the men of Mayou how to drink the blood and eat the flesh of the long pigs the gods have given into our hands," and again he buried the weapon in Baxter's breathless body. And as Banderah looked at the old man's working face, and saw the savage mouth, flecked with foam, writhing and twisting in horrible contortions, and then saw the almost equally dreadful visages of the rest of his men, he knew that the old, old lust for human flesh had come upon them.

So, with the one idea of saving Blount and the missionary and his wife, he turned and fled through the forest towards the beach.

## V ~ THE TAPU OF BANDERAH

The Rev. Wilfrid and Mrs. Deighton were at lunch, talking about the genial manners and other qualifications of their guests, when suddenly they heard a rapid step on the verandah, and Blount dashed into the room.

His face was white with excitement, and they saw that he carried his revolver in his hand.

"What in heaven's name is wrong, Mr. Blount? Why are you armed——"

"For God's sake don't ask me now! Our lives are in danger—deadly, imminent danger. Follow me to my house!"

"But, my dear sir," began Mr. Deighton, "I do not see—I fail——"

"Man, don't talk! Do you think I do not know what I am saying? Your two friends are both murdered. Banderah is now at my house, too exhausted to tell me more than to come and save you."

"Dear, dear me! Oh, this is dreadful! Let us, Alice, my dear, seek Divine——"

"You fool!" and the trader seized the missionary by the arm as he was about to sink upon his knees. "Stay here and pray if you like—and get your throat cut in ten—in five minutes more, every native except Banderah will be here ready to burn and murder. I tell you, man, that our only chance of safety is to reach my house first, and then the schooner. Come, Mrs. Deighton. For God's sake, come!"

Pushing past the missionary, he seized Mrs. Deighton by the hand and descended the steps. They had scarcely gone two hundred yards when they heard a strange, awful cry peal through the woods; and Mr. Deighton shuddered. Only once before had he heard such a cry, and that was when, during the early days of the mission, he had seen a native priest tear out the heart of a victim destined for a cannibal feast, and hold it up to the people.

Suddenly little Mrs. Deighton gasped and tottered as they hurried her along; she was already exhausted. Then Deighton stopped.

"Mr. Blount... go on by yourself. We have not your strength to run at this speed. I will help my wife along in a minute or two. Some of the mission people will surely come to our aid."

"Will they?" said Blount grimly. "Look for yourself and see; there's not a soul in the whole village. They have gone to see——" and he made an expressive gesture.

Mr. Deighton groaned. "My God, it is terrible!—" then suddenly, as he saw his wife's deathly features, his real nature came out "Mr. Blount, you are a brave man. For God's sake save my dear wife! I am too exhausted to run any further. I am too weak from my last attack of the fever. But we are only a quarter of a mile away from your house now. Take her on with you, but give me your revolver. I can at least cover your retreat for a time."

Blount hesitated, then giving the weapon to the missionary, he lifted the fainting woman in his arms, and said—

"Try and come on a little; as soon as I am in sight of the house your wife will be safe; you must at least keep me in sight."

As the trader strode along, carrying the unconscious woman in his strong arms, the missionary looked at the weapon in his hand, and shuddered again.

"May God forgive me if I have done wrong," he muttered. "But take the life of one of His creatures to save my own I never will. Yet to save hers I must do it."

Then with trembling feet but brave heart he walked unsteadily along after the trader and his burden. So far, no sound had reached him since that one dreadful cry smote upon his ear, and a hope began to rise in his breast that no immediate danger threatened. A short distance away, embowered among the trees, was the house of Burrowes. The door was closed, and not a sign of life was discernible about the place.

"Heavens, were they asleep?" He had heard that Burrowes and the German had been carousing all the morning with the captain of the *Starlight*. Likely enough they were all lying in a drunken slumber. "God, give me strength to warn them," he said to himself; and then with a last glance at Blount and his wife, he resolutely turned aside and began to ascend the hill.

But before he gained the summit, Blount had reached the fence surrounding his house, and Banderah and Taya and her two young brothers, rifles in hand, met the trader.

"Quick, take her!" and he pushed Mrs. Deighton into Taya's arms and looked back.

"My God! he's going up to Burrowes' house! Come, Banderah," and he started back again, "he'll be speared or shot before he gets there."

Just as the missionary reached the door and began in feeble, exhausted tones to call out, Blount and the chief caught up to him, and seizing his hands dragged him away again down the hill.

"Don't bother about them, they are all on board," was all Blount said. And there was no time to talk, for now fierce cries were heard in the direction of the mission house, and Blount and Banderah, looking back, saw black, naked figures leap over the low stone wall enclosing the missionary's dwelling and disappear inside.

"Just in time," muttered the trader, as dragging Mr. Deighton between them they gained the house, and sat the missionary down beside his wife, who with a cry of thankfulness threw her arms about his neck and then quietly fainted.

For nearly half an hour Blount, with Banderah and the missionary by his side, looked out through the windows and saw the natives plundering and wrecking the mission house and the dwellings of Schwartzkoff and Burrowes. A mile away, motionless upon the glassy waters of the harbour, lay the schooner, with her boat astern, and every now and then Blount would take a look at her through his glass.

"I can't see a soul on deck," he said to Mr. Deighton. "I heard that Peter and Burrowes went off this morning with the captain, all pretty well drunk. Would to God I knew what is best to do! To go on board would perhaps mean that those ruffians would shoot us down before we were alongside. No, we'll stay here and take our chance. Banderah says he feels pretty sure that he can protect us from his own people. They'd never dare to hurt him; and I think *that* will steady them a bit," and he pointed to the fence, upon which, at intervals, were tied green cocoanut boughs. These had just been placed there by Banderah himself, and meant that the house was *tapu*—it and all in it were sacred.

"God grant it may!" said Mr. Deighton, and looking at the mystic sign, the use of which he had so often tried to put down as a silly, heathenish practice, he felt a twinge of conscience.

At last the work of plunder was over, and then Blount saw a swarm of black, excited savages, led by two or three "devil-doctors" or priests, advance towards the house. At the same moment Banderah, looking seaward, saw that the boat had left the schooner and was pulling ashore. He was just about to point her out to the trader when, for some reason, he changed his mind, turned away, and joined his white friends at the other end of the room.

Following the lead of the "devil-doctors," who, stripped to the waist, and with their heads covered with the hideous masks used in their incantations, looked like demons newly arisen from the pit, the yelling swarm of natives at last reached the fence outside Blount's house; and Mr. Deighton, with an inward groan, saw among them some of his pet converts, stark naked and armed with spears and clubs.

Leaping and dancing with mad gyrations, and uttering curious grunting sounds as their feet struck the ground, the devil-doctors at last came within a few feet of the gate in the trader's fence. Then, suddenly, as they caught sight of a branch of cocoanut leaf twisted in and around the woodwork of the gate, they stopped their maddened whirl as if by magic; and upon those behind them fell the silence of fear.

"Thank God!" muttered Blount, "we are safe. They will not break Banderah's *tapu*."

Then, rifle in hand, and with quiet, unmoved face, Banderah opened the trader's door and came out before them all.

"Who among ye desires the life of Banderah and those to whom he has given his *tapu*?" he said.

The smaller of the two priests dashed aside his mask, and revealed the face of the old man Toka, who had struck Baxter his death-blow.

"Who indeed, O chief? If it be to thy mind to make *tapu* this house and all in it, who is there dare break it? To the white man Challi and his sons and daughters we meant no harm, though sweet to our bellies will be the flesh of those whom we have slain and who now roast for the feast. But more are yet to come; for I, Toka, lost my son, when thou, Banderah, lost thy brother; and the gods have told me that I shall eat my fill of those who stole him."

The savage, bitter hatred that rang through the old man's voice, and the deep, approving murmur of those who stood about him, warned both Banderah and Blount that the lust for slaughter was not yet appeased; so it was with a feeling of intense surprise and relief that he and the missionary saw them suddenly withdraw, and move rapidly away to the rear of the house among the thick jungle.

"That's d—d curious!" said Blount, turning to Banderah and speaking in English; and then the chief took him by the arm and pointed towards the shore—the boat, pulled by Schwartzkoff and Burrowes, with Captain Bilker sitting in the stern, had just touched the beach. Then it flashed across his mind in an instant why the natives had left so suddenly—they were lying in ambush for the three men!

"By God! bad as they are, I can't let them walk to their deaths," said Blount, jumping outside, so as to hail and warn them. But before he could utter a sound, Banderah sprang upon him and clapped his hand to his mouth.

"Challi," he said, "they must die. Try to save them, and we all perish. For the sake of thy daughters and of thy sons, raise not thy voice nor thy hand. Must all our blood run because of these three dogs' lives?"

Even as he spoke the end came. Staggering up the beach in drunken hilarity, the three whites did not notice, as they headed for the path, a file of natives, armed with spears and clubs, walk quietly along between them and the water's edge. There they sat down and waited. But not for long, for presently from out the thick, tangled jungle in front came a humming whirr of deadly arrows and in a few seconds the three white men were wallowing in their blood. Then came that bloodcurdling shout of savage triumph, telling those who heard it that all was over. Before its echoes died away the bleeding bodies were carried to where a thick, heavy smoke rising from the jungle told the shuddering missionary that the awful feast was preparing. When he looked again not a native was in sight.

Standing apart in the room from the others, Blount and Banderah spoke hurriedly together, and then the trader came to the missionary.

“Mr. Deighton, if you wish to save your wife's and your own life, and escape from this slaughterhouse, now is your time. As God is my judge I believe we shall never be safe again, and I would gladly go with you if I could. But my daughter Nelly is at Lak-a-lak, and—well, that settles it. Banderah here will tell you that he dreads your staying, as the priests may plot your death at any moment. I implore you, sir, to think of your wife. See, there is the boat, drifting along the beach with the tide. For God's sake be advised and get on board the schooner, and whatever port you do reach, send a vessel to take me away!”

Then, before the missionary and his wife could realise what was happening, Banderah had run to the beach, swam to the boat, seized the painter, gained the shore again, and pulled her along till opposite the trader's house, just as Blount and Taya, supporting Mrs. Deighton between them, were leaving the house to meet him.

In twenty minutes more they were close to the *Starlight*, and saw that her crew were weighing the anchor. On the after deck stood the mate and steward with rifles in their hands.

“What in the name of God is wrong?” said the mate, as the boat ranged up alongside, and the missionary and his wife were assisted on deck.

“Don't ask now, man. Get your anchor up as quick as you can and put to sea. Your captain and the two passengers are all dead. Clear out at once if you don't want the ship to be taken.”

“I thought something was wrong when I saw the native dragging the boat along. Lend us a hand to get under weigh, will you?” and the mate sprang forward.

In another five minutes the *Starlight's* anchor was up, and then Blount and Banderah, with a hurried farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Deighton, sprang into the boat and pushed off.

“May God bless and keep you,” called out the missionary to Blount, “and may we meet again soon;” then sinking on his knees beside his wife, he raised his face to heaven, and the trader saw that tears were streaming down his worn and rugged cheeks.

Blount never heard of the missionary and his wife again. Long, long afterwards he did hear that some wreckage of a vessel like the *Starlight* had been found on Rennel Island, and that sovereigns were discovered among the pools and crevices of the reef for many years after. Whether she ran ashore or drifted there dismasted—for a heavy gale set in a week after she left Mayou—is one of those mysteries of the sea that will never be solved.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TAPU OF BANDERAH \*\*\*

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