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### **MY TROPIC ISLE**

**BY**

**E. J. BANFIELD**

**AUTHOR OF "THE CONFESSIONS OF A BEACHCOMBER"**

**T. FISHER UNWIN**

**LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE LEIPSIC: INSELSTRASSE 20**

1911

**TO**

**MY WIFE**

"What dost thou in this World? The Wilderness  
For thee is fittest place."

**MILTON.**

"Taught to live  
The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts  
To interrupt sweet life."

## PREFACE

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### THE AUTHOR.

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"AT ONE STRIDE COMES THE DARK"

Photo by Caroline Hordern

COCONUT AVENUE

Photo by Caroline Hordern

THE BUNGALOW

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PARASITIC FERN

THE COVE, PURTABOI

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PANDANUS PALM

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DEVELOPMENT OF BAILER SHELL

EGG CAPSULES OF MOLLOSC, ATTACHED TO FAN CORAL

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"FAERY LANDS FORLORN," TIMANA.

NEST OF GREEN TREE ANT

MATCH-BOX BEANS

PALL-KOO-LOO

WHERE SWIFTLETS BUILD

SWIFTLETS' NESTS

H. Barnes, Jun., Photo. Australian Museum

UMBRELLA TREE (*Brassaia actinophylla*)

Photo by Caroline Hordern

HAMED OF JEDDAH

BLACKS' TOYS—1. PIAR-PIAR; 2. BIRRA-BIRRA-GOO; 3. PAR-GIR-AH

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YANCOO'S LAST RITE

# MY TROPIC ISLE

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE BEGINNING

Had I a plantation of this Isle, my lord—

\* \* \* \* \*

I' the Commonwealth I would by contraries  
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic  
Would I admit . . . riches, poverty  
And use of service, none.

### SHAKESPEARE

How quaint seems the demand for details of life on this Isle of Scent and Silence! Lolling in shade and quietude, was I guilty of indiscretion when I babbled of my serene affairs, and is the penalty so soon enforced? Can the record of such a narrow, compressed existence be anything but dull? Can one who is indifferent to the decrees of constituted society; who is aloof from popular prejudices; who cares not for the gaieties of the crowd or the vagaries of fashion; who does not dance or sing, or drink to toasts, or habitually make any loud noise, or play cards or billiards, or attend garden parties; who has no political ambitions; who is not a painter, or a musician, or a man of science; whose palate is as averse from ardent spirits as from physic; who is denied the all-redeeming vice of teetotalism; who cannot smoke even a pipe of peace; who is a casual, a nonentity a scout on the van of civilisation dallying with the universal enemy, time—can such a one, so forlorn of popular attributes, so weak and watery in his tastes, have aught to recite harmonious to the ear of the world?

Yet, since my life—and in the use, of the possessive pronoun here and elsewhere, let it signify also the life of my life-partner—is beyond the range of ordinary experience, since it is immune from the ferments which seethe and muddle the lives of the many, I am assured that a familiar record will not be deemed egotistical, I am scolded because I did not confess with greater zeal, I am bidden to my pen again.

An attempt to fulfil the wishes of critics is confronted with risk. Cosy in my security, distance an adequate defence, why should I rush into the glare of perilous publicity? Here is an unpolluted Isle, without history, without any sort of fame. There come to it ordinary folk of sober understanding and well-disciplined ideas and tastes, who pass their lives without disturbing primeval silences or insulting the free air with the flapping of any ostentatious flag. Their doings are not romantic, or comic, or tragic, or heroic; they have no formula for the solution of social problems, no sour vexations to be sweetened, no grievance against society, no pet creed to dandle. What is to be said of the doings of such prosaic folk—folk who have merely set themselves free from restraint that they might follow their

own fancies without hurry and without hindrance?

Moreover, if anything be more tedious than a twice-told tale, is it not the repetition of one half told? Since a demand is made for more complete details than were given in my "Confessions," either I must recapitulate, or, smiling, put the question by. It is simplicity itself to smile, and can there be anything more gracious or becoming? Who would not rather do so than attempt with perplexed brow a delicate, if not difficult, duty?

I propose, therefore, to hastily fill in a few blanks in my previous sketch of our island career and to pass on to features of novelty and interest—vignettes of certain natural and unobtrusive features of the locality, first-hand and artless.

This, then, is for candour. Studiously I had evaded whensoever possible the intrusion of self, for do not I rank myself among the nonentities—men whose lives matter nothing, whose deaths none need deplore. How great my bewilderment to find that my efforts at concealment—to make myself even more remote than my Island—had had by impish perversity a contrary effect! On no consideration shall I part with all my secrets. Bereave me of my illusions and I am bereft, for they are "the stardust I have clutched."

One confessedly envious critic did chide because of the calculated non-presentation of a picture of our humble bungalow. So small a pleasure it would be sinful to deny. He shall have it, and also a picture of the one-roomed cedar hut in which we lived prior to the building of the house of comfort.

Who could dignify with gilding our utterly respectable, our limp history? There is no margin to it for erudite annotations. Unromantic, unsensational, yet was the actual beginning emphasis by the thud of a bullet. To that noisy start of our quiet life I meander to ensure chronological exactitude.

In September of the year 1896 with a small par of friends we camped on the beach of this Island—the most fascinating, the most desirable on the coast of North Queensland.

Having for several years contemplated a life of seclusion in the bush, and having sampled several attractive and more or less suitable scenes, we were not long in concluding that here was the ideal spot. From that moment it was ours. In comparison the sweetest of previous fancies became vapid. Legal rights to a certain undefined area having been acquired in the meantime, permanent settlement began on September 28, 1897.

For a couple of weeks thereafter we lived in tents, while with clumsy haste—for experience had to, be acquired—we set about the building of a hut of cedar, the parts of which were brought from civilisation ready for assembling. Houses, however, stately or humble, in North Queensland, are sacrificial to what are known popularly as "white ants" unless special means are taken for their exclusion. Wooden buildings rest on piles sunk in the ground, on the top of which is an excluder of galvanised iron in shape resembling a milk dish inverted. It is also wise to take the additional precaution of saturating each pile with an arsenical solution. Being quite unfamiliar with the art of hut-building, and in a frail physical state, I found the work perplexing and most laborious, simple and light as it all was. Trees had to be felled and sawn into proper lengths for piles, and holes sunk, and the piles adjusted to a uniform level. With blistered and bleeding hands, aching muscles, and stiff joints I persevered.

While we toiled our fare, simplicity itself, was eaten with becoming lack of style in the shade of a bloodwood-tree, the tents being reserved for sleeping. When the blacks could be spared, fish was easily obtainable, and we also drew upon the scrub fowl and pigeon occasionally, for the vaunting proclamation for the preservation of all birds had not been made. Tinned meat and bread and jam formed the most frequent meals, for there were hosts of simple, predestined things which had to be painfully learned. But there was no repining. Two months' provisions had been brought; the steamer called weekly, so that we did not contemplate famine, though thriftiness was imperative. Nor did we anticipate making any remarkable addition to our income, for the labour of my own hands, however eager and elated my spirits, was, I am forced to deplore, of little advantage. I could be very busy about nothing, and there were blacks to feed, therefore did we hasten to prepare a small area of forest land, and a still smaller patch of jungle for the cultivation of maize, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. Fruit, being a passion and a hobby, was given special encouragement and has been in the ascendant ever since, to the detriment of other branches of cultural enterprise.

I have said that our Island career began with an explosion. To that starting-point must I return if the narration of the tribulations our youthful inexperience suffered is to be orderly and exact.

While we camped, holiday-making, the year prior to formal and rightful occupancy, in a spasm of enthusiasm, which still endures, I selected the actual site for a modest castle then and there built in the accommodating air. It was something to have so palpable and rare a base for the fanciful fabric. All in a

moment, disdaining formality, and to the, accompaniment of the polite jeers of two long-suffering friends, I proclaimed "Here shall I live! On this spot shall stand the probationary palace!" and so saying fired my rifle at a tree a few yard's off. But the stolid tree—a bloodwood, all bone, toughened by death, a few ruby crystals in sparse antra all that remained significant of past life—afforded but meagre hospitality to the, soft lead.

"Ah!" exclaimed one of my chums, "the old tree foreswears him! The Island refuses him!"

But the homely back gate swings over the charred stump of the boorish tree burnt flush with the ground. Twelve months and a fortnight after the firing of the shot which did not echo round the world, but was merely a local defiant and emphatic promulgation of authority, a fire was set to the base of the tree, for our tents had been pitched perilously close. Space was wanted, and moreover its bony, imprecating arms, long since bereft of beckoning fingers, menaced our safety. I said it must fall to the north-east, for the ponderous inclination is in that direction, and therein forestalled my experience and delivered the whole camp as hostages into the hands of fortune.

In apparent defiance of the laws of gravity the tree fell in the middle of the night with an earth-shaking crash to the south-east. There was no apparent reason why it did not fall on our sleeping-tent and in one act put an inglorious end to long-cogitated plans. Because some gracious impulse gave the listless old tree a certain benign tilt, and because sundry other happenings consequent upon a misunderstanding of the laws of nature took exceptional though quite wayward turnings, I am still able to hold a pen in the attempt to accomplish the task imposed by imperious strangers.

And while on the subject of the clemency of trees, I am fain to dispose of another adventure, since it, too, illustrates the brief interval between the sunny this and the gloomy that. Fencing was in progress—a fence designed to keep goats within bounds. Of course, the idea was preposterous. One cannot by mere fencing exclude goats. The proof is here. To provide posts for the vain project trees were felled, the butts of which were reduced to due dimensions by splitting. A dead tree stood on a slope, and with the little crosscut we attacked its base, cutting a little more than half-way through. When a complementary cut had been made on the other side, the tree, with a creak or two and a sign which ended in "swoush," fell, and as it did so I stepped forward, remarking to the taciturn black boy, "Clear cut, Paddy!" The words were on my lips when a "waddy," torn from the vindictive tree and flung, high and straight into the inoffensive sky, descended flat on the red stump with a gunlike report. The swish of the waddy down-tilted the frayed brim of my cherished hat!

The primary bullet is not yet done with, for when the tree which had reluctantly housed it for a year was submitted to the fires of destruction among the charcoal a blob of bright lead confirmed my scarcely credited story that the year before the datum for our castle, then aerial and now substantial, had been established in ponderous metal.

What justification existed for the defacement of the virginal scene by an unlovely dwelling—the, imposition of a scar on the unspotted landscape? None, save that the arrogant intruder needed shelter, and that he was neither a Diogenes to be content in a tub nor a Thoreau to find in boards an endurable temporary substitute for blankets.

It was resolved that the shelter should by way of compensation be unobtrusive, hidden in a wilderness of leaves. The sacrifice of those trees unhaply in prior occupation of the site selected would be atoned for by the creation of a modest garden of pleasant-hued shrubs and fruit-trees and lines and groves of coconut-palms. My conscience at least has been, or rather is being, appeased for the primary violation of the scene, for trees perhaps, more beautiful, certainly more useful, stand for those destroyed. The Isle suffers no gross disfigurement. Except for a wayward garden and the most wilful plantation of tropical fruit-trees, no change has been wrought for which the genius of the Isle need demand satisfaction.

Though of scented cedar the hut was ceilingless. Resonant corrugated iron and boards an inch thick intervened between us and the noisy tramlings of the rain and heat of the sun. The only room accommodated some primitive furniture, a bed being the denominating as well as the essential feature. A little shambling structure of rough slabs and iron walls contrived a double debt to pay—kitchen and dining-room.

From the doorsteps of the hut we landed on mother earth, for the verandas were not floored. Everything was as homely and simple and inexpensive as thought and thrift might contrive. Our desire to live in the open air became almost compulsory, for though you fly from civilisation and its thralls you cannot escape the social instincts of life. The hut became the focus of life other than human. The scant hut-roof sheltered more than ourselves.

On the narrow table, under cover of stray articles and papers, grey bead-eyed geckoes craftily stalked

moths and beetles and other fanatic worshippers of flame as they hastened to sacrifice themselves to the lamp. In the walls wasps built terra-cotta warehouses in which to store the semi-animate carcasses of spiders and grubs; a solitary bee constructed nondescript comb among the books, transforming a favourite copy of "Lorna Doone" into a solid block. Bats, sharp-toothed, and with pin-point eyes, swooped in at one door, quartered the roof with brisk eagerness, and departed by the other.

Finding ample food and safe housing, bats soon became permanent lodgers. For a time it was novel and not unpleasant to be conscious in the night of their waftings, for they were actual checks upon the mosquitoes which came to gorge themselves on our unsalted blood. But they increased so rapidly that their presence became intolerable. The daring pioneer which had happened during its nocturnal expeditions to discover the very paradise for the species proclaimed the glad tidings, and relatives, companions, and friends flocked hither, placing themselves under our protection with contented cheepings. Though the room became mosquitoless, serious objections to the scavengers developed. Before a writ of ejection could be enforced, however, a sensational cause for summary proceedings arose.

In the dimness of early morning when errant bats flitted home to cling to the ridge-pole, squeaking and fussy flutterings denoted unwonted disturbance. Daylight revealed a half concealed, sleeping snake, which seemed to be afflicted with twin tumours. A long stick dislodged the intruder, which scarce had reached the floor ere it died violent death. Even the snake spectre did no seriously affright the remaining bats, though it confirmed the sentence of their immediate banishment. In the eye of the bats the sanctuary of the roof with an odd snake or two was preferable to inclement hollow branches open to the raids of undisciplined snakes. Definite sanitary reasons, supplemented by the fact that where bats are there will the snakes be gathered together, and a pious repugnance to snakes as lodgers, made the casting out of the bats a joyful duty.

So we lived, more out of the hut than in it, from October, 1897, until Christmas Day, 1903. We find the bungalow, though it, too, has no ceiling, much more to our convenience, for the hut has become crowded. It could no longer contain our content and the portable property which became caught in its vortex.

In the designing of the bungalow two essentials were supreme, cost and comfort—minimum of cost, maximum of comfort. Aught else was as nothing. There was no alignment to obey, no rigid rules and regulations as to style and material. The surroundings being our own, we had compassion on them, neither offering them insult with pretentious prettiness nor domineering over them with vain assumption and display. Low walls, unambitious roof, and sheltering veranda, so contrived as to create, not tickling, fidgety draughts but smooth currents, "so full as seem asleep," to flush each room so sweetly and softly that no perceptible difference between the air under the roof and of the forest is at any time perceptible.

Since the kitchen (as necessary here as elsewhere) is not only of my own design but nearly every part of the construction absolutely the work of my unaided, inexperienced hands, I shall describe it in detail—not because it presents features provocative of pride, but because the ideas it embodies may be worth the consideration of others similarly situated who want a substantial, smokeless, dry, convenient appurtenance to their dwelling. Two contrary conditions had to be considered—the hostility of white ants to buildings of wood, and the necessity for raising the floor but slightly above the level of the ground.

A bloodwood-tree, tall, straight, and slim, was felled. It provided three logs—two each 15 feet long and one 13 feet. From another tree another 13-foot log was sawn. All the sapwood was adzed off; the ends were "checked" so that they would interlock. Far too weighty to lift, the logs were toilfully transported inch by inch on rollers with a crowbar as a lever. Duly packed up with stones and levelled, they formed the foundations, but prior to setting them a bed of home-made asphalt (boiling tar and seashore sand) was spread on the ground where they were destined to lie. Having adjusted each in its due position, I adzed the upper faces and cut a series of mortices for the studs, which were obtained in the bush—mere thin, straight, dry trees which had succumbed to bush fires. Each was roughly squared with the adze and planed and tenoned.

Good fortune presented, greatly to the easement of labour, two splendid pieces of driftwood for posts for one of the doors. To the sea also I was indebted for long pieces to serve as wall plates, one being the jibboom of what must have been a sturdily-built boat, while the broken mast of a cutter fitted in splendidly as a ridge-pole. For the walls I visited an old bean-tree log in the jungle, cut off blocks in suitable lengths, and split them with maul and wedges into rough slabs, roughly adzed away superfluous thickness, and carried them one by one to the brink of the canyon, down which I cast them. Then each had to be carried up the steep side and on to the site, the distance from the log in the jungle being about three hundred yards.

Within the skeleton of the building I improvised a rough bench, upon which the slabs were dressed with the plane and the edges bevelled so that each would fit on the other to the exclusion of the rain. Upon the uprights I nailed inch slats perpendicularly, against which the slabs were placed, each being held in place temporarily until the panel was complete, when other slats retained them. The rafters were manipulated of odd sorts of timber and the roof of second-used corrugated iron, the previous nail holes being stopped with solder. A roomy recess with a beaten clay floor was provided for the cooking stove. Each of the two doors was made in horizontal halves, with a hinged fanlight over the lintel, and the window spaces filled with wooden shutters, hinged from the top. The floor (an important feature) is of asphalt on a foundation of earth and charcoal solidly compressed. But before carting in the material boards were placed temporarily edgewise alongside the bedlogs round the interior. Then when the earthen foundation was complete the boards were removed, leaving a space of about an inch, which was filled with asphalt, well rammed, consistently with the whole of the floor space.

All this laborious work—performed conscientiously to the best of my ability—occupied a long time, and from it originated much backache and general fatigue, and at the end I found that I had been so absorbed in the permanence rather than the appearance of the dwelling that one of the corner posts was out of the perpendicular and that consequently the building stood awry. Grace of style it cannot claim; but neither "white ants" nor weather trouble it.

And to what sweet uses has adversity made us familiar! When I bought a boat to bring hither I knew not the distinguishing term of a single halyard, save the "topping lift," and even that scant knowledge was idle, for I was blankly ignorant of the place and purpose of the oddly-named rope. Necessity drove me to the acquirement of boat sense, and now I manage my home-built "flattie"—mean substitute for the neat yacht which necessity compelled me to part with—very courageously in ordinary weather; and I am content to stay at home when Neptune is frothy at the lips.

A preponderant part of the furniture of our abode is the work of my own unskilled hands—tables, chairs, bookshelves, cupboards, &c. There is much pleasure and there are also, many aches and pains in the designing and fashioning serviceable chairs from odd kinds of bush timber.

In the making of a chair, as in the building of a boat by one who has had no training in any branch of carpentry, there is scope for the personal element. Though the parts have been cut and trimmed with minute care and all possible precision, each, according to requirements, being the duplicate of the other, when they come to be assembled obstructive obstinacy prevails. One of the most fiendish things the art of man contrives is a chair out of the routine design made by a rule-of-thumb carpenter. Grotesque in its deformities, you must needs pity your own mishandling of the obstinate wood. Have you courage to smile at the misshapen handiwork, or do you cowardly, discard the deformity you have created? How it grunts and groans as pressure is applied to its stubborn bent limbs! Curvature of the spine is the least of its ills. It limps and creaks when fixed tentatively for trial. Tender-footed, it stands awry, heaving one leg aloft—as crooked and as perverse as Caliban. In good time, botching here, violent constraint there, the chair finds itself or is forced so to do, for he is a weak man who is not stronger than his own chair. So, after many days' intense toil—toil which even troubled the night watches, for have I not lain awake with thoughts automatically concentrated on a seemingly impossible problem, plotting by what illicit and awful torture it might be possible for the tough and stubborn parts to be brought into juxtaposition—there is a chair—a solid, sitable chair, which neither squeaks, nor shuffles, nor shivers. May be you are ashamed at the quantity of mind the dull article of furniture has absorbed; but there are other reflections—homely as well as philosophic.

## CHAPTER II

### A PLAIN MAN'S PHILOSOPHY

"Be advised by a plain man, (said the quaker to the soldier), 'Modes and apparels are but trifles to the real man: therefore do not think such a man as thyself terrible for thy garb nor such a one as me contemptible for mine.'"—ADDISON.

Small must be the Isle of Dreams, so small that possession is possible. A choice passion is not to be squandered on that which, owing to exasperating bigness, can never be fully possessed. An island of bold dimensions may be free to all—wanton and vagrant, unlovable. Such is not for the epicure—the lover of the subtle fascination, the dainty moods, and pretty expressions of islands. The Isle must be

small, too, because since it is yours it becomes a duty to exhaustively comprehend it. Familiarity with its lines of coast and sky, its declivities and hollows, its sunny places, its deepest shades, the sources of its streams, the meagre beginning of its gullies cannot suffice. Superficial intimacy with features betrayable to the senses of any indiscriminating beholder is naught. Casual knowledge of its botany and birds counts for little. All—even the least significant, the least obvious of its charms are there to, give conservative delight, and surly the soul that would despise them.

If you would read the months off-hand by the flowering of trees and shrubs and the coming and going of birds; if the inhalation of scents is to convey photographic details of scenes whence they originate; if you would explore miles of sunless jungle by ways unstable as water; if you would have the sites of camps of past generations of blacks reveal the arts and occupations of the race, its dietary scale and the pastimes of its children; if you desire to have exact first-hand knowledge, to revel in the rich delights of new experiences, your scope must be limited.

The sentiments of a true lover of an Isle cannot without sacrilege be shared. The love is an exclusive passion, not of Herodian fierceness, misgiving, and gloom, but of joyful jealousy, for it must be well-nigh impossible to every one else.

Such is this delicious Isle—this unkempt, unrestrained garden where the centuries gaze upon perpetual summer. Small it is, and of varied charms—set in the fountain of time-defying youth. Abundantly sprinkled with tepid rains, vivified by the glorious sun, its verdure tolerates no trace of age. No ill or sour vapours contaminate its breath. Bland and ever fresh breezes preserve its excellencies untarnished. It typifies all that is tranquil, quiet, easeful, dreamlike, for it is the, Isle of Dreams.

All is lovable—from crescentric sandpit—coaxing and consenting to the virile moods of the sea, harmonious with wind-shaken casuarinas, tinkling with the cries of excitable tern—to the stolid grey walls and blocks of granite which have for unrecorded centuries shouldered off the white surges of the Pacific. The flounces of mangroves, the sparse, grassy epaulettes on the shoulders of the hills the fragrant forest, the dim jungle, the piled up rocks, the caves where the rare swiftlet hatches out her young in gloom and silence in nests of gluten and moss—all are mine to gloat over. Among such scenes do I commune with the genius of the Isle, and saturate myself with that restful yet exhilarating principle which only the individual who has mastered the art of living the unartificial life perceives. When strained of body and seared of mind, did not the Isle, lovely in lonesomeness, perfumed, sweet in health, irresistible in mood, console and soothe as naught else could? Shall I not, therefore, do homage to its profuse and gracious charms and exercise the rights and privileges of protector?

"When thus I hail the moment flying,  
Ah! still delay, thou art so fair!"

Sea, coral reefs, forest, jungle afford never ending pleasure. Look, where the dolorous sphinx sheds gritty tears because of the boldness of the sun and the solvency of the disdainful sea. Look, where the jungle clothes the steep Pacific slope with its palms and overskirt of vines and creepers! Glossy, formal bird's-nest ferns and irregular mass of polypodium edged with fawn-coloured, infertile fronds fringe the sea-ward ending. Orchids, old gold and violet, cling to the rocks with the white claws of the sea snatching at their toughened roots, and beyond the extreme verge of ferns and orchids on abrupt sea-scarred boulders are the stellate shadows of the whorled foliage of the umbrella tree, in varied pattern, precise and clean cut and in delightful commingling and confusion. Deep and definite the shadows, offspring of lordly light and steadfast leaves—not mere insubstantialities, but stars deep sculptured in the grey rock.

And when an intemperate sprite romps and rollicks, and all the features of prettiness and repose are distraught under the bluster and lateral blur of a cyclone, still do I revel in the scene. Does a mother love her child the less when, contorted with passion, it storms and rages? She grieves that a little soul should be so greatly vexed. Her affection is no jot depreciated. So, when my trees are tempest-tossed, and the grey seas batter the sand-spit and bellow on the rocks, and neither bird nor butterfly dare venture from leafy sanctuary, and the green flounces are tattered and stained by the scald of brine spray, do I avow my serenity. How staunch the heart of the little island to withstand so sturdy a buffeting!

In such a scene would it not have been wicked to have delivered ourselves over to any cranky, miserly economy or to any distortion or affectation of thrift? Had fortune smiled, her gifts would have been sanely appreciated, for our ideas of comfort and the niceties of life are not cramped, neither are they to be gauged by the narrow gape of our purse. Our castles are built in the air, not because earth has no fit place for their foundations, but for the sufficient reason that the wherewithal for the foundations was lacking. When a sufficiency of the world's goods has been obtained to satisfy animal wants for food and



clothing and shelter, happiness depends, not upon the pleasures but the pleasantnesses of life; not upon the possession of a house full of superfluities but in the attainment of restraining grace.

It might be possible for us to live for the present in just a shade "better style" than we do; but we have mean ambitions in other directions than style. Style is not for those who are placidly indifferent to display; and before whom on a comely, scornful Isle shall we strut and parade? "You and I cannot be confined within the weak list of a country's fashions," for do we not proclaim and justify our own? Are we not leaders who have no subservient, no flattering imitators, no sycophantic copyists? The etiquette of our Court finds easy expression, and we smile decorously on the infringements of casual comers.

Once a steamer anchored boldly in the bay—a pert steamer with a saucy, off-duty air. Certain circumstances forewarned us of a "formal call." So that the visit should not partake of an actual surprise a boat containing ladies and gentlemen was rowed ostentatiously across to land awkwardly at such a point as would herald the fact and afford a precious interim in which we were plainly invited to embellish ourselves—to assume a receptive style of countenance and clothes and company manners. Careless of dignity, the charitable prelude was lost upon us. Our self-conscious and considerate visitors dumbly expressed amazement at their informal reception and our unfastive attire. Yet my garments were neat, sufficient, and defiantly unsoiled. Had I donned a full, white suit, with neat tie and Panama hat, and stood even barefooted on the beach, conspicuous, revealed as a "gentleman" even from the decks of the defiant steamer, the boat-load would have come straight to the landing smiling, and chatting, to drop "their ceremonious manna in the way of starved people." They would have been elated had I assumed robes of reverence—a uniform indicative of obligation—a worthy response to their patronage. With compliments expressed in terms of functionary clothes they had hoped to soothe their vanity. White cotton and a tinted tie would have been smilingly honoured; and the mere man was not flattered to perceive that he was less in esteem than the drapery common to the species. I never will be content to be a supernumerary to my clothes.

Our visitors reflected not on their intrusion. My precious privacy was gratuitously violated, and in such circumstances that my holiday humour was put under restraint for the time being. Though I do profess love for human nature, for some phases I have but scant respect.

But our house was open. None of the observances of the rites of hospitality was lacking. Gleams of good humour dispersed the gloom on the faces of our guests. They had penetrated the thin disguise of clothes, and it was then that I silently wished in Portia's words that "God might grant them a fair departure."

Another class of visitor came on a misty morning in a fussy little launch. After preliminary greetings on the beach he remarked on my name, presuming that I belonged to a Scotch family.

"A good family, I do not question."

"Oh, yes. A family of excellent and high repute."

"Then, I cannot be any connection, for I am proud to confess that our family is distinguished—greatly distinguished—by a very bad name. It comes from Kent. I am a kinsman of a king—the King of the Beggars!"

"Ah! Quite a coincidence. I remarked to my friend as we came up to your Island: 'If the exile is a descendant of the King of the Beggars, this is just the kind of life he would be likely to adopt.'"

"Exactly. I am indeed complimented. Blood—the blood of the vagabond—will tell!"

And my friendly visitor—a man whom the King had delighted to honour—with whimsical glances at my clothes, which tended to "sincerity rather than ceremony," strolled along the beach.

If we were disposed to vaunt ourselves, have we not, in this simplicity and lack of style, the most persuasive of examples?

Indifferent to style, we do indulge in longings—longings pitifully weak—longings for the preservation of independence toilfully purchased during the poisonous years of the past. Beside all wishes for books and pictures and means for music and the thousands of small things which make for divine discontent, stands a spectre—not grim and abhorrent and forbidding, but unlovely and stern, indicating that the least excess of exotic pleasures would so strain our resources that independence would be threatened. If we were to buy anything beyond necessities, we might not be certain of gratifying wants, frugal as they are, without once more being compelled to fight with the beasts at some Australian Ephesus. Rather than clog our minds with the thought of such conflict and of fighting with flaccid muscles, dispirited and almost surely ingloriously, we choose to laugh and be glad of our liberty, to put summary checks upon arrogant desires for the possession of hosts of things which would materially add to

comforts without infringing upon pleasures, and find in all serene satisfaction.

We have not yet pawned our future. No sort of tyranny, save that which is primal, physical, and of the common lot, puts his dirty foot on our haughty, sun-favoured necks.

"It is still the use of fortune  
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,  
To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow  
An age of poverty."

May Heaven and our thrift avert the fate!

The nervous intensity, the despotic self-sufficiency of this easy and indifferent existence may expose us to taunts; but how sublimely ineffective the taunts which are never heard and which, if heard through echoing mischance, would provoke but serene smiles; for have we not avoided the aches of uniformity, the seriousness of prosperity, most of the trash of civilisation, and the scorn of Fortune when she sniggers?

How magnificently slender, too, is our boasted independence! What superb economists are we! Astonishment follows upon an audit of our slipshod accounts at the amount spent unconsciously on small things which do not directly affect the actual cost of living. Taking the mean of several years' expenditure, the item "postage stamps" is a little larger than the cost of my own clothing and boots. The average annual cost of stamps has been £5 4s.; clothing and boots, £4 12s. Indeed, this latter item is inflated, since, while I have stamps worth only a few shillings on hand, clothes are in stock sufficient (in main details) to last twelve months. The "youthful hose, well kept," with other everlasting drapery brought from civilisation, is still wearable. The original clothing, such as conformity with the rules of the streets implies, remains serviceable, however obsolete in "style," which is another word for fashion, "that pitiful, lackey-like creature which struts through one country in the cast-off finery of another." For the privilege of citizenship in what, at present, is the freest country in the world my direct taxation amounts to £1 5s. per annum; and, since "luxuries" are not in demand, indirect contributions to State and Commonwealth are so trivial that they fail to excite the most sensitive of the emotions. All our household is in harmony with this quiet tune, and yet we have not conquered our passion for thrift but merely disciplined it.

A young missionary who became a great bishop, after some experience of "the wilds," expressed the opinion that there were but six necessaries—shelter, fuel, water, fire, something to eat, and blankets. Our practical tests, extending over twelve years, would tend to the reduction of the list. For the best part of the year one item—blankets—is superfluous. Water and fuel are so abundant that they count almost as cheaply as the air we breathe; but we do lust after a few clothes—a very few—which the good missionary did not catalogue. Our essentials would therefore be—shelter, something to eat, and a "little" to wear. Fire is included under "something to eat," for it is absolutely unnecessary for warmth. We do still appreciate a warm meal. Our house contains no means for the production of heat, save the kitchen stove.

Fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs, poultry, fish, and nearly all the meat consumed—emergency stocks of tinned goods are in reserve—are as cheap as water and fuel. Our unsullied appetites demand few condiments. Why olives, when if need be—and the need has not yet manifested itself—as shrewd a relish and as cleansing a flavour is to be obtained from the pale yellow flowers of the male papaw, steeped in brine—a decoration and a zest combined? Our mango chutney etherealises our occasional salted goat-mutton—and we know that the chutney is what it professes to be.

What more wholesome and pleasant a dish than papaw beaten to mush, saturated with the juice of lime, sweetened with sugar, and made fantastic with spices? What more enticing, than stewed mango—golden and syrupy—with junket white as marble; or fruit salad compact of pineapple, mango, papaw, granadilla, banana, with lime juice and powdered sugar?

We lack not for spring chicken or roast duck whenever there is the wish; for the best part of the year eggs are despicably common. Every low tide advertises oysters gratis, and occasionally crabs and crayfish for the picking up. Delicate as well as wholesome and nutritious food is ours at so little cost that our debt to smiling Nature, if she kept records and tendered her accounts, would be somewhat embarrassing. And if Nature frowns with denial and there are but porridge and goat's milk and eggs and home-made bread and jam, thank goodness she blesses such fare with unjaded appreciation!

Since deprived of the society of blacks, our domestic expenditure has dwindled by nearly one-half. Indeed, it is almost as costly to feed and clothe three blacks as to provide essentials for three whites of frugal tastes. Here are a few items of annual domestic expenditure, proffered not in the spirit of

gloating over our simplicity or of delighting in economy of luxuries, but to illustrate how few are the wants which Nature (with a little assistance) leaves unsatisfied. The figures are presented with the utmost diffidence, but with indifference alike to the censure of those who may scent obsequiousness to the stern philosophy of Thoreau in the matter of diet, or to the jeers of others who despise small things:

Flour £ 4 5 0
Groceries, lighting, &c. 40 0 0
Sundries 12 0 0
-----
Total £56 5 0

And the irreducible minimum has yet to be reached. For many years my exacting personal needs demanded the luxury of coffee. Pure and unadulterated, I quaffed it freely, and (being no politician) neither did it enhance my wisdom nor enable me to see through anything with half-shut eyes. Yet did it make me too glad. Under such vibrant, emphatic fingers my frail nerves twanged all too shrilly, and of necessity coffee was abandoned—not without passing pangs—in favour of a beverage direct from Nature and untinctured by any of the vital principles of vegetables. Thus is economy evolved, not as a foppish fad but as due obedience to the polite but imperious decrees of Nature.

And having confessed—far too literally, I fear—to so much on the expenditure side of the simple life in tropical Queensland, it might be anticipated that the items of income would be stated to the completion of the story. The affairs of the busy world were discarded, not upon the strength of large accumulated savings or the possession of means by inheritance or by the success of investments or by mere luck, but upon merely imperative, theoretic anticipations upon the cost of living the secluded life. We had little in reserve, how little it would be unbecoming to say. Our theories proved delusive, though not bewildering. Some of the things abandoned with unphilosophic ease at the outset proved under the test of experience to be essential. Others deemed to be needful to desperation were forsaken unconsciously. Under the light of experience forecasts as to actual requirements were quite as vain as our preconceptions contrariwise. No single item which was not subjected to regulation. Without imposing any more impatient figures, be it said, then, that, though all preliminary estimates of ways and means underwent summary evolution, the financial end was close upon that on which we had calculated. Compulsion had all to do with the result. During each of the years of Island life our total income has never exceeded £100 and has generally fallen considerably below that amount. From the beginning we felt—and the foregoing lines have failed of their purpose if this acknowledgment has not been forestalled

"To be thus is nothing,  
But to be safely thus";

and to draw again from the unplumbed depths of Shakespeare:

"What's sweet to do, to do will aptly find."

## CHAPTER III

### "MUCH RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM"

"Go and argue with the flies of summer that there is a power divine yet greater than the sun in the heavens, but never dare hope to convince the people of the South that there is any other God than Gold."—KINGLAKE.

No "saint-seducing gold" has been permitted to ruffle this placidity. Gold! Our ears were tickled by the tale that good folks had actually thrilled when we slunk away to our Island. Rumour wagged her tongue, abusing God's great gift of speech, until scared Truth fled. She said—how cheap is notoriety!—that secret knowledge of hidden wealth which good luck had revealed during our holiday camp had induced us to surreptitiously secure the land, that in our own good time we might selfishly gloat over untold gold! Some came frankly to prospect our hills and gullies, others shamefacedly, when our backs were turned; for had it not been foretold that gold was certain to be found on the Island, and were not

the invincible truths of geology verified by our covert ways? Had not one of the natives told of a lump so weighty that no man might lift it and on which hungry generation after hungry generation had pounded nuts? Had not another used a nugget as a plummet for his fishing-line? It mattered not that the sordidly battered lump proved to be an ingot of crude copper—probably portion of the ballast from some ancient wrecks—and that Truth was sulking down some very remote well when the fable of the golden sinker was invented. Ordinary men—men of the type whom Kinglake designated "Poor Mr. Reasonable Man"—men with common sense, in fact, the very commonest of sense—were not to be beguiled by the plain statement that apparently sane individuals wilfully ventured into solitude for the mere privilege of living. Gold must be the real attraction—all else fictitious, said they. "They have" [Rumour is speaking] "the option of an unwitnessed reef, sensationally, romantically rich, or know of a piratically and solemnly secreted hoard." Indeed, we did think to enjoy our option, but over something more precious than gold.

But one visitor was so confidentially certain about the gold that he boldly made a proposition to share it. A fair exchange it was to be. He would, then and there, lead to a shaft 60 feet deep, and deep in the jungle, too, at a spot so artfully concealed that no mortal man could ever unguided hope to find it, where was to be revealed a reef—a rich reef blasted by the mere refractoriness of the ore, a disadvantage which would vanish like smoke before a man of means. To this sure and certain source of fortune he would provide safe and speedy conduct if on our part we would with like frankness confide in him our secret.

Our lack of secret, was it not boldly writ on our faces? But it was fair to assume an air of mystery. "Our secret," said we, "is more desirable than gold, yea, than much fine gold. Yours, at the best, is but dross!"

The very worst that could happen would be the discovery on this spot of anything more precious than an orchid. Gold, which would transform the Isle into a desert, is therefore selfishly concealed, and the reason for the concealment remains an incomprehensible enigma. Was it not the pinnacle of folly to retire to an Island where gold was not to be gotten either by the grace of God or by barter or strife with man? So bold a foolishness was incredible. Yet we get more out of the life of incredible folly than the wise who think of gold and little else but gold.

The singular perfection of our undertaking—"the rarity to run mad without a cause, without the least constraint or necessity," the exercise of that "refined and exquisite passion"—stamped me a disciple of Don Quixote, and such I remain.

Some ancient said that the more folly a man puts into life the more he lives—a precept in which I steadfastly believe, provided the folly is of the wholesome kind and on a sufficient and calculated scale.

For several years prior to our descent no blacks had been resident on the Island. After the blotting out of the great multitude, the visits of its descendants had been irregular and brief. Therefore—and the assurance is almost superfluous—most of the evidences of the characteristics of the race had, in the course of nature, been obliterated. A few frescoes adorning remote rock shelters, a few pearl shell fish-hooks, stone axes and, hammers, a rude mortar or two (merely granite rocks in which shallow depressions had been worn by the pounding of nuts), shells on the sites of camps, scars of stone axes on a few trees—these were the only relics of the departed race.

Has a decade of occupation by wilful white folks wrought any permanent change in the stamp of Nature? None, save the exotic plants, that time, fire, and "white ants" might not consume. My kitchen midden is less conspicuous than those of the blacks, and, decently interred, glass and china shards the only lasting evidence thereof, for the few fragments of iron speedily corrode to nothingness in this damp and saline air. Unwittingly the blacks handed down specimens of their handicraft—the pearl shell fish-hooks, a thousand times more durable in this climate than hooks of steel. Geologists tell us that shells with iridescent colours are found in clays of such ancient date that if stated in centuries an indefinite number of millions would have to be assigned to them. It is not strange, then, that some of my pearl shell hooks are as lustrous and sharp to-day as when the careless maker mislaid them in the sand for me to find half a century later. We leave no records on the land itself which would betray us after the lapse of half a dozen years. Is it not humiliating to find that the white man as the black records his most durable domestic history in rubbish, easily expungible by clean-fingered time?

Is humanity ever free from worries? What it has not it invents. Remote though we are from the disturbance of other folk's troublous cries, the ocean does not afford complete exemption from the sight of the shocking insecurity of the street.

One memorable day, casually glancing at the mainland, I saw on the beach something moving at astonishing speed. Whereupon the telescope was brought to bear, and to my dismay revealed, actually and without fiction, a practical spring cart, drawn by a real horse at a trot, which horse was driven (as

far as the telescope was credible) by a man! Over four years have elapsed since I saw any wheeled vehicle other than my own barrow—the speed of which is sedate (for I am a sedate and determined man, and refuse to be flurried by my own barrow). Nervousness and excitement began to play. Thank the propitious stars, two miles and more of mighty ocean separated me from the furious car. Otherwise, who may say? I might in my confusion have been unable to avoid disaster. This place is becoming thrilling. Let me move farther from the rush and bewilderment of traffic. Let me flee to some more secluded scene, where my sight, unsoiled hitherto by motor-car, may for ever preserve most excellent virginity. I have since made inquiries, and have been assured that the nerve-shocking juggernaut of the opposite beach is palsied—liable, indeed, to dissolution at any moment. When the collapse occurs I propose to venture across to inspect the remains and renew youthful memories of the species of conveyance to which it belonged.

How do we spend our day? How fill up the blank spaces? Goats are to be milked, fowls to be fed, dough to be kneaded, breakfast to be prepared, firewood to be cut, house to be looked after. Most of the substantial improvements have long since been finished, but there is no place but has to be kept in repair. One day, a week practically, is bestowed on the steamer. All odd moments and every evening are devoted to books.

During the cool season, when day tides range low, hours are passed on the coral reef, as often as conscience permits, in contemplation of the life of that crowded area. Seldom do we leave the Island, and rarely does any but a casual visitor break in on our privacy. Satisfied of the unpotentially of wealth, here we materialise those dreams of happiness which are the enchantment of youth, the resolve of maturity, the solace of old age. Let other questants abandon hope, for I have found the philosopher's stone.

My concerns are far too engrossing to permit my mind to wander on the trivial, unreal, incomprehensible affairs of the Commonwealth, for the command of which practical politicians continuously grapple, though, I am one of those who mourn for democracy, since democracy has chosen to indulge in such hazardous experiments. The Government of a country which gives equal voice in the election of its representatives to university professor and unrepentant Magdalene is not altogether in a wholesome way, even though over a dozen Houses of Parliament clamour to manufacture its laws.

It is enough for me to possess the Isle of Desire—the evergreen isle that "sluttish time" has never besmeared with ruin—where one may wander whithersoever the mood of the moment wills, or loll in the shade of scented trees, or thread the sunless mazes of the jungle—that region of shadow where all the leaves are dumb—listening for faint, ineffective sounds, or bask on the sand—on clean, unviolated, mica-bespangled sand—dreamily gazing over a sea of flashing reflections where fitful zephyrs, soft as the shadows of clouds, alone make blueness visible.

The individual whose wants are few—who is content, who has no treasure to guard, whose rights there is none to dispute; who is his own magistrate, postman, architect, carpenter, painter, boat-builder, boatman, tinker, goatherd, gardener, woodcutter, water-carrier, and general labourer; who has been compelled to chip the superfine edges of his sentiments with the repugnant craft of the butcher; who, heedless of rule and method, adjusts the balance between wholesome toil and whole-hearted ease; who has a foolish love for the study of Nature; who has a sense of fellowship with animate and inanimate things; who endeavours to learn the character and the purpose of varied forms of life; whose jurisdiction extends over fifteen sacrosanct isles; who is never happier than when reading—need never bewail the absence of human schemes and sounds or fret under the galling burden of idleness. Here is no bell to affright; nor are we subject to the bidding or liable to the assault of any passer by. Smooth-flowing time knows not mud or any foulness, while its impassive surface, burnished by August sunshine, reflects fair scenes and silent doings.

The freedom from care, the vague sense of selfish property in the whole scheme of Nature, the delicious discovery of the virtues of solitude, the loveliness of this most gay and youthful earth, and the tones of the pleasant-voiced and often surly sea fill me with joy and embellish hope—vague and unsubstantial—for is not this Isle the "place where one may have many thoughts and not decide anything"?

For all my occupations, I am often driven to "dialogue with my shadow" for lack of less subservient auditor, and though, as the years pass, I find that I become more loose of soul and in broad daylight indulge the liberty of muttering my affairs and addressing animals and plants and of confiding secrets to the chaste moon—poets and dramatists term such incontinence of speech soliloquy and employ it for the utterance of edifying inspiration—it is because it is impossible to be ever quite alone. Not so very long ago in Merrie England if a person muttered to himself it was enough on which to establish a charge of wizardry; but it is also said that real witches and wizards, though subject to the most ticklish

tests, never perspired—a default which hastened conviction. Therein is my hope of salvation. If it be my fate some day to be found

"With age grown double,  
Picking dry sticks and mumbling to myself."

I shall claim a profuse prerogative, and continue to saunter down into the gloom at the foot of the hill of life unblinking in the sun.

## CHAPTER IV

### SILENCES

"Who has not hearkened to Her infinite din?"—THOREAU.

Free alike from the clatter of pastimes and the creaks and groans of labour, this region discovers acute sensibility to sound. Silence in its rarest phases soothes the Isle, reproaching disturbances, though never so temperate. All the endemic sounds are primitive and therefore seldom harsh. Even the mysterious fall of a tree in the jungle—not an unusual occurrence on still days during the wet season—is unaccompanied by thud and shock. Encompassing vines and creepers, colossal in strength and overwhelming in weight, which have strained the tree to breaking point, ease their burden down, muffling its descent, though now and again the primal rupture of trunk or branch rings out a sharp protest, and following the fall is silence—that varying, elusive sensation not to be expressed by the absence of actual noise.

There are silences which tinkle or buzz in the ears, causing them to ache with stress and strain; silences dull and sad as a wad of wool; silences as searching as the odour of musk—as soothing as the perfume of violets. The crisp silence of the seashore when absolute calm prevails is as different from the strained, sodden, padded silence of the jungle as the savour of olives from the raw insipidity of white of egg, for the cumbersome mantle of leafage is the surest stifler of noise, the truest cherisher of silence.

The most imperious hour of this realm of silence is three o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun has absorbed the energies of the most volatile of birds and insects. An hour later all may begin to assert themselves after a reviving, siesta; yet during the intensest hour of silence any abrupt noise—a call, or whistle, or bark of a dog—finds an immediate response. No sound has been heard for an hour. All the birds have been stricken dumb or have been banished, yet as an echo to any violation of the silence comes the sweet, mellow, inquisitive note of the "moor-goody" (to use the black's name, for the shrike thrush). The bird seems fond of sound and will answer in trills and chuckles attempts to imitate its call.

The condition of perfect silence is not for this noisy sphere. The artist in so-called silences merely registers certain more or less delicate sound-waves flowing in easy contours, which others have not the leisure to distinguish. Often have I found myself as I strolled gloating over the exquisite absence of sound—enjoying in full mental relish the quaint and refined sensation. Yet when I have stopped and listened determinedly, viciously analysing my sensations, have I become aware of a hubbub of frail and interblended sounds. That which I had thought to be distilled silence, was microphonic Babel—an intimate commingling of analogous noises varying in quality and intensity. By wilful resistance to what Falstaff called "the disease of not listening," I have been privileged to become aware of the singing of a quiet tune, some of the phrases of which were directly derivative from inarticulate vegetation—the thud of glossy blue quandongs on the soft floor of the jungle, the clicking of a discarded leaf as it fell from topmost twigs down through the strata of foliage, the bursting of a seed-pod, the patter of rejects from the million pink-fruited fig, overhanging the beach, the whisper of leaves, the faint squeal where interlocked branches fret each other unceasingly, the sigh of phantom zephyrs too elusive to be felt.

Echoes from vistas of silence far in the jungle lost their individuality in a sob. Grasshoppers clinked in the forest, the hum of bees and beetles, the fluty plaint of a painted pigeon far in the gloom, the furtive scamper of scrub fowl among leaves made tender by decay, the splash of startled fish in the shadows, commingled and blended to the accompaniment of that subdued aerial buzz by which Nature manifests the more secret of her functions and art—that ineffable minstrelsy to which her silent battalions keep

step. Preoccupation, the whirl of my own temperate thoughts, scared silence, while as soon as the mental machine was stilled, the very trees became vocal. Thus have I caught fleet silences as they passed in chase of fugitive sounds.

Since the morning stars sang together, absolute silence has not visited the uneasy earth. In this Silent Isle the ears—

"Set to small measure, deaf to all the beats  
Of the large music rolling o'er the world"—

become almost supernaturally alert, catching the faintest sound. Kinglake, who heard in the Syrian desert while dozing on his camel and for ten minutes after awakening "the innocent bells of Marlen," attributed the phenomenon to the heat of the sun, the perfect dryness, the deep stillness, "having rendered the ears liable to tingle under the passing touch of some mere memory that may have swept across my brain in a moment of sleep." Homesick sailors, too, lost in the profound stillness of mid-ocean, have listened with fearful wonder to the phantom chiming of their village bells.

Apart from the tricks which memory plays upon the solitary individual, inviting him by scents and sounds to scenes of the past, I find that the moist unadulterated atmosphere is a most compliant medium for the transmission of certain sorts of sound waves. The actual surface of the sea—differing from its resonant bulk—seems to sap up, rather than convey sounds, though on given planes above its level sounds travel unimpeded for remarkable distances. The resonance of the atmosphere appears at times to be dependent on the tone and quality rather than on the abruptness and loudness of the sound. I have listened with strange delight to the rustle of the sea on the mainland beach—two and a half miles distant—when the air has been so idle that the sensitive casuarinas—ever haunted by some secret woe upon which to moan and sob—have been mute and unable to find excuse for the faintest sigh. The branches which thinly shaded me hung limp and still and yet the soft, white-footed sea marking time on the harder sands of the mainland set distance at naught in one continuous murmur.

However listless the air, the coral-reef, though its crowded life is inarticulate and mute is ever brisk with minor but strenuous noises. Splashes and gurgles, sighs and gasps, coughs and sneezes, sharp clicks and snaps and snarls—telling of alarms, tragic escapes, and violent death-dealings—blend with the continuous murmur of the sea, and are occasionally punctuated by sudden slaps and thuds as a blundering, hammer-head shark pursues a high-leaping eagle-ray, or the red-backed sea eagle dashes down upon a preoccupied bream, the impact of its firm breast embossing a white rosette on the blue water.

In the absence of vibratory media the noises of the reef are isolated. furtive, echoless—staccato accidentals and dull dissonances out of tune with the soothing theme of the sea. Hence, when, as I wandered absorbed in an inspection of minor details, and a mellow whistle, constant but varying in volume, broke in upon my musings, it was vain to repress the thrill of excitement. A sound so foreign and incongruous also had a certain element of mystery. In a flash unsensational ponderings were displaced by a picture of a steamer in distress far away. Had I not on a similar occasion of a secret-disclosing tide heard through seven miles of insulted and sullen air the flop of an inch or so of dynamite exploded by a heartless barbarian for the illicit destruction of vivacious fish? Had I not listened with amazement to the buzz of a steamer's propeller and the throb of her engines six miles away when unaccustomed "nigger-heads" of coral showed yellow in the sun? The calm, shallow sea conveyed the sounds with marvellous fidelity and surety. Yet this unaccountable call came from a quarter whence steamers may not venture, and was I not the only whistler within a range of many miles? No steamer ever gloated or warned or appealed in so fluty a note—plaintive, slightly tremulous, nervously imploring.

Alert, I tracked the strange sound along an eccentric course to its haunt, finding nothing more than the empty shell of a huge sea urchin, which in accord with a whim of the sea had floated and was now held aloft slantwise to the lips of the wind, firm in the branching tines of stag's-horn coral. A rustic pipe—giving forth a sonorous moan, now cooing and crooning, now bold and confident, and again irresolute and unschooled. Not too sure of instrumentalism, oft the note was hesitating, soliciting a compliant ear as became a modest wooer of the muses, polishing his unceremonious serenade to some, shy mermaid, or hooting at shy silence.

A new art, a rare accomplishment! So the musician was diffident, half-ashamed, half-shocked at his audacity, wholly self-conscious; earnest to please yet doubtful of the reception awaiting his untutored, artless play. Gathering courage, the breeze moistened his lips and a triumphant spasm of sound boomed out, and again the tremulous undertone prevailed. It was more than a serenade—a primitive sensation from primitive matter—a vital function, for as long, as the wind blew and until the lapping sea

gurgled in its throat and its note ceased with the bursting of a bubble, there, held fixedly by living coral, the dead shell could not choose but whistle. So I left it to its wayward pipings, happy to have been the sole auditor to a purely natural, albeit mechanical, monotone. Upon such an instrument did the heavenly maid beguile the time when she was yet uncouthly young—at the hoydenish age when men also cajoled her with clicking sticks and the beating of hollow logs, and music was but a variety of noise.

## CHAPTER V

### FRUITS AND SCENTS

"The pot herbs of the gods."—THOREAU.

Those branches of the cultural enterprise which depend upon my own unaided exertions fail, I am bound to confess, consistently. However partial to the results of the gardener's art, I admit with lamentations lack of the gardener's touch. Since bereft of black labour by the seductions of rum and opium, the plantation of orange-trees has sadly degenerated; the little grove of bananas has been choked with gross over-bearing weeds, the sweet-potato patch has been absorbed, the coffee-trees elbowed out of existence. But how may one man of many avocations withstand acres of riotous and exulting weeds? Therefore do I attempt atonement for obvious neglect by the scarcely less laborious delight of acclimatising plants from distant tropical countries.

A valued and disinterested friend sends seeds which I plant for the benefit of posterity. Who will eat of the fruit of the one durian which I have nurtured so carefully and fostered so fondly? Packed in granulated charcoal as an anti-ferment, the seed with several others which failed came from steamy Singapore, and over all the stages of germination I brooded with wonder and astonishment. Since the durian is endemic in a very restricted portion of the globe, and since those who have watched the vital process may be comparatively few in number and therefore unlikely to be jaded by the truisms of these pages, a few words in explanation may not be resented. The seed of the durian is roughly cordate, about an inch and a quarter long. In the form of a disproportionately stout and blundering worm the sprout of my seed issued from the soil, peered vaguely into daylight, groped hesitatingly and arched over to bury its apex in the soil, and from this point the delicately white primal leaves sprang, and the growth has been continuous though painfully slow ever since.

Perhaps the deliberate development of the plant is gauged by eagerness and anticipation. Do I not occasionally indulge the hope of living long enough to sample the first fruits? When in such humour I long for the years to come, and thus does my good friend stimulate expectations:—

"I have been spending a small fortune in durians, they are relatively cheap and very good this season in Singapore. Like all the good things in Nature—tempests, breakers, sunsets, &c. durian is indescribable. It is meat and drink and an unrivalled delicacy besides, and you may gorge to repletion and never have cause for penitence. It is the one case where Nature has tried her hand at the culinary art and beaten all the CORDON BLEUE out of heaven and earth. Would to Heaven she had been more lavish of her essays!

"Though all durians are, perhaps, much alike and not divided like apples and mangoes into varieties, the flavour varies much according to size and ripeness. In some the taste of the custard surrounding the heart-like seeds rises almost to the height of passion, rapture, or mild delirium. Yesterday (21st June, 1907) about 2 p.m. I devoured the contents of a fruit weighing over 10 lb. At 6 p.m. I was too sleepy to eat anything, and thence had twelve hours of almost unbroken slumber."

Since my friend is not an enthusiast in regard to tropical fruits, his reverie is all the more reasonable.

The Dyaks, who are passionately fond of the durian, distinguished it by the title of DIEN, which signifies the fruit PAR EXCELLENCE. Under such circumstances my anticipations are justifiable. To my friend I am also indebted for several young plants of the sapodilla plum (ACHRAS SAPOTA), sold in some parts of India under the spurious title of MANGOSTEEN, and considered to be one of the most luscious fruits of the tropics. Like the durian, the sapodilla plum grows all too slowly for my precipitate tastes, though I console myself plenteously with mangoes.

Now, the mango in its infinite variety possesses charms as engaging as those of Cleopatra. Rash and



vain though it be, I am in such holiday humour in respect of the sweet anticipation of the durian that I cannot refrain from an attempt to chant the praises of the "little lower" fruit. Yet it is

"Beyond the power of language to enfold  
The form of beauty smiling at his heart"

whose palate is tickled with such dulcet, such fantastic flavours.

How may one hope to externalise with astringent ink the aesthetic sensation of the assimilation of gusts of perfume?

A mango might be designated the unspeakable eatable, for who is qualified to determine the evanescent savours and flavours which a prime specimen of the superb fruit so generously yields? Take of a pear all that is mellow, of a peach all that is luscious, of a strawberry all that is fragrant, of a plum all that is kindly, of an apricot all its aroma, of cream all its smoothness. Commingle with musk and honey, coriander and aniseed, smother with the scent of musk roses, blend with cider, and the mixture may convey a dim sense of some of the delectable qualities of one kind of mango. To do justice to the produce of the very next tree another list of triumphant excellences might be necessary. A first-class mango is compact of so many sensations to the palate, its theme embraces such rare and delicate surprises, that the true artist in fruit-flavours is fain to indulge in paraphrase and paradox when he attempts to record its virtues and—yes, its vanities.

There are mangoes and mangoes. The very worst is not to be wholly despised. For the best there are due moods and correct environments. For some, the lofty banquet-hall, splendid with reflected lights and the flash of crystal and silver and the triumphal strains of a full band hidden by a screen of palms and tree-ferns. There are others best to be eaten to slow, soft music in a flower-bedizened glade of fairy-land.

September is the season of scents. Partly as a result of the dryness of the month, the mango trees continue to bloom as though each had determined (for the time being) to abandon all notion of utility and to devote itself solely to the keeping up of appearances. Appearances are well worth maintaining, for however trivial from a florist's point of view the flower of the mango in detail, yet when for six weeks on end the trees present uniform masses of buff and pink, varied with shades of grey and pale green, and with the glister of wine-tinted, ribbon-like leaves, and the air is alert with rich and spicy odour, there is ample apology ever ready for the season and the direct results thereof. The trees are manifestly over-exerting themselves, in a witless competition with others which may never boast of painted, scented fruit. There is not a sufficient audience of aesthetics to tolerate the change of which the mango seems ambitious.

In Japan, where the cultured crunch hard and gritty fruits, peach and plum trees may be encouraged to expend all their force and prime in the production of bloom. Vagrant Englishmen are still so benighted that the desire for sweet and aromatic fruit vaunts over that which gives delight merely to the eye. But to assume indifference to present conditions, to decline to accept in full measure the redolence of the season which stands for spring in tropical Australia, to refuse to be grateful for it all, would be inhuman.

The limes have flowered and scattered their petals; the pomeloes (the forbidden fruit) display posies of the purest white and of the richest odour, an odour which in its depth and drowsy essence epitomises the luxurious indolence of the tropics; the lemons and oranges are adding to the sweetness and whiteness, and yet the sum of the scent of all these trees of art and cultivation is poor and insipid compared with the results of two or three indigenous plants that seem to shrink from flaunting their graces while casting sweetness on the desolate air.

Just now, in some situations, the old gold orchid rivals the mango in showiness and fragrance; the pencil orchid dangles white aigrettes from the trunks and branches of hundreds of trees, saturating the air with a subtle essence as of almonds and honey; and the hoyas hang festoons from rocks and trees in such lavish disregard of space and the breathings of less virile vegetation, that the sensual scent borders on the excessive. On the hill-tops, among rocks gigantic of mould and fantastic of shape, a less known orchid with inconspicuous flowers yields a perfume reminiscent of the violet; the shady places on the flats are showy with giant crinum lilies.

It is the season of scents, and the native, untended, unpampered plants are easily and gracefully first in an uncatalogued competition. Haunting conceit on the part of the mango will not permit acknowledgment of defeat; but no impartial judge would hesitate in making his selection from among plants which in maturing make no formal appeal whatever to man, but in some cases keep aloof from notice and renown, while dissipating scents which fertilise the brain, stimulating the flowers of fancy.

Not all the scents which sweeten the air are salubrious. Several are distinctly injurious. Men do not actually "die of a rose in aromatic pain," though many may become uncomfortable and fidgety by sniffing delicious wattle-blossom; and one of the crinum lilies owes its specific title, (PESTILENTIS) to the ill effects of its stainless flowers, those who camp in places where the plant is plentiful being apt to be seized with violent sickness. An attractive fruit with an exalted title (DIOSPYROS HEBECAPRA) scalds the lips and tongue with caustic-like severity, and a whiff from a certain species of putrescent fungus produces almost instantaneous giddiness, mental anguish, and temporary paralysis.

The most elemental of all incenses—that which arises from warm, dry soil sprinkled by a sudden shower—is undoubtedly invigorating. The spirituous scent of melaleuca-trees burdens the air, not as an exhalation but as an arrogant physical part of the Isle, while a wattle (ACACIA CUNNINGHAMI) shyly proclaims its flowering by a scent as intangible and fleeting as a phantom.

"The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense." Not so in respect of the organ of smell. The more educated, the more practised nose detects the subtler odour and is the more offended by grossness. And upon what flower has been bestowed the most captivating of perfumes? Not the rose, or the violet, or the hyacinth, or any of the lilies or stephanotis or boronia. The land of forbidding smells produces it; it is known to Europeans as the Chinese magnolia. Quaint and as if carved skilfully in ivory, after the manner of, the inhabitants of its countrymen, the petals tumble apart at the touch, while fragrance issues not in whiffs but in sallies, saturating the atmosphere with the bouquet of rare old port commingled with the aroma of ripe pears and the scent of musk roses.

Some of the flowering plants of old England here dwell contentedly, leafage being free, however few and dwarfed in some cases the bloom. Roses, violets, honeysuckle, pansies, cosmos, phlox, balsams, sunflowers, zinnias, blue Michaelmas daisies, dianthus, nasturtiums, &c., are on common ground with purely tropical plants, while ageratum has become a pestiferous weed.

An early or late arrival among flowers and fruit cannot be hailed or chidden where there is but trifling seasonable variation. Without beginning and without end, the perpetual motion of tropical vegetation is but slightly influenced by the weather. Who is to say that this plant is early or that late, when early or late, like Kipling's east and west, are one? It is not that all flowering trees and plants are of continuous growth. Many do have their appointed seasons, producing flowers and fruit according to date and in orderly progress, leaving to other species the duty of maintaining a consecutive, unbroken series which defies the mechanism of cold countries with their cast-iron calendars.

Here but three or four trees deign to recognise the cool season by the shedding of their leaves. FICUS CUNNINGHAMI discards—by no means consistently—its foliage in obedience to some spasmodic impulse, when the many thin branches, thick-strewn with pink fruit, stand out against the sky as aerial coral, fantastically dyed. But in two or three days burnished brown leaves burst from the embraces of elongated buds which, rejected, fall—pink phylacteries—to decorate the sand, while in a week the tree wears a new and glistening garment of green. The flame-tree (ERYTHRINA INDICA) slowly abandons its foliage; but before the last yellow-green leaf is cast aside the fringe of the blood-red robe soon to overspread has appeared. The white cedar (MELIA CONFERTA) permits its leaves to become yellow and to fall lingeringly, but its bareness is merely for a week or so. So also does the foliage of the moo-jee (TERMINALIA MELANOCARPA) turn to deepest red and is discarded, but so orderly is the disrobing and the never varying fashion of foliage that the tree averts the scorn of the most respectable of neighbours.

Month after month of warm days and plenteous rain during the early part of 1909 produced an effect in the acacias which cannot be too thankfully recorded. The blooming season extended from March 29th to July 17th, beginning with ACACIA CUNNINGHAMI and ending with the third flush of A. AULACOCARPA. During a third of the year whiffs of the delicious perfume of the wattle were never absent, for two flushes of A. FLAVESCENS filled in the brief intervals between those of AULACOCARPA. This latter, the commonest of the species on the island, produces its flowers in long spikes in the axils of the leaves on the minor branches, weighting such branches with semi-pendulous plumes laden with haunting perfume. The fragrance of the bounteous, sacrificial blooms saturates miles of air, while their refuse tricks out the webs of spiders great and small with fictitious favours, and carpets the earth with inconstant gold.

## CHAPTER VI

# HIS MAJESTY THE SUN

"And therefore is the glorious planet, Sol,  
In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd  
Amidst the ether, whose medicinable eye  
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil."

## SHAKESPEARE.

Twelve years of open-air life in tropical Queensland persuade me that I am entitled to prerogative of speech, not as an oracle or a prophet on the prodigious subject of the weather at large, but of the effect thereof on my sensations and constitution, since the greater part of that period has been spent under conditions calculated to put them to the test. Especially has the sun given penetrating tastes of his quality and bestowed enduring marks of his favour. During these twelve joyful years the annual rainfall has averaged over 131 inches, the average number of days on which rain has fallen being 134. Of the heat of the sun during the hottest month of the year let two unstudied records speak. As January 29, 1907, gave early promise of exceptional heat, I watched the thermometer closely, noting the consistency with which its ups and downs tallied with my perceptions These are the readings:

Deg. 6 a.m. 75 10 a.m. 94 Noon 96 12.30 p.m. 97 1 p.m. 98 3 p.m. 97 4 p.m. 88 5 p.m. 85 6 p.m. 82

In the sun at 1 p.m. the glass registered 108°, at 2 p.m. 110°, and at 3 p.m. 107°. A thunderstorm accounted for the rather early culmination of the temperature and its rapid decline.

The shade temperature of January, 1910, at 6.30 a.m. was 73°, at 3 p.m. 88°. The sun registered 98° on the hottest day of that month when my diary tells me I took part in the erection of rough fencing, horse-driving, and lifting and carrying logs.

This salubrious sun does not excuse man from day labour in unshaded scenes. During January, I, who am blessed with but slight muscular strength and no inherent powers of resistance to noontide flames, have toiled laboriously without registering more than due fatigue. Those accustomed to manual work experience but little inconvenience. It would be palpably indiscreet and vain to say that outdoor work in excessive heat involves no discomfort, but it may be truthfully asserted that midday suspension therefrom, though pleasant, is not absolutely necessary, at any rate where the environment is such as this.

Bounteous rain and glorious sunshine in combination might seem to constitute a climate unsuitable to persons of English birth, or at least trying to their preconceptions of the ideal. My own experience is entirely, enthusiastically favourable. I proffer myself as an example, since there is none other upon whom publicity may be thrust, and really in the spirit of performing an inevitable duty, such duty being comprehended in the fervent desire to proclaim from the lowly height of my housetop how health unbought and happiness unrealisable may be enjoyed in this delicately equable clime.

When I landed feebly on September 28, 1897, and crawled up on the beach beyond the datum of the most recent high tide to throw myself prone on the consoling sand I was worn, world-weary, and pale, and weighed 8 st. 4 lb. Now my weight is 10 st. 2 lb., and my complexion uniformly sun-tinted. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that my uniform has been bestowed by the sun, because having early discovered the needlessness of clothes—that "the body is more than raiment"—most of the apparel in which civilisation flaunts was promptly discarded, and through the few thin things retained the sun soon worked his will. Latterly while in the open air I have abandoned the principal part of the superfluous remnant, to the enjoyment of additional comfort and the increase of self-complacency. As a final violation of my reserve be it proclaimed that to the super-excellence of the air of the Island, to the tonic of the sea, and to the graciousness of his Majesty the Sun—in whose radiance have I gloried—do I owe, perhaps, salvation from that which tributary friends in their meed of tenderness predicted—an untimely grave.

It is natural that those who live in cold climates and who wear for their comfort clothing designed to exclude the air from all parts of the body save the face should be steeped in conservatism; but the farther one ventures from the chaste opinion of the world the less subserviency he shows to customs and habits authoritative and relevant among century-settled folk, and the more readily he adapts himself to his environment the sooner does he become a true citizen of the country which he has chosen. Preconceptions he must discard as unfit, if not fatal. He is an alien until he learns to house, feed, and dress himself in accordance with the inviolable laws which Nature prescribes to each and every portion of her spacious and discordant realm.

Was I to remain fully clad and comfortless, or the reverse? The indulgence of my sensations has brought about revolutionary changes of costume and custom. Such changes were bound to react mentally, for are they not merely the symbols of ideas? Once it was unseemly, if not uncleanly, to perspire freely. Now the function is looked upon as necessary, wholesome, and the sign of one's loyalty to the sun. The sun compels thoughts. Daily, hourly does he exact homage and reign supreme over mind, body, and estate. So commanding is his rule, so apparent his goodwill, so speedy his punishment for sins of disobedience, so influential his presence, that I have come to look up to him as the transcendent manifestation of that power which ordains life and all its privileges and abolishes all the noisomeness of death. Alive, he nourishes, comforts, consoles, corrects us. Dead, all that is mortal he transforms into ethereal and vital gases. Obey him, and he blesses; flout him, and you perish.

An old historian of sport quaintly expressed a correct theory as to the virtue of profuse perspiration: "And when the hunters do their office on horseback and on foot, they sweat often; then if they have any evil in them it must come away in the sweating; so that he keep from cold after the heat." So does the wise man in the tropics regard perspiration—not as an offensive, certainly not as a pleasant function, but as one that is really inevitable and conducive to cleanliness and health.

Can the man who swathes his body in ever so many separate, superimposed, artificial skins, and who is careful to banish purifying air from contact with him, save on the rare occasions of the bath, be as healthful as he who furnishes himself with but a single superfluous skin, and that as thin and penetrable as the laws which hold society together permit?

The play of the sterilising sun on the brown, moist skin is not only tolerable but delightful—refreshing and purifying the body, while even light cotton clothing saturated to the dripping stage with perspiration represents the acme of discomfort, and if unchanged a good deal of the actually unwholesome.

All the hotter hours of the day have I worked in the bush felling trees, sawing and splitting logs, and adzing rough timber, the while November's unclouded sun evaporated perspiration almost as speedily as it flowed from high-pressure pores. There was no sensation of overheat, although the arms might weary with the swinging of the heavy maul and the back respond with aches to the stiffened attitude imposed by the adze.

Then at sundown to plunge into the tepid sea, to frolic and splash therein, while the red light in the west began to pale and the pink and silver surface of the ocean faded to grey; then to a vigorous soaping and scrubbing in the shady creek, where the orange-tinted drupes of pandanus-palms give to the cool water a balsamic savour; then, clad in clean cotton, to the evening meal with a prodigious appetite; and to bed at nine o'clock to sleep murmurlessly for eight hours—tell me if thus you are not fitted for another day's toil in the sublimating sunshine!

A medical man on the staff of one of the earliest of European voyages in the Pacific Ocean expressed the opinion that the "cutaneous disorders which so generally affect the inhabitants in the neighbourhood of the equator are caused by an acrimonious alteration of the humours brought on by the great heat of these climates"; and he adds: "I have no doubt that the constant action of the air and sun upon the skin of the people who go continually naked contributes much to these maladies, and renders them more obstinate." Though it would be presumptuous to pose as counsel for the defence of his Majesty the Sun, one who is blessed with so many of the privileges he bestows cannot ignore so scandalous albeit musty a libel which time, the only dispassionate judge, has long since condemned in respect of the generality of manhood. It is surprising, too, that Byron, though he revelled in the sea, was also under a delusion as to the more vitalising element, for he fancied the scorching rays to be "impregnate with disease," whereas the sun, the sea, and, in lesser degree, the torrid sand do actually represent "the spice and salt which season a man," and are the elements whence are derived many of his cleanest, superfine thoughts.

Kinship with his Majesty the Sun of the tropics is not to be claimed offhand. The imperious luminary does not grant his letters-patent to all. Very few does he permit to wanton in his presence without exacting probation. He is a rare respecter of persons. Though there are faces, like King Henry V.'s, which the sun will not condescend to burn, sometimes he smites savagely. He makes of the countenances of his foes a fry and of their bodies a comprehensive granulation. But if you find favour in his eyes—in those discriminating, ruthless, sight-absorbing glances which none may reciprocate—accept your privileges with a thrill of chastened pride that you may bask in his presence and be worthy his livery and of gladsome mind. The harpings of the sweet singer of Israel could not have been more effectual in the dispersal of depression than the steadfast beams of the sun supreme in tropic sky.

Let the sun scorch the skin and blister it until it peels, and scorches and peels again, and scorches and peels alternately until, having no more dominion over the flesh, it tinctures the very blood and transmutes mere ruddiness to bronze. Thereafter you know not for ever the pallor of the street for have

you not the gold of the sun in your blood and his iron in your bones?

Of the graciousness of the sun a special instance has been preserved in my erratic diary. Here it is: November 24, 1908: Spent from 10 a.m. to 1.15 p.m. on the beach and on the Isle of Purtaboi, bare-limbed, bare-bodied, save for scant cotton pants. Above high-water mark the sand was scorchingly hot to the feet. The heat of the glowing coral drift on the Isle forced me promptly to amend my methodic gait to a quick step, though my hardened soles soon became indifferent. Nutmeg pigeons were nesting plentifully on trees and shrubs amongst masses of orchids, and on ledges almost obscured by grass. Brown-winged terns occupied cool nooks and crannies in the rocks, and other species of terns had egg reserves—they cannot be called nests—on the unshaded coral bank. After gazing intently on the white drift, eagerly making mental notes of any remarkable mutations in the colouring of the thickly strewn eggs, and admiring the fortitude or indifference with which the fledglings endured the sizzling heat, I found myself subject to an optical illusion, for when I looked up and abroad the brightly gleaming sea had been changed to inky purple, the hills of the mainland to black. Though absolutely cloudless, the sky seemed oppressed with slaty gloom, and the leaves of the trees near at hand assumed a leaden green. For a few seconds I was convinced that some almost unearthly meteorological phenomenon, before which the most resolute of men might cower, had developed with theatrical suddenness. Then I realised that the intense glare of the coral, of which I had been unconscious, and the quivering heat rays had temporarily deprived my vision of appreciation of ordinary tints. Saturated by vivid white light, my bemused sight swayed under temporary aberration. I was conscious of illusion creating symptoms, tipsy with excess of sunshine. This condition passing, I found the atmosphere, though hot, pleasant and refreshing, the labour of rowing across the bay involving no unusual exertion or sense of discomfort. During my brief absence the beach of the island seemed to have absorbed still more effectively solar rays. "Scoot" (my terrier, exulting companion on land and sea) skipped in sprightly fashion across the burning zone, while I was fain to walk on the grass, the sandy track being impracticable to bare feet. In the house protests against the intolerance of the sun were rife. Crockery on the kitchen shelves seemed to have been artificially heated, while the head of an axe exposed to the glare was blisteringly hot. Yet to me in the open air, most scantily draped and wearing a frayed, loop-holed, and battered straw hat, the sunbath had been a pleasant and exhilarating indulgence in no way remarkable on the score of temperature.

Dress, other than fulfils the dictates of decency, is not only unimportant but incongruous and vexatious. During bright but cloudless days the less worn the higher the degree of comfort, and upon comfort happiness depends. Sick of a surfeit of pleasures, the whining monarch, counselled by his soothsayers, ransacked his kingdom for the shirt of a happy subject. He found the enviable man—a toil-worn hind who had never fidgeted under the discomfort of the badge of respectability.

In his native state the black fellow is nearer the ideal than the white alien in his body clothes, starched shirt, high collar, cloth suit, and felt hat. The needs and means of the black are non-existent. His dress corresponds, whereas the white usurper of his territory—servile to the malignant impositions of custom and fashion—suffers from general superfluity and winces under his sufferings. Would he not be wiser owning subservience to the sun, and adopting dress suitable to actual needs and the dominant characteristics of the land of the sun? He would pant less, drink less, perspire less, be more wholesome and sweeter in temper, and more worthy of citizenship under the sun, against whose sway there can be no revolt. Kings and queens are under his rule and governance. His companionship disdains ceremonious livery, scorns ribbands, and scoffs at gew-gaws. Bronze is his colour, native worth the only wear.

Whosoever has seen (himself unseen) an unsophisticated North Queensland black parading his native strand has seen a lord of creation—an inferior species, but still a lord. His bold front, fluent carriage, springy step, alert, confident, superior air proclaim him so, innocent though he be of the frailest insignia of civilisation. The monarch arrayed in seven colours ascends the steps of his throne with no prouder mien than that in which the naked child of the sun lords it over the empty spaces.

In civility to his Majesty the Sun do I also proudly testify to his transcendent gifts as a painter in the facile media which here prevail. Look upon his coming and his going—an international, universal property, an ecstatic delight, an awesome marvel, upon which we gaze, of which we cannot speak, lacking roseate phrases. A landscape painter also is he, for have I not seen his boldest brush at work and stood amazed at the magnificence of his art?

Do those who live in temperate and cold climates realise the effect of the sun's heat on the sea—how warm, how hot, blessed by his beams, the water may become? The luxuriousness of bathing in an ocean having a temperature of 108° is not for the multitude who crowd in reeking cities which the sun touches tremulously and slantwise.

On November 21, 1909 (far be it from me to bundle out into an apathetic world whimpering facts

lacking the legitimacy of dates), we bathed at Moo-jee in shallow water on the edge of an area of denuded coral reef fully two miles long by a mile broad. For three hours a considerable portion of the reef had been exposed to the glare of the sun, and the incoming tide filched heat, stored by solar rays, from coral and stones and sand. The first wallow provoked an exclamation of amazement, for the water was several degrees hotter than the air, and it was the hottest hour (3 p.m.) of an extremely hot day. No thermometer was at hand to register the actual temperature of the water, but subsequent tests at the same spot under similar conditions proved that on the thermometerless occasion the sea was about 108° F.—that is, the surface stratum of about one foot, which averaged from 4° to 6° F. hotter than the air. Beneath, the temperature seemed ordinary—corresponding with that of the water a hundred yards out from the shore. This delectable experience revealed that in bathing something more is comprehended than mere physical pleasure. It touched and tingled a refined aesthetic emotion, an enlightened consciousness of the surroundings, remote from gross bodily sensations. For the time being one was immersed, not in heated salt water only but in the purifying essence of the scene—the glowing sky, stainless, pallid, and pure; the gleaming, scarcely visible, fictitious sea and the bold blue isles beyond; the valley whence whiffs of cool, fern-filtered, odorous air issued shyly from the shadowed land of the jungle through the embowered lips of the creek. The blend of these elements reacted on the perceptions, rendering the bathe in two temperatures that of a lifetime and a means also whereby the clarified senses were first stimulated and then soothed. With an occasional lounge on the soft sand, when the body became clad in a costume of mica spangles and finely comminuted shell grit, the bathe continued for two hours, with an after effect of sleek and silky content.

Another date (January 10, 1910) may verify details of such a sybaritic soak in the sea as is to be indulged in only in the tropics and remote from the turmoil of man. Between noon and 3 p.m. the thermometer hanging on the wall of the house under the veranda, five feet from the corrugated iron roof, wavered between 89° and 90°, while the unshaded sun registered 98°. My noontide bath failed to detect any difference in temperature between air and water, and putting my perceptions to scientific test found the sea to be heated to 90°. With the bulb buried in the sand six feet from the edge of the water, the mercury rose to 112° in a few seconds and remained stationary.

It being far more blissful to lounge in the sea than on the veranda, I sat down, steeped chin deep in crystal clearness, warmth, and silence, passively surrendering myself to a cheap yet precious sensation. Around me were revealed infinitely fragile manifestations of life, scarcely less limpid than the sea, sparkling, darting, twisting—strong and vigorous of purpose. Tremulous filaments of silver flashed and were gone. No space but was thickly peopled with what ordinarily passes as the invisible, but which now, plainly to behold, basked and revelled in the blaze—products of the sun. Among the grains of sand and flakes of mica furtive bubblings, burrowings, and upheavals betrayed a benighted folk to whom the water was as a firmament into which they might not venture to ascend.

Sought out by the sun, translucent fish revealed their presence by spectral shadows on the sand, and, traced by the shadows, became discernible, though but little the more substantial.

This peace-lulled, beguiling, sea, teeming with myriad forms scintillating on the verge of nothingness—obscure, elusive, yet mighty in their wayward way—soothed with never so gentle, so dulcet a swaying. This smooth-bosomed nurse was pleased to fondle to drowsiness a loving mortal responsive to the blissfulness of enchantment. Warm, comforting, stainless, she swathed me with rose-leaf softness while whispering a lullaby of sighs. Her salty caresses lingered on my lips, as I gazed dreamily intent upon determining the non-existing skyline. Yet, with no demarcation of the allied elements this rimless, flickering moon, to what narrow zone, I pondered, is man restricted! He swims feebly; if he but immerse his lips below the shining surface for a space to be measured by seconds, he becomes carrion. On the mountain-tops he is deadly sick. Thus musing, the sorcery of the sea became invincible. My thoughts drifted, until I dozed, and dozing dreamt—a vague, incomprehensible dream of floating, in some purer ether, some diviner air than ever belonged to wormy earth, and woke to realities and a skate—a little friendly skate which had snoodled beside me, its transparent shovel-snout half buried in the sand. Immune from the opiate of the sea, though motionless, with wide, watery-yellow eyes, it gazed upon me as a fascinated child might upon a strange shape monstrous though benign, and as I raised my hand in salutation wriggled off, less afraid than curious.

Beyond, a shadow—a disc-shaped shadow—drifted with a regular pulsating motion. Shadowlike, my thoughts, too, drifted, but how remote from the scene! They transported me to Thisbe—Thisbe who

"Saw the lion's shadow ere himself  
And ran dismayed away."

How different the shadow of the moment from that of the king of beasts which led to the tragedy under the walls of Babylon, where the blood of the lovers dyed the mulberry red! It is the evidence of a

bloodless thing, a rotund and turreted medusa, the leader of a disorderly procession, soundless and feeble as becomes beings almost as impalpable as the sea itself. Shadows of fish exquisitely framed flit and dance. I see naught but shadows, dim and thin, for I doze and dream again; and so fantastic time, whose footfalls are beads and bubbles, passes, and grosser affairs beckon me out of the sunlit sea.

Oh, great and glorious and mighty sun! Oh, commanding, majestic sun! Superfine invigorator; bold illuminator of the dim spaces of the brain; originator of the glow! which distils its rarest attars! Am I not thy true, thy joyful knight? Hast thou not touched my toughened, unflinching shoulders with the flat of thy burnished sword? Do I not behold its jewelled hilt flashing with pearls and precious stones as thou sheathest it for the night among the purple Western hills? Do I not hail its golden gleams among the fair-barked trees what time each scented morn I milk my skittish goats?

## CHAPTER VII

### A TROPIC NIGHT

"Come and compare  
Columns and idol-dwellings, Goth or Greek,  
With Nature's realms of worship, earth and air,  
Nor fix on fond bodies to circumscribe thy prayer."

#### BYRON.

For a week the wet monsoon had frolicked insolently along the coast, the intermittent north-east breeze, pert of promise but flabby of performance, giving way to evening calms. Then came slashing south-easters which, having discourteously bundled the cloud banks over the mountains, retired with a spasm upon the reserves of the Pacific.

All day long the sea had been pale blue with changeful silvery lights, and now the moon, halfway down on her westward course, shines over a scene solemn in its stillness—the peace and repose more impressive than all the recent riot and haste.

Here on the verge of the ocean, at the extreme limit of the spit of soft, shell-enamelled sand, where the breakers had roared in angry monotone, the ears thrilled with tender sounds. Though all the winds were dead the undertones of the sea linger in lulling harmonies. The tepid tide on the warm sand crisply rustles and hisses as when satin is crumpled and smartly rent. Weird, resonant tappings, moans, and gurgles come from a hollow log drifting, with infinite slowness. Broken sighs and gasps tell where the ripples advancing in echelon wander and lose their way among blocks of sandstone. As the tide rose it prattled and gurgled, toying with tinkling shells and clinking coral, each tone separate and distinct, however thin and faint. My solitary watch gives the rare delight of analysing the night thoughts of the ocean, profound in its slumber though dreamily conscious of recent conflict with the winds. All the frail undertones suppressed, during the bullying day now have audience. Sounds which crush and crowd have wearied and retired. The timid and shy venture forth to join the quiet revelry of the night.

On its northern aspect the sand spit is the steeper. There the folds of the sea fall in velvety thuds ever so gentle, ever so regular. On the southern slope, where the gradient is easy, the wavelets glide up with heedless hiss and slide back with shuffling whisper, scarce moving the garlands of brown seaweed which a few hours before had been torn from the borders of the coral garden with mischievous recklessness.

The sounds of this most stilly night are almost wholly of the faintly pulsing sea—sibilant and soft. Twice have the big-eyed stone plovers piped demoniacally. Once there were flutterings among the nutmeg pigeons in the star-proof jungle of the crowded inlet to the south. A cockatoo has shrieked out in dismay at some grim nightmare of a snake. Two swamp pheasants have assured each other in bell-like cadences that the night is far spent, and all is well.

As the moon sinks a ghostly silence prevails. Even the subdued tones of the sea are hushed. Though I listen with aching intentness no sense of sound comes to my relief. Thus must it be to be bereft of hearing. This death-like pause, this awful blank, this tense, anxious lapse, this pulseless, stifling silence is brief. A frail moan, just audible, comes from the direction of the vanishing moon. There is a scarcely

perceptible stir in the warm air—a sensation of coming coolness rather than of motion, and a faint odour of brine. A mile out across the channel a black band has settled on the shining water.

How entrancing these night-tinted sights and soft sounds! While I loll and peer and listen I am alert and still, for the primitive passions of the universe are shyly exercised. To be sensitive to them all the faculties must be acutely strained. With this lisp, coaxing, companionable sea the serene and sparkling sky, the glow beyond the worlds, the listening isles—demure and dim—the air moist, pacific and fragrant—what concern of mine if the smoky messenger from the stuffy town never comes? This is the quintessence of life. I am alive at last. Such keen tingling, thrilling perceptions were never mine before. Now do I realise the magnificent, the prodigious fact of being. Mine not only a part in the homely world, but a fellowship with the glorious firmament.

It is night—the thoughtful, watchful, wakeful, guardian night, with no cloud to sully its tremulous radiance. How pretty a fable, I reflect, would the ancients have associated with the Southern Cross, shimmering there in the serene sky! Dare I, at this inspiring moment, attempt what they missed, merely because they lacked direct inspiration? Those who once lived in Egypt saw the sumptuous southern jewel, and it may again glitter vainly for the bewilderment of the Sphinx if the lazy world lurches through space long enough. Yes, let me invent a myth—and not tell it, but rather think of the origin of the Milky Way and so convince myself of the futility of modern inventions.

Juno's favourite flowers were, it is written, the dittany (a milk-like plant), the flaunting poppy, and the fragrant lily. Once, as she slept, Jupiter placed the wonderfully begotten Hercules to her alien, repugnant breasts. Some of the milk dripped and as it fell was dissipated in the heavens—and there is the Milky Way. Other drops reached the earth and, falling on the lily, which hitherto had been purple, purified it to whiteness. In similar guise might the legend of the Southern Cross be framed—but who has the audacity to reveal it! And have not the unimaginative blacks anticipated the stellar romance?

As I gaze into those serene and capricious spaces separating the friendly stars I am relieved of all consciousness of sense of duration. Time was not made for such ecstasies, which are of eternity. The warm sand nurses my body. My other self seeks consolation among the planets.

"Thin huge stage presenteth naught but show  
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment."

A grey mist masks the winding of a mainland river. Isolated blotches indicate lonely lagoons and swamps where slim palms and lank tea-trees stand in crowded, whispering ranks knee-deep in dull brown water. The mist spreads. Black hilltops are as islands jutting out from a grey supermundane sea.

Come! Let me bid defiance to this clumsy dragon of vapour worming its ever-lengthening, ever-widening tail out from the close precincts of a mangrove creek. Shock-headed it rolls and squirms. Soft-headed, too, for the weakest airs knead and mould it into ever-varying shapes. Now it has a lolling, impudent tongue—a truly unruly member, wagging disrespectfully at the decent night. Now a perky top-knot, and presently no head at all. Lumbering, low-lying, cowardly—a plaything, a toy, a mockery, a sport for the wilful zephyrs. Now it lifts a bully head as it creeps unimpeded across the sea and spreads, infinitely soft, all-encompassing. As if by magic the mainland is blotted out. The sea is dark and death-like, the air clammy, turgid, and steamy. Heavy vapour settles upon the hills of the Island, descending slowly and with the passivity of fate, until there is but a thin stratum of clear air between the gloomy levels and the portentous pall.

Lesser islands to the south are merely cloud-capped. This lower level with blurred and misty edges may not be further compressed, but the air is warm, thick, sticky, and so saturated with vegetable odours that even the salt of the sea has lost its savour.

A low, quavering whistle heralds the approach of a nervous curlew, running and pausing, and stamping, its script—an erratic scrawl of fleurs-de-lis—on the easy sand. Halting on the verge of the water, it furtively picks up crabs as if it were a trespasser, conscious of a shameful or wicked deed and fearful of detection. It is not night nor yet quite day, but this keen-eyed, suspicious bird knows all the permanent features of the sand-spit. The crouching, unaccustomed shape bewilders it; it pipes inquiringly, stops, starts with quick, agitated steps, snatches a crab—a desperate deed—and flies off with a penetrating cry of warning.

A long-billed shore plover takes up the alarm, and blunderingly races towards instead of from me, whimpering "plin, plin" as it passes and, still curious though alert, steps and bobs and ducks—all its movements and flight impulsive and staccato.

The grey mist whitens. A luminous patch indicates the east. The light increases. The cumbersome



vapour is sopped up by the sun, and the coo-hoing of many pigeons makes proclamation of the day. Detached and erratic patches of ripples appear—tiptoe touches of sportful elves tripping from the isles to the continent, whisking merrily, the faintest flicks of dainty toes making the glad sea to smile. Parcelled into shadows, bold, yet retreating, the dimness of the night, purple on the glistening sea, stretches from the isles towards the long, orange-tinted beach.

Let there be no loitering of the shadows. The gloomy isles have changed from black to purple and from purple to blue, and as the imperious sun flashes on the mainland a smudge of brown, blurred and shifting, in the far distance—the only evidence of the existence of human schemes and agitations—the only stain on the celestial purity of the morning—betokens the belated steamer for the coming of which the joy-giving watches of the tropic night have been kept.

## CHAPTER VIII

### READING TO MUSIC

"Silence was pleased."

As I lounged at mine ease on the veranda, serenely content with the pages of a favourite author, I became conscious of an unusual sound—vague, continuous, rhythmic. Disinclined to permit my thoughts to wander from the text, at the back of my mind a dim sensation of uneasiness, almost of resentment, because of the slight audible intrusion betrayed itself. Close, as firmly as I could, my mental ear the sound persisted externally, softly but undeniably. Having overcome the first sensation of uneasiness, I studied the perfect prose without pausing to reflect on the origin of the petty disturbance. In a few minutes the annoyance—if the trivial distraction deserved so harsh an epithet—changed, giving place to a sense of refined pleasure almost as fatal to my complacency, for it compelled me to think apart. What was this new pleasure? Ah! I was reading to an accompaniment—a faint, far-off improvisation just on the verge of silence, too scant and elusive for half-hearted critical analysis.

This reading of delightful prose, while the tenderest harmony hummed in my ears, was too rare to be placidly enjoyed. Frail excitement foreign to the tranquil pages could not be evaded. The most feeble and indeterminate of sounds, those which merely give a voice to the air eventually, quicken the pulse.

An eloquent and learned man says that the mechanical operation of sounds in quickening the circulation of the blood and the spirits has more effect upon the human machine than all the eloquence of reason and honour. So the printed periods became more sonorous, the magic of the words more vivid. The purified meaning of the author, the exaltation he himself must have felt, were realised with a clearer apprehension. But the very novelty of the emotional undertaking drew me reluctantly from that which was becoming a lulling musical reverie.

Still, fain to read, but with the niceties of the art embarrassed, I began to question myself. Whence this pleasant yet provoking refrain? Not of the sea, for a glassy calm had prevailed all day; not of the rain which pattered faintly on the roof. This sound phantom that determinedly beckoned me from my book—whence, and what was it?

Listening attentively and alert, the mystery of it vanished. It was the commotion, subdued by the distance of three-quarters of a mile, of thousands of nutmeg pigeons—a blending of thousands of simultaneous "coo-hoos" with the rustling and beating of wings upon the thin, slack strings of casuarinas. The swaying and switching of the slender-branched and ever-sighing trees with the courageous notes of homing birds had created the curious melody with which my reading had fallen into tune.

And the sound was audible at one spot only. The acoustic properties of the veranda condensed and concentrated it within a narrow area, beyond which was silence. Chance had selected this aerial whirlpool for my reading.

Again taking my ease, the mellow "roaring" of the multitude of gentle doves commingling with the aeolian blandness of trees swinging under the weight of the restless birds, became once more an idealistic accompaniment to the book. I read, or rather declaimed inarticulately, to the singularly pleasing strain until light and sound failed—the one as softly and insensibly as the other. I had enjoyed a new sensation.

Relieved of the agreeable pressure of the text, my thoughts turned to the consideration of bird voices—more to the notes of pigeons, their variety and range. There are sounds, little in volume and rather flat than sharp, rather moist than dry, which seem to carry farther under favouring atmospheric conditions than louder and more acute noises. The easy contours of soothing sounds created in the air seem to resemble the lazy swell of the sea; while fleeter though less sustained noises may be compared to jumpy waves caused by a smart breeze. Pitched in a minor key sounds roll along with little friction and waste, whereas a louder, shriller stinging note may find in the still air a less pliant medium. The cooing of pigeons—a sound of low velocity—has a longer range than the shrieking of parrots. My pet echo responds to an undertone. A loud and prolonged yell jars on its sensitiveness—for it is a shy echo, little used to abrupt and boisterous disturbances. A boy boo-hooting into an empty barrel soon catches the key to which it responds. He adjusts his rhythms to those of the barrel, which becomes for the time being his butt. "Straining harsh discords and displeasing sharps," he girds at its acoustic soul until it finds responsive voice and grunts or babbles or bellows in consonance with his. Only when the vibrations—subdued or lusty—correspond with the vocal content of the barrel are the responses sensitive and in accord. On this stilly, damp evening the air in the corner of the veranda happened to be resilient to the mellow notes of far-away pigeons.

Thus reflecting, I was less astonished that the coo-hooing of the congregation had reached me through three-quarters of a mile of vacant air. There was no competing noise. It was just the fluid tone that filled to the overflowing otherwise empty, shallow spaces.

The nutmeg pigeon has the loudest, most assertive voice of the several species which have their home in my domain, or which favour it with visits. Though the "coo-hoo" is imperative and proud, to overcome the space of a mile the unison of thousands is necessary. But when the whole community takes flight simultaneously the whirr and slapping of wings creates a sound resembling the racing of a steamer's propeller, but of far greater volume. The nutmeg is one of the noisiest of pigeons individually and collectively.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BIRTH AND BREAKING OF CHRISTMAS

"He doubted least it were some magical  
Illusion that did beguile his sense;  
Or wandering ghost that wanted funerall,  
Or aery spirite under false pretence."

#### SPENSER.

He was a tremulous long-legged foal on the Christmas Day we became known to each other. I accepted him as an appropriate gift, and he regarded me with a blending of reserve, curiosity, and suspicion, as he snoodled beside his demure old mother. The name at once suggested itself. It seems the more appropriate now, for he is whitish, with flowing mane and sweeping tail, of a fair breadth, and open countenance.

Can the biography of a horse be anything but crude, lacking reference to ancestry? On this point there is the silence of a pure ignorance, and the record will be deficient in other essentials. Moreover, none of the phrases of the cult are at command, nor can a purely domestic story be decorated with clipped, straw-in-the-mouth, stable-smelling terms.

Christmas's mother was a commonplace cart creature with a bad cough. It was a chronic cough, and in course of time its tuggings took her on a very long journey. She passed away, assisted towards the end with a cruel yet compassionate bullet, for in my agitation I made a fluky shot. She died on the beach, and as the tide rose we floated her carcass into the bay to the outer edge of the coral reef. The following morning the sea gave up the dead not its own. Once more we towed it away into the current which races north.

Some time before these reiterated ceremonies Christmas had been born, and I was grateful to the old mare, whose chronic cough had become one of the sounds of the Island, for he is an ornament, a chum, a companion, and a real character. I find myself confronted by inherent disadvantage, for I cannot even

describe his points in popular language. He is a "clean-skin." That is the only horsey (or should it be equine?) phrase in my vocabulary. He is a "clean-skin," and in more than one sense. Clean describes him—character and all—and I like the word. He is 5 ft. 4½ in. at the shoulders, barefooted, for he has never known a shoe, and his toes are long; his waist measurement is 6 ft. 8 in., his tail sweeps the ground, his forehead is broad, his eyes clear, with just a gleam of wickedness now and again; his ears neat, furry, and very mobile; his colour a greyish roan, tending more to white in his maturity, which now is. Lest the detail might prejudice him in his love affairs, of which he is as yet entirely innocent, I am determined not to mention his age, even in the strictest confidence, and though the anniversary of his birth is at hand.

Though he spends most of his time in the forest, he takes astounding interest in maritime affairs, watching curiously passing sailing boats and steamers. More than once he has been first to proclaim, "A sail!" for when he flourishes his head and tosses his mane and gives a semi-gambol with his hind quarters, we know that he sees something strange, and look in the direction in which he gazes.

But I am ahead of my story. When he was in his shy, frisky foalage—as nervous and twitchy as might be—one lucky day I offered him from a distance of thirty yards one of the luscious bananas I was enjoying as I strolled down the path to the beach. The aroma was novel, and apparently very pleasant, for to my astonishment he walked towards me gingerly, but with a very decided interest in the banana. As he approached on the pins and needles of alertness, I extolled the qualities of the banana. He stopped, and started again, anxious to taste the hitherto unknown delicacy, but not at all trustful. Soon he came boldly up, and taking the banana from my hand, ate it with the joy of discovery in his features, and calmly demanded another. Thus began the breaking of Christmas, and if I had had sense enough to have followed up his education on similar lines, a deal of hard work, risk to life and limb, and the loss of some little personal property might have been saved. Ever after, Christmas could not resist the decoy of a banana.

When he was two and a half years old we decided to break him in. He was big, and strong, and wilful, and how was a feeble man with no experience and a black boy confessedly frightened of the big horse to accomplish such purpose? Tom is at home on a boat, and enjoys outwitting fish and turtle and dugong. However unstable his craft and surly the sea, he keeps calm; but with a tempestuous horse, who was wont to play about on the flat, pawing the air like a tragic actor, and kicking it with devastating viciousness, well—"Look out!" As was the horse, so was the yard designed—big and strong. Some of the posts are one foot in diameter, and four and a half feet in the ground. As neither of us had built a yard before, there may be original points about this one; but I would admonish others not to imitate them unless they have time, heaps of time, and an oppressive stock of enthusiasm, and I may add, fascinating experience, upon which to draw. The last-mentioned quality is invaluable in all such enterprises. If you have it, full play is permitted the speculative, if not the imaginative, faculties. If you have it not, then the work is merely a brutal exercise, in which a dolt might excel.

During the building of the yard I frequently reflected whether, though Christmas lived to enjoy a long and laborious age, would all the work he performed compensate for the strains and aches and bruises suffered. Circumstances prevented the completion of the yard in exact accordance with plans, for experience, that harsh stepmother, proved that the enclosure was unnecessary. The yard exists as a monument to profane misunderstanding of Christmas's character. Had I realised his high-mindedness, his amiability, his considerateness and shrewdness, the yard would never have been built; a month of fearful over-exertion, and many pains would have been obviated, and poor Christmas saved much physical weariness and perplexity. At the cost of three ripe bananas all the virtue of the yard might, had we but known, have been purchased.

High and strong, and especially ponderous where it was weak, the yard was at last ready. The next process was to induce Christmas to enter it. We had another horse, Jonah, the nervous, stupid, vexatious skew-ball. In the absence of saddle and bridle, Tom deemed it wise not to attempt to round up Christmas. I admired his wisdom without exactly committing myself, and we resorted to strategy.

Naturally Christmas is inquisitive. He watched the building of the yard so intently that we half expected his curiosity might prompt him to try if it were adapted to his tastes and requirements. But when we chuckled and coaxed he grew suspicious, behaved quite disdainfully with his heels, and took a marine excursion to a neighbouring island. When he came back after three days, a banana tempted him. He was a prisoner before he realised. We giggled. The next thing was to rope him. Our perversity converted a trustful, gentle creature temporarily into a ramping rogue. Twice he snapped a new Manilla rope of like make and dimensions to that which is used in the harpooning of whales. For two days the conflict continued. Sullen and suspicious, Christmas ate scantily of the green grass we cut for him and drank from a bucket when we were not looking. At last a crisis came. Tom lassoed him once more. Nelly (Tom's spouse) assisted me to take up the slack round a blockwood tree as Tom cautiously, but with great demonstrations of evil intentions, hunted the weary horse into the corner, where we

designed to so jam him that a halter might be put on with a minimum of risk to ourselves. Christmas made a supreme effort. He roared and reared, and when the rope throttled him, in rage and anger dashed his head against the foot-thick corner-post. The shock loosened it, so that two rails sprang out (just missing my scalp) and stunned Christmas.

As he lay on the ground with twitching lips, with frantic haste we cut the rope, and in a few seconds he rose to his feet, discovering that he was in the land of the living with a joyful whinnying. If he had not been endowed with the suavity of a gentleman and the long-suffering of a saint, he would have walked off, for the yard was in a disreputable state of repair, and we were all shaky from the effects of nerve-shock. But no, in spite of abuse and misunderstanding, he was resolved at cost of whatever discomfort to himself to give us further lessons in the science of horse-breaking. He stood patiently while we patched up the fence. Then, taking the halter, and my courage, in both hands, I walked to his head, and with a few comforting words put it on. The good horse looked down at me with wondrous eloquence. His sensitive upper lip spoke, and his sneering nostrils; his twitchy ears told his thoughts as truly as semaphores; his clear eyes under sagacious white lashes transmitted emotions I could not fail to comprehend. "Is that what you wanted me to do?" said he. "Why didn't you do it before? We have quite misunderstood one another! And what an exciting time we have had! I thought you were going to garrotte me. Yes, give me a banana. Follow you? Yes, of course, with pleasure; but don't attempt to hang me again or else there'll be trouble. Another banana if you please. Now, don't be frightened, I'm not going to run over you. I'm not that sort of horse. If I were there might have been a beastly mess in this yard any time the last two days. I was beginning to feel quite peevish. I don't know what might happen if I became really vexed. Another banana. Certainly you took great risks for a little man. We are beginning to understand one another. Are there any more ripe bananas handy?" He said all this and more, as he looked round, cheerfully accepting peace-offerings and listening to many consolatory words. The next morning he showed us how a young and not foolish horse should accept bit and bridle.

Several other episodes embellish the early career of Christmas as a working horse, all of them, I conscientiously confess, arising from gross misunderstanding. He knew in what manner a good-natured, competent, lusty horse should be handled and trained. We didn't, and necessarily had to learn. He trained himself while we took hearty lessons in holding him. Once he decided to gallop with a sled. It was a mere whim—a gay little prank—but Tom couldn't stop him. He ran too, holding on to the reins at arm's length, contrary to my counsel, urged from discreet distance. Christmas ran faster, and by and by Tom sat down on his chin, and Christmas went on without him. He didn't quite remember the width of the sled. Consequently when with a careless flourish he whisked between two bloodwoods the sled struck one with a shock that for a moment "dithered" the Island. It was just like that sucking earthquake which went off bang under Kingsley's bed when he was in Italy. The bruise is on the tree now, and the sled wasn't worth taking home for firewood. Christmas went on but just as the passion of the moment calmed down, the trailing reins—fit to hold a whale, be it repeated—caught in a tough sapling, and it was Christmas that went down. It was only a trip, but as he got up and faced about looking for the remains of the sled, the harness, tugged by the reins, crowded on his neck—backband, collar, hames, chains and all. Then began a merry-go-round, for Christmas, properly bedevilled, lost his presence of mind, and in a fancy costume of the Elizabethan age—a ruff of harness—waltzed most fantastically.

Again a few soothing words and two bananas calmed his affrighted and angry soul. Great is the virtue of the banana! A goodly hour was spent in untying the knots, and Tom made the one joke of his life. "My word, that fella Christmas he no good for boat. He make'm knot—carn let go quick!" Christmas is not petulant, though he is occasionally indignant on a large and complicated scale.

Early in his career Christmas showed and materialised the quality of masterfulness, his chief trait. He bullied Jonah, now banished to "an odd angle of the Isle," courted encounters with a huge nondescript dog belonging to the blacks which once disrespectfully snapped at his heels and for ever after took a distorted view of things on account of a lop-sided jaw, and was wont to scatter the goats with a wild gallop through the flock. How meek and gentle his demeanour when he whinnies over the gate for bananas, or screws his head beneath the kitchen shutter and shuts his eyes and opens his lips, tempting his mistress to treat him to unknown dainties! And for all his masterful spirit did he not once fly from Jonah? During one of Tom's many absences ex-trooper George was chief assistant in the administration of the affairs of the Island, between whom and Christmas cordial companionship was manifested; for George, in his understanding of horses, knew how to flatter and gratify Christmas with small attentions.

More at home in the saddle than on foot, having improvised bit and bridle, he rode off on Jonah into the bush, unobserved of Christmas, who had never beheld one of his species so hampered by a human being. While George was away it occurred to one of us to suggest that a high-mettled, never-ridden steed might be flustered when confronted with novel and incomprehensible circumstances. When George cantered home, Christmas gazed, horror-struck, for a moment, bounded into the air, snorted,

and with flowing mane and flying tail fled to the most secluded corner of the paddock with strides that seemed to gulp the ground. In a few minutes he returned at the trot, inquisitive, high-stepping, tossing his head, flinging little clods of earth far behind, snorting, and tail trailing like a plume of steam from a locomotive. Again he looked, baulked, and with a contemptuous fling of heels raced up the paddock. Retreating to him was not running away, nor was staying wisdom when danger overbalanced hope. Again he made a gallant effort to vanquish his fear, but at the critical moment Jonah, under the stimulus of George's heels, charged, and Christmas, with a squeal of terror, thundered blindly among the trees. Now was he convinced of the grisliness of the visitation. That downtrodden, servile Jonah, from whom he exacted prompt obedience to every passing whim, should be thus translated and so puffed up with audacity as to chase him was proof of the presence of incredible mischief from which the most valorous might with discretion retire; and without pause he galloped—free and wild as the blast of a tempest—round the paddock time and again, keeping the greatest possible space between himself and the pursuing apparition.

George kept up the fun until Christmas, beginning to reflect, swerved from fear to the attitude of anger, and to paw the ground and to sniff defiantly the air. Trotting boldly up towards Jonah, he neighed imperatively, but George waved off his assurance with his hat, and Christmas collapsing with fright, made furious haste for non-existing solitude. Once more he ventured, with bolder, more menacing front. He reared, pranced, kicked, savaged the air—not an item of all his pentup wickedness being undemonstrated. Then George dismounted suddenly, and calling in soothing tones, Christmas realised that the appalling creature was but a temporary compound of his playmate and the abject Jonah. Cautiously advancing in a series of contours dislocated with staccato stops and starts and frothy exclamations, he seemed to recognise the whole episode as a practical joke, of which he had been the victim, and to promise retaliation upon Jonah, for no sooner was that meek animal at liberty than he became the sport and jeer.

From the catalogue of the more theatrical doings of Christmas one more may be cited. Within a week of his yarding he had taught us so much, inspired us with such confidence in his resourcefulness and ability, that we resolved to give him a treat in the plantation dragging round a miniature disc-harrow, a particular brand of agricultural implement known as the "pony dot." Being so, in fact and appearance, it was quite a misfit for Christmas—a mere toy with which a gay young horse might condescend to beguile a few loose hours. It was a charming morning. Birds were vulgarly sportful. Honey-eaters whistled among the trees, scrub-fowl chuckled in the jungle. Christmas, too, was bent on amusing himself, and he was so lusty and jocund, and the toy jangled and clattered so cheerfully that neither Tom nor myself could bestow much attention to the birds. What was gentle exercise to Christmas was quite sensational to us. He did not mind what stumps and logs were in the way. We did. Our agility was distinctly forced. But it was a charming morning, and Christmas was out for pleasure. In an hour or so the monotony of the picnic began to pall on Christmas, and as Tom began to chirp at him familiarly, if not quite authoritatively, I sat down in the shade to reflect that while Christmas had been violently exercising me, some of the charm of the day had filtered through my aching fingers. How pleasant it was to think that the discordant labour of the tropical agriculturist was past! This charming morning had settled it all. Tom and Christmas and the "pony dot" would keep the whole plantation as innocent of weeds as the Garden of Eden. Thus to muse in the dim arcade of the jungle absorbing the sounds of the birds, and of the murmuring sea, while a horse did all the work, in holiday humour, was the very bliss of the tropical farmer.

In the midst of a soothing, inarticulate soliloquy the "pony dot" burst out into a furious jangle. Tom yelled. Quick hoofs thudded on the soil, and Christmas swept through the banana-plants like a destroying angel, in a glorious bolt for home. The picnic had palled; and Tom, shouting rebukes, orders, and suggestions from behind a tree, showed by his dun-coloured skin that he had been dragged ignominiously through the freshly tilled soil. A remarkable feature of the plantation is a steep bank, the original strand line of the Island. Christmas, with the reins soaring like lassos, and harness welting his fat sides, stampeded to his fate. In a flash I saw what a ludicrous misfit the "pony dot" was. The impish invention—malignant purpose in its incompassionate metallic heart—furiously pursued Christmas twenty feet at a bound, discs whirling, every bearing squeaking with spite and fury. Struck with bewilderment, the honey-eaters became dumb, the dismayed doves forgot to coo, the scrub-fowl ceased their chuckling, and three cockatoos flew from the blue-fruited quandong-tree shrieking abominable sarcasms. As Christmas heaved over the banks the reins thrashed him. Resenting the insult, his heels flew high. The "pony dot" flew higher and jangled and screeched with accumulating vindictiveness. To what fearsome figure had this hasty flight transformed the mean little emblem of rusticity? A tipsy goblin? No—rather a limping aeroplane of the Stone Age; and it rattled like a belfry under the shock of bombardment. Could there be any crueller device to tie an unsophisticated horse to, and a horse whose single thought had been a merry morning? It would, when the crisis came, leap frenziedly on Christmas and slice him with keen, whizzing blades.

Tom raced past—a five-act tragedy in pantomime! A terrible jangle and catastrophic silence! No groan from misused Christmas. No remarks from the dumbfounded birds! With the vicious aeroplane hopping after him, he had galloped for the narrow aisle through the ribbon of jungle concealing the beach. There he had met his fate! Yes, the "pony dot" anyhow and everywhere, and Christmas all of a heap beyond. With imprecations on all "pony dots" in my mind, I hastened to inspect the mangled remains. They groaned, struggled to their feet, shook themselves and went placidly home as soon as we had unhitched the chains. One scratch on the most rotund part of the body was the only record of the "brief, eventful history," and Christmas smiled in Tom's face as he munched a soul-soothing banana.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SPORT OF FATE

"A populous solitude of bees and birds  
And fairy-formed and many-coloured things."

#### BYRON.

Was ever a more glorious season for butterflies, and, alas! be it said, for sand and fruit and other flies of humble bearing but questionable character?

Light-hearted, purely ornamental insects, sober and industrious, ugly, mischievous, destructive, all have revelled—and the butterfly brings the art of inconsequent revelling to the acme of perfection—in the comparatively dry air, in the glowing skies, and in the succession of serene days. Moreover there has been no off-hand, untimely destruction of the nectariferous blossoms of millions of trees and shrubs. Frail as some flowers are, others linger long if unmolested by profane winds, offering a protracted feast of honey, pure and full-flavoured. The light sprinklings of rain have served to freshen the air and moisten the soil without diluting the syrupy richness of floral distillations. All the generous output has been over-proof.

Gaudy insects, intoxicated and sensuous, have feasted and flirted throughout the hours of daylight, and certain prim moths, sonorous of flight, find subtly scented blossoms keeping open house for them the livelong night.

Let others vex their souls and mutter the oddest sorts of imprecations because the fruit-fly cradles its pampered young in the juiciest of their oranges. Me it shall content to watch butterflies sip the nerve-shaking nectar of the paper-barks, and in their rowdy flight cut delirious scrolls against the unsullied sky.

Shall not I, too, glory in the superb season, and its scented tranquillity? Even though but casual glances are bestowed on the dainty settings of the pages on which Nature illustrates her brief but brilliant histories, understanding little, if aught, of her deeper mysteries, but thankful for the frankness and unaffectedness of their presentation—shall not I find abundance of sumptuous colour and grace of form for my enjoyment, and for my pondering texts without number?

What more fantastic scene than the love-making of the great green and gold and black Cassandra—that gem among Queensland butterflies—when four saucy gallants dance attendance on one big, buxom, sober-hued damsel of the species, and weave about her aerial true lovers' knots, living chains, festoons, and intricate spirals, displaying each his bravest feathers, and seeking to dazzle the idol of the moment with audacious agility, and the beauty of complex curves and contours fluid as billows?

The red rays of the Umbrella-tree afford a rich setting to the scene. The rival lovers twirl and twist and reel as she—the prude—flits with tremulous wings from red knob to red knob—daintily sampling the spangles of nectar.

Not of these living jewels in general, but of one in particular, were these lines intended to refer—the great high-flying Ulysses, first observed in Australia on this very island over half a century ago. It was but a passing gleam, for the visiting scientist lamented that it flew so high over the treetops that he failed to obtain the specimen. True to name, the Ulysses still flies high, and wide—a lustrous royal blue with black trimmings and dandified tails to his wings that answer the dual purpose of use and ornament.

When Ulysses stops in his wanderings for refreshment he hides his gorgeous colouring, assuming similitude to a brown, weather-beaten leaf, and then the tails complete the illusion by becoming an idealistic stalk. He is one of the few, among gaily painted butterflies that certain birds like and hawk for. When in full flight, by swift swerves and doubles, he generally manages to evade his enemies, but during moments of preoccupation is compelled to adopt a protective disguise.

As the boat floated with the current among the bobbing, slender spindles of the mangroves—youthful plants on a voyage of discovery for new lands—there appeared a brown mottled leaf on the surface. A second glance revealed a dead Ulysses—an adventurous creature which had succumbed to temporary weakness during a more than usually ambitious maritime excursion. Here was a flawless specimen, for the wings of butterflies, in common with the fronds of some delicate ferns, have the property of repelling water, and do not readily become sodden, But as I essayed to take it up tenderly the wings boldly opened, displaying just the tone of vivid blue for which the silvery sea was an ideal setting.

It was sad to be weary and to fail; to experience gradual but inevitable collapse; to flop helplessly to the water to drown; but the lightest touch of the hand of man was a fate less endurable—too, frightful by far to submit to without a struggle. So, with a grand effort the great insect rose; and the sea, reluctant to part with such a rare jewel, retained in brown, dust-like feathers the pattern of the mottling of the under surface of the wings. What finicking dilettantism—was ever such "antic, lispings, affecting fantastico?"—that rough Neptune, who in blind fury bombards the stubborn beaches with blocks of coral, should be delicately susceptible to the downy print of a butterfly's wings!

Though languid and weary, the butterfly was resolute in the enjoyment of the sweetness of life, Its flight, usually bold, free, and aspiring, was now clumsy, wavering, erratic. Three-quarters of a mile away was an islet. Some comely instinct guided it thitherwards, sometimes staggering low over the water, sometimes flitting splendidly high until distance and the glowing sky absorbed it.

My, course lay past the islet, and I stood in the boat that I might see the coral patches slipping past beneath, the shoals of tiny fish, and the swift-flying terns, the broad shield of the sea, and the purple mountains. Close to the islet what I took to be the tip of a shark's fin appeared. It seemed to be cutting quick circles, rising and dipping as does the dorsal fin when a shark is closely following, or actually bolting its prey. As the boat approached, the insignia of a voracious shark changed to the spent Ulysses, making forlorn and ineffectual efforts to rise. Once again, however, the fearsome presence of man inspired a virile impulse. Ulysses rose, flapping wildly and unsteadily but with gallant purpose. The islet was barely twenty yards away. Would the brave and lovely emblem of gaiety reach it and rest? It rose higher and higher in lurching spirals, and having gained the necessary elevation, swooped superbly for the sanctuary of the tree-lined beach.

Rest and safety at last! But at that moment ironic Fate—having twice averted drowning, twice waved off the hand of man—flashed out in the guise of a twittering wood swallow. In the last stage of exhaustion no evading swerve was possible.

Two blue wings on the snow-white coral marked where the wanderings of Ulysses had ended, while at the corner of the little cove a dozen heedless Cassandras rioted amongst the rays of the umbrella-tree in curves and swoops of giddy flight.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **FIGHT TO A FINISH**

"Dire and parlous was the fight that was fought."

With logic as absolute as that of the grape that can "the two-and-twenty jarring sects confute," Nature sets at naught the most ancient of axioms. How obvious is it that the lesser cannot contain the greater! Yet that Nature under certain circumstances blandly puts her thumb unto her nose and spreads her fingers out even at that irrefragable postulate, let this plain statement of fact stand proof.

Where the grass was comparatively sparse a little lizard, upon whose bronze head the sunlight glistened, sighted on a chip a lumbering "March" fly dreaming of blood, and with a dash that almost eluded observation seized and shook it. With many sore gulps and excessive straining—for the lizard was young and tender—the tough old fly was swallowed. While the lizard licked its jaws and twirled its

tail with an air of foppish self-concern and haughty pride, a withered leaf not three inches away stirred without apparent cause, and in a flash a tiny death adder grappled the lizard by the waist. The grey leaf had screened its approach.

Both rolled over and over, struggling violently. For a minute or two there was such an intertwining and confusion of sinuous bodies that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. The grip of the death adder was not to be lightly shaken off. When "time" was called, the truce lasted several minutes. Then the wrestling was continued in a miniature cyclone of sand and grass-chips. All the energy was on the part of the lizard. The death-adder kept on doing nothing in a dreadfully determined way. In fighting weight the combatants seemed to be fairly equally matched, but in length the lizard had the advantage by at least two inches. The adder was slightly the bulkier. At times the lizard, full of pluck, would scamper away a few inches, dragging the adder, or would claw the sand into tiny, ineffectual furrows in vain efforts. The adder was never able to shake the lizard; it merely maintained its grip. All the wit and sprightliness of the fight was on the part of the lizard, who lashed its foe with its pliant tail, and endeavoured so to swerve as to bite. Both were light weights. One was all dash and sportive agility; the other played a dull waiting game with admirable finesse.

In spite of the greater activity and muscular power of the lizard, the combat seemed unfair, for in the cunning persistency of the frail but determined little snake there was something uncanny and nerve-shaking. For fully ten minutes the fight continued. The violent antics of the lizard became less and less frequent. Obviously the tactics of the snake were wearing it down. Though the lizard seemed to have lost none of its spirit, the flesh was becoming weak. While it panted, its eyes twinkled with inane ferocity, and the snake, with that peculiar fearsome, gliding movement—neither wriggle nor squirm—typical of the species, slowly edged its victim under the shadow of a tussock. There both reposed, the snake calm in craft and design, the lizard waiting for the one chance of its life. Swallowing the lizard under any circumstances seemed an impossible feat. To begin the act in the middle of the body was absolutely beyond accomplishment. There would come a time when the death-adder must release its hold to re-seize its prey by the head or tail, and if the soul of the lizard could possess itself in patience until that moment, and take advantage of it, all might be well.

Now, it seemed to me, the only witness to this fateful fray, that both parties to it knew that the crisis had yet to come. The lizard reserved all its energy for a supreme effort—for one leap to liberty and life—while its impassive foe stolidly concentrated its powers in the direction of an instantaneous release and a fresh grip at a convenient part. Thus they lay. A thrill of excitement possessed me as I watched. The flashing alertness of a fly-catching lizard, is it not proverbial? Which was to be the master—the more muscular creature with four legs, the whole previous existence of which had depended upon its agility, or the subtle, slow, snake, which moves under ordinary circumstances not very much faster than a clammy worm? As I watched with all possible keenness a grey blur followed by bewildering wriggings and contortions indicated a new manoeuvre. Then instead of two reptiles at right angles, there appeared to be but one, and with a tail at each end. The head of the lizard was in the jaws of the death-adder. The fatal quickness of the snake had decided the combat.

But the lizard was not yet resigned to its fate. It rolled and reared and wriggled, tossing and tumbling the adder; but all in vain.

Alas! light-hearted lizard, servant and trustful companion of man, thou art joined in woeful issue! There can be no deliverance for thy jewelled head from that slow, all-absorbing chancery! No striving, no pushing with frenzied fingers, no lashing with that whip-like tail may now avail. Never more may you bask and blink in the glare, or doze in the knife-edged shadows, or pounce upon gauze-winged flies. Thou hast learned too late that snakes, like democracy, never restore anything.

I waited for the finish, which came with painful slowness. The sides of the victim heaved and quivered even as they slowly disappeared and the end of that once foppish tail twitched sadly as it hung limply from the jaws of the gorged snake.

Although it had practically demonstrated that the lesser can contain the greater, the snake was but triflingly increased in girth. It was just in that phenomenal condition which entitled it to the honour of preservation in a solution of formalin.

## CHAPTER XII



## SEA-WORMS AND SEA-CUCUMBERS

From the tinted tips of fragile corals to the ooze on the edge of the beach sand there is seething life. Exposed by the ebb tide, the sun-caressed slime glitters and shimmers, so that if the observer is content to stand still for a few moments he shall see myriads of obscure activities, graceful and uncouth, of the existence of which he has not previously dreamt and among which his footsteps make a desolating track. Perhaps in no other earthly scene do the gradations of life blend so obviously in form and appearance. This mud is primal, fertile with primitives, for similitude of environment checks variations.

In such tepid slime primordial life began, and in it even in these latter days the far beginning of superior things may be discovered actively pursuing their craft and purpose in the order of the universe. Worms are abundant, and among them certain genera which might be taken as apt illustrations of the more significant facts of evolution. Studying them, the parting of the ways between two distinct orders, each having a conspicuous feature in common while differing in appearance and habits generally, is made strangely plain, and I propose in my unversed way to demonstrate the line of upward development in a few examples.

Accepting as a primitive form that deplorably thin, phantasmal worm which excavates in the ooze an appropriately narrow shaft indicated by a dimple, or, in some cases, a swelling mound with a well-defined crater and circular pipe, the ascent of the genealogical tree is not beset with any great difficulty. These worms are grey in colour and shoddy in texture, merely a tough description of slime with a crude head and long, simple filaments. The sides of the shafts are smooth, and on the least alarm the nervous inhabitant retracts with surprising alertness. Slightly superior in grade, but in uninterrupted succession, is a similar worm which solidifies its shaft with a kind of mortar and carries it up above the level of the ooze about an inch or so—a crude effort in the direction of the acquirement of some ease of circumstance. These flue-like projections are more frequent on the verge of the sandy beach.

The next in order—still slim, though of a slightly more robust habit of body—has acquired the art of spinning (caterpillar-like) a cocoon, and of causing to adhere to the exterior thereof grains of sand and minute chips of shell. Though this vestlet is very frail and though the sandy outer coat is liable to drop off (when it collapses altogether), it seems to me to indicate distinct progress, a successful accomplishment in the direction of isolation, independence, and security. Does it not signify that the animal has a certain perception of the knowledge of good and evil such as dawned upon Eve as she ate the diverting apple? Eve forthwith took to fig-leaves; the slim worm knitted a shoddy wrapper and reinforced it with grains of sand when it realised that there was something better than slush for a dwelling. The sandy coverlet is evidence of the gift of discrimination.

A still more highly endowed relation spins a similar fabric, upon which are loosely agglutinated numbers of small dead shells, grit, and even opercula a quarter of an inch in diameter. In weight, size, and number of its constituents this exterior armour is altogether disproportionate to the extreme tenuity of its foundation. Too unsubstantial to sustain its own weight, it sprawls, like the track of a tipsy snail, indeterminately, slowly developing its sinuosities over the irregular surface of a rock, and slightly adherent thereto, throughout its whole length. Of this there seem to be several nicely shaded grades, some in the form of galleries laboriously built of a mixture of mud and sand, and each indicating superiority to the naked denizen of the clement mud. They seem to be superior in appearances also, for some of the animals display brightly coloured plume-like tentacles, long and capable of being ostentatiously fluttered.

The individual worm next to be described typifies such a wonderful advance that it might almost be designated a subsequent and intrusive sport, no marked are the distinctions it exhibits. It is one of the shell-binders (PECTINARIA), but its mansion of mosaics is unique and beautiful. In the universal struggle for place, self-preservation, and food, the animal has acquired a higher order of intelligence and keener perceptions of safety and of the niceties of life than its fellows. Living in sand and mud, in obedience to some gracious instinct, it gathers numbers of small shells, grit, and fragments of coral wherewith to construct a tube, somewhat similar in shape to the horn of cornucopia, and from three to six inches long. The materials are cemented together in accordance with a symmetrical design, the interior being lined with a transparent substance, which, when dry, is readily separable from the casing! This creature accomplishes by calculation, choice, and dexterity that which a subtle chemical process does unconsciously for the more advanced mollusc, and that it practised the art of the interlocking of atoms ages before the birth of Macadam can scarcely be doubted.

My imagination loves to dwell on the perceptive faculties possessed by this lowly creature, a creature soft and delicate, merely such and such a length of gelatinous substance, slightly stiffened and

toughened and graced with a pair of tentacles glittering like tinsel extended from a marvellously constructed tube.

In certain structural details the animal (which in appearance has greater resemblance to a caterpillar than a worm) is even more remarkable than the ornate dwelling it constructs, for it is an actual though living prototype of the fabled race (catalogued by Othello with the anthropophagi)—

"Whose heads  
Do grow beneath their shoulders."

The paradox exists, not as a whim or grimace on the part of Nature but for a definite and vital end. In default the animal would be unable to obey the first law of Nature—self preservation—for it is soft-bodied and its dwelling has the serious defect of being open at both ends. In such plight lacking special organs it would be at cruel advantage in the struggle for existence. The posterior segment of the body is therefore developed into an operculum-like organ, smooth and of horny texture, which closes the narrow end of the tube. The other extremity is more elaborately guarded, the anterior segment being fringed with a frontal membrane, while the second segment forms a disc, the minute mouth orifice with the true tentacles and gills being debased to the third segment.

Confronted by danger, the animal closes its front door by retracting until the disc presses immovably against the circumference of the tube, the retraction being so sudden that a frail spurt betrays the whereabouts of an otherwise secret dwelling-place. In the centre of the disc is the first segment, from which the frontal fringe is extended in the form of an array of keen bristles as a defensive weapon. With the lid at one end and the armed disc at the other the animal enjoys security and comfort, and when unsuspecting the "shoulders" protrude, the head meekly following. The tentacles are serrate and glitter like tinsel, possibly for the fascination of the minute forms of life which the tube-dweller consumes. To enable it to retract and emerge quickly the animal is provided with a series of tufts of bristles on the back and on the ventral surface of the body with a row of toothed "pads," which fulfil the dual office of grapplers and feet.

With what skill and patience does this pectinarian construct its ornate habitation! How artfully does it pick and choose among the tiny shells and grit! With what rare discretion rejects the unfit, and with what satisfaction retains a neat and dainty item of building material! How deftly does it arrange its courses and bonds, cementing each fragment in its place until a perfect cylinder, proportionate in dimensions, uniformly expanding in circumference, smooth within, rugged without, scientifically correct in design, is the result! How apt, too, the frictionless lining! And all this laborious neatness and precision absorbed in the construction of a tenement which has no time! Does the inmate possess any sense of duration? Addison (quoting a French authority) says that it is possible some creatures may think half an hour as long as we do a thousand years! The magnificent mind of the modern biologist regards a million of years as a mere fag-end of time. The industrious worm which has built so choice a home may have enjoyed the sense of comfort and security for a period representing an honourable age, while, according to the standards of man, the home was not worth the building for so short a tenancy.

Do we not see in this astonishing example a highly successful effort of a marine worm to improve on the condition and habits of its barbarous ancestors? Analyse a bulk sample of the building material, and you shall find it not dissimilar from the shell of a mollusc, and the interior film—no doubt a secretion of the animal—is to be safely accepted as analogous to the silky smoothness which molluscs (often of rough and rugged exterior) obtain by nacreous deposit and which finds its culmination in the goldlip mother-of-pearl?

Still higher in the series, so far as the construction of a tenement is concerned, is that known as the SERPULA, a worm which constructs a calcareous tube more or less loosely convoluted and adherent to a shell or stone or coral, or sometimes entwined into a self-supporting colony.

Another worm builds of sand or mud, with a rough casting of fine gravel and shell-grit, a habitation similar in design to that of the serpula, though on a less complete and authoritative model; indeed, it would almost seem that the latter had designed its tenement after the fashion of that of its poor relation—that the one made a study in mud which the other reproduced in carbonate of lime. But the most curious fact is that a true mollusc (VERMETUS) so far departs from the fashion prevalent in the molluscan world of building a spiral shell, that after beginning one in proper spiral mode it elongates itself in vermiform manner and forms an irregular serpuloid tube on the surface of larger shells or stones just as the SERPULA does; so that without examination of the animal one may easily be mistaken for the other.

What a contrast is here—on the one hand a lowly worm learning to build a solid if rude shelly

covering for its tender body, on the other a relative of the elegant, many-whorled *TURRITELLA* forgetting its high station and degenerating to the likeness of a worm. No doubt it is really a case of degeneration from the acquirement of fixed habits, just as when a lively young crustacean larva gives up its free independent life and glues its head to a stone—what happens? Why, he becomes a mere barnacle instead of a spritely shrimp as he might have been! Let mankind take note and beware.

Another group of worm-like or snaky creatures common on a coral-reef are the sea-cucumbers or *bêche-de-mer*. In my experience the most singular branch of the family is at once the longest and thinnest, for it resembles a snake so closely that at first sight the observer subconsciously assumes an attitude of hostility. There seem to be two varieties of the species. One is much more ruddy in appearance than the other, and its body is the smoother; but they are much alike in physique and helplessness. The figure of a sausage-skin four or five and even six feet long, and capable of elongation to almost double, containing muddy water in circulation and one end exhibiting a set of ever-waving tentacles, conveys a not unflattering notion of the animal as it lies coiled among the coral, half hidden with algae. Far too feeble to be offensive, it suffers collapse on alarm—that is to say, if such a violent mental and physical ill can befall an animal of such crude organism. At least, the tentacles are withdrawn, nor will they be protruded until some sense—unlikely to be either sight, hearing, taste, or touch, but probably nervous tension acutely susceptible to vibrations—tells that danger is past. Then the tentacles are shyly exhibited and the agitations of the animal are renewed.

Throughout the length of the body of the more remarkable of the two species of which I may speak on first-hand knowledge are four rows of bosses, closely spaced, which when the animal has dragged its slow length along to the utmost limit diminish into mere wrinkles, and disappear altogether when it is slung across a stick, and the fluid contents, being precipitated, congest and woefully weight each end, sometimes to the bursting-point. The bosses of repose seem to indicate so much length in reserve. A dozen simple tentacles, sword-shaped, with frayed edges, and about an inch and a half long, indicate the head without decorating it, for they are of an inconspicuous neutral tint, closely resembling the alga among which the animal slowly winds its way.

The progress of all species of *bêche-de-mer* is sedate and cautious, and this, probably the longest and the weakest and limpest of all, surpasses the race in deliberateness. It cannot move as a whole, so it progresses in sections. When the head has been advanced to its utmost, about the middle of the body an independent series of succedant ripples or wrinkles manifests itself and travels consistently ahead, while farther towards the rear another series follows, and so on, until the lagging tail is enabled to wrinkle itself along. But the animal is endowed with the capacity of quite suddenly retracting its forepart like the bellows of a concertina, and when so compressed to heave it backward or in any direction, so that an immediate change of route is possible. The retraction and uplifting of the foreshortened part is astonishingly rapid in view of the methodic movements of the animal as a whole. It is also notable that when the retraction takes place the tentacles are entirely withdrawn, otherwise they are for ever anxiously exploring every inch of the toilsome way. Scientific men have entitled one of the species—possibly the very one blunderingly introduced—*SYNAPTA BESELLII*, and brief reference is made to it elsewhere.

One member of the great "sea-cucumber," or *BÊCHE-DE-MER*, family is especially noticeable because it is decorated with colours of which a gaily plumaged bird might be envious, though it has no other claim to comeliness. Most primitive in form—merely a flattened sac, oval and four inches long by three inches broad, with a purple and white mouth puckered as if contracted by a drawn string. Its general tint is grey; longitudinal bands of scarlet, green, violet, and purple radiate from the posterior and converge at the mouth, the hues blending rainbow-like. The brighter colours seem to have been carelessly and profusely applied, for they run when touched and smear the fingers. Among a family generally sad-hued and shrinking so conspicuous an example is quite prodigal and invites one to ponder upon the sportfulness of Nature. What special office in her processes does this fop of the species with prismatic complexion perform?

The functions of *bêche-de-mer* are not only interesting, but requisite in the commonwealth of the coral reef, however purposeless to the observer intent upon the obvious and external only; while the genera are so numerous that doubtless to each species is consigned the performance of a special office. Some seem to delight in a diet of slush of the consistency of thin gruel; others prefer fine grit; others, again, coarse particles of shell and coral grit and rough gravel. Peradventure the actual food consists of the micro-organisms in the slush and on the superficies of the unassimilatable solids.

When submitted to the sun on the dry beach death is speedy, and decomposition in the case of some species complete to obliteration in a few hours. An apparently solid body, weighty in comparison with its size and apparently of such nature that rapid desiccation would convert it into a tough, leathery substance, it melts at the sight of the sun, leaving as a relic of existence its last meal—a handful of grit-covered with a transparent film of varnish, which the first wavelet of the flowing tide dissolves. Yet on

the reef in a pool such an individual endures complacently water heated to a temperature of 108°. Though feeble and of such readily dissolvable texture, *bêche-de-mer* may be regarded as among the mightiest agents in the conversion of the waste of the coral reef into mud—the sort of mud of which some of the toughest of rocks are compounded. Graded by this and that species, the debris is reduced to fine particles, which upon sedimentation help to raise the level of the reef and thus prepare foundations for dry land.

For richness of colour and diversity of design some of the lovely corals and sponges, which seem to counterfeit the inventions and contrivances of man, and the algae, and those anomalous "growths" which fixedly adhere to the under surface of stones and blocks of coral debris, are not to be surpassed. These dull stones, partly buried in sand, reveal in blotches, daubs, and smears the crude extravagances of a painter's palette. Can it be that such brilliant colours and tints, so profuse and delicate, are necessary features of animals of such crude organisms that they appear to be merely disembodied splashes and dribbles from the brush of the Great Artist? Look at this fantastic patchwork, brightening the obscurity of an upturned stone with glowing orange. In perfectly regular minute dots a pattern of quartered squares, raised slightly in the centre, is being worked out. Many of the squares are finished, but the fabric is rugged at the edges, where, with miraculous precision, the design is being followed, each tiny stitch the counterpart of its fellow. Unless this gross and formless blotch of sage green interferes or this disc of royal blue expands, the whole under surface of the stone may be covered with an orange coloured quilt as dainty as if wrought by fairy fingers.

Why, again, is this particular miniature dome of coral so precisely spirally fluted, like the dome of a Byzantine cathedral? Why of so pure a mauve and bespangled with so many millions of snow-white crystals? Why—where no eyes see them—should parti-coloured algae flaunt such graceful, flawless plumes? What marvellous fertility of imagination in form and design is exhibited in every quiet coral garden! Stolid battlemented walls, massive shapeless blocks, rollicking mushrooms, tipsy toadstools; narrow fjords, sparkingly clear, wind among and intersect the stubborn masses. Fish, bright as butterflies and far more alert, flash in and out of mazes more bewildering than that in which Rosamond's bower was secluded. Starfish stud the sandy flats, a foot in diameter, red with burnished black bosses, and in all shades of red to pink and cream and thence to derogatory grey. Here is a jade-coloured conglomeration of life resembling nothing in the world more than a loose handful of worms without beginning and without end, interloped and writhing and glowing as it writhes with opalescent fires; and here a tiny leafless shrub, jointed with each alternate joint, ivory, white, and ruby-red respectively; again this tracery of gold and green and salmon pink decorating a shiny stone, in formal and consistent pattern. What is it? why is it? and why are such luminous tints so sordidly concealed?

## CHARTER XIII

### SOME MARINE NOVELTIES

"And call up unbound  
In various shapes old Proteus from the sea."

MILTON.

During the cool season the tides on the coast of North Queensland offer peculiar facilities to the observer of the thousand and one marvels of the tropic sea. Spring tides throughout the warm months range low at night and high during the day. In other words, the lowest day spring-tide in winter exposes far more of the reefs than the lowest day tide of summer, while the highest night tide of summer sweeps away the data of the corresponding tide of winter. When, therefore, the far receding water makes available patches of coral reef exposed at other times of the year merely to the cool glimpses of the moon, I am driven to explore them with an eagerness, if not of a treasure-seeker or in the frenzies of naturalistic fervour, at least with the enthusiasm of an ardent student.

It may be that most of the sights which are revealed are of common knowledge among scientific men, and if one is inclined to preach a little sermon on the text of the living stones and polyps and animated jelly, and if such text be trite, let it be granted that the sermon is at least original. Necessarily the sermon will lack commentary and application, and be very imperfect in many other details. If it possesses any virtues, you must apply them personally, for the preacher is not enlightened enough to expound them even to his own, much less to the satisfaction of others.

In many places on this reef little secrets, well kept throughout the rest of the year, are boldly proclaimed when the sea retreats. A fairly common one is a huge anemone of a rich cobalt blue which opens out like a soup-plate with convoluted edges. Another has a form something resembling a hyacinth-glass. The more public parts are not unlike a dwarf growth of that old-fashioned flower the Prince of Wales's feather, save that the colour is a rich brown. Being an animal, it possesses senses in which the most highly specialised vegetable is deficient. It has the power of waving its spikelets, and of the thousand of truncated tentacles which cover the spikelets each seems to possess independent action. Though all, no doubt, contribute to the sustenance of the animal, they, at will, rest from their labours or assume great activity.

It is natural to suppose that the diet of such an animal must be of microscopic proportions. The other day I happened on one which had seized a fish about four inches long, and seemed to be greedily sucking it to death. The fish was still alive, and as it looked up at me with a pathetic gleam in its watery eyes, I released it. It was very languid—indeed, so feeble and faint that it could not swim away. Aid had come too late. The fish was the legitimate prey of the anemone. My interference had been at variance from the laws of property and right. As the vestige of life which remained to the fish was all too fragile for salvation, and as I saw the chance of ascertaining whether the anemone had consciously seized it, or whether it had by mishap blundered against the anemone and had been arrested for its intrusion, I placed the fish close to the enemy. I am certain the anemone made an effort to reach it. There was a decided swing of one of the spikes in the direction of the fish, and decided agitation among the hundreds of minute tentacles. When I, in the interests of remorseless truth, placed the fish in the anemone it was immediately held fast, the activity on the part of the tubes subsiding with an air of satisfaction at the same moment.

It is well known that sea anemones do assimilate such robust and rich diet as living fish. If one's finger is presented the spikelets adhere to it. I cannot describe the sensation as seizure, for it is all too delicate for that; but at least one is conscious of a faint sucking pull. If the finger is rudely withdrawn, some of the tentacles which have taken a firm hold are torn away. Again, the animal is often found apparently asleep, for it is languid and listless, and will not respond to the bait of a finger, however coaxingly presented.

There is another giant anemone (*DISCOMA HADDONI*) known to the blacks as "pootah-pootah," whose inner, reflexed, convoluted edges are covered with tentacles of brown with yellow terminals. This is friendly to fish—at any rate to one species. It is the landlord or host of one of the prettiest fish of all the wide, wide sea, and seems proud of the company of its guest, and the fish is so dependent upon its host as to be quite helpless apart from it. The fish (*AMPHIPRION PERCULA*) "intel-intel" of the blacks, is said to be commensal (literally, dining at the same table with its host), as distinguished from the parasite, which lives on its host.

The good-fellowship between the dainty fish—resplendent in carmine, with a broad collar, and waist-band of silvery lavender (or rather silver shot with lavender) and outlined with purple—and the great anemone is apparent. If the finger is presented to any part of the latter, it becomes adherent; or if the anemone is not in the mood for food, it curls and shrinks away with a repulsive demeanour. But the beautiful fish on the least alarm retires within the many folds of its host, entirely disappearing, presently to peep out again shyly at the intruder. It is almost as elusive as a sunbeam, and most difficult to catch, for if the anemone is disturbed it contracts its folds, and shrinks away, offering inviolable sanctuary. If the fish be disassociated from its host, it soon dies. It cannot live apart, though the anemone, as far as can be judged from outward appearances, endures the separation without a pang.

However, it is safe to assert that the association between the stolid anemone and the painted fish—only an inch and a half long—is for their mutual welfare, the fish attracting microscopic food to its host. And why should one anemone greedily seize a fish, and another find pleasure in the companionship of one of the most beautiful and delicate of the tribe?

This hospitable anemone occasionally takes another lodger—very frail and beautiful. All that is visible on casual inspection is an irregular smear of watery, translucent violet, flitting about in association with disjointed threads—stiff, erratic, and delicately white. There is no apparent connection between the spectral patch of colour and the animated threads, though they are in company. If, determined to investigate the mystery, the finger is presented, the colour evades it. It is conscious and abhors the touch of man. Follow it up in the pellucid water, and make of your hand a scoop, and you will find that you have captured, not a phantom but a prawn, compact of one bewildering blotch—and that is a word of doubtful propriety in connection with so elfin an organism—a mere shadow tinted the palest violet, and transparencies, with legs and antennae frail as silken threads.

"Substance might be called what shadow seemed,

For each seemed either."

So far I have never seen this lovely lodger in the same anemone with the painted fish. The latter, perhaps, admires it too ardently and literally.

Another marvel, the sea-hare (APLYSIA), is a crudely wedge-shaped body but incomparable in its ruggedness to that or any other model, and the colour of mud and sand and of coral, dead and sea-stained. It reposes, with its back flush with the surface, beside a block of coral or stone defiantly indistinguishable from the ocean floor—a stolid, solid, inert creature, eight or ten inches long, the under part smooth, presenting the appearance of wet chamois-leather, and irresponsive to touch—"the mother tongue of all the senses." Ugly, loathsome, and tough of texture, it is so helpless that if it is placed on the sand it is extremely doubtful whether of its own volition it could regain its natural position. The surge of the sea might roll it over, and it might then be able to regain the grovelling attitude essential to life. Otherwise, I am inclined to think fatal results would follow the mere placing of the creature sideways on the sand. It seems to possess but the feeblest spark of life, and yet it has its sentiments and love for its kind, for often three or four are huddled together. And how, it may be asked, is this creature, so apt at concealment and so completely disguised, made visible to human eyes?

The answer is that if by chance the animal is disturbed it makes a supreme effort at further concealment, and that impulse—perfect as it may be when set in opposition to the wit of the creature's nervous and apprehensive enemies—reveals it most boldly to man. From a funnel-shaped opening between two obscure flaps on the back—ordinarily invisible—there is emitted a gush of liquid, royal purple in hue, which stains the sea with an impenetrable dye for yards around. The colour, which is delightfully gorgeous, mingles with the water in jets and curling feathery sprays, enchanting the beholder with unique and ever-changing shapes until a glorious cloud is created and he forgets the ugliness and forgives the humility of the originator in the enjoyment of an artistic treat. If the cloud which Jupiter assumed was of the imperial tone and of the fascinating fashion which the groveller in the mud creates, Aegina would have been superfeminine had she not joyously surrendered. Between the neutral tints of the squalid sprawler and the fluid which it excretes the contrast is so surprising that one involuntarily raises his hat by way of apology for any slighting thoughts which may have arisen from first and imperfect acquaintance.

There are grounds for the entertainment of the belief that the ejected fluid not only effectually conceals the scarcely discernible animal but that it harshly affects the sensibilities of fish.

In a partially submerged coral grotto were two small spotted sharks (Wobbegong, CROSSORHINUS sp.) notoriously sluggish and averse from eviction from their quarters during daylight. The larger callously disregarded the tickling of a light fish spear, but lashed out vigorously when a decisive prod was administered. In its flurry it must have disturbed one of the dye-secreting molluscs, which had escaped my notice, for in a few seconds the water was richly imbued. Thereupon both the sharks began to manifest great uneasiness, and eventually with fluster and splashing they worked among the fissures of the coral and shot out into the unimpregnated sea. The sharks seemed to find the presence of the forlorn groveller in the mud unendurable when it stained the water red, though apparently indifferent to its presence as long, as it remained quiescent, which facts lend confirmation to the popular opinion that the fluid possesses a caustic-like principle violently irritative to the skin.

And why should this uncouth creature with scarcely more of life than a lump of coral have within it a fountain filled with Tyrian dye? Why? Because it has enemies; and though it seems to be SANS mouth, SANS eyes, SANS ears, SANS everything it is instinct with the first law of Nature—self-preservation.

A fairly common inhabitant of the sandy shallows diversifying the coral reef is a slim snake (? AIPYSINAS FUSCUS), sand-coloured, with a conspicuous dark brown stock, defined with white edgings, a whitish nose and pectoral fins so large as to remind one of those defiant collars which Gladstone was wont to wear with such excellent effect. Blacks invariably give the snake and its retreat a wide berth on the principle enunciated by Josh Billings: "Wen I see a snaik's hed sticking out of a hole I sez that hole belongs to that snaik." Among them this species has the reputation of attacking off-hand whosoever disturbs it, and of being provided with deadly venom. My experience, however, bids me say that the pretty snake has the typical dread of the family of man, which dread expresses itself in frenzied efforts to get out of the way when suddenly molested. For the most part it lives in a neat hole, oubliette-shaped, and in its eagerness to locate and reach its retreat it darts about with a nimbleness which almost eludes perception. These frantic quarterings, I believe, led to the opinion that the snake is specially savage, whereas it is merely exceptionally nervous and eager for the security of its home. Twice recently when I have startled one in an enclosed pool it has darted hither and thither in extreme excitement, even passing between my legs without offering any violence or venom, and has eventually

disappeared in a miniature maelstrom of mud, as the reptile often does. Like that lively fellow of whom Chaucer tells:

"He is heer and there,  
He is so variant, he bideth nowhere."

Dickens had in his mind a similarly elusive character when he wrote: "You look at him and there he is. You look again—and there he isn't."

This habit of furiously seeking a lair might pass casually but for an astonishing detail, of which I was not well assured until it was confirmed by repeated observations and by knowledge current among the blacks. When the scared snake descends into its own well-defined well, very little disturbance and no discoloration of the water takes place. But when in desperation it disappears down a haphazard hole, a dense little cloud of sediment is created. By careful watching I discovered that the snake entered its home head first, but in any other hole the tail had precedence, and that the frantic wriggling as it bored its way down caused the obscuration. Moreover the snake—as subtle as any beast of the field—first detects a befitting temporary retreat from apparent or fancied danger, and then deliberately turns and enters tail first. Does the fact justify the conclusion that the creature, in the moment intervening between the detection of a present refuge in time of trouble and its dignified retreat thereinto, calculates the possibility that the unfamiliar habitation may be so narrow as to prevent the act of turning round? Does this sea-snake match its wonderful nimbleness of body with an equally wonderful nimbleness of brain? I do not presume to theorise on such a conundrum of Nature, but mention an undoubted fact for others to ponder.

One of the salt sea snakes is distinguished by its odd, deceptive shape—a broad, flattened tail whence the body consistently diminishes to the head, which is the thinnest part. Other aquatic snakes have paddle-shaped tails.

Another singular denizen of the reef is a species of *Acrozoanthus* (?)—a compound animal having a single body and several heads. The body is contained in a perpendicular, parchment-like, splay-footed tube a foot and a half or two feet long, whence the heads obtrude alternately as buds along a growing branch. Many of the tubes are vacant—the skeletons of the departed. From those which are occupied the heads appear as bosses of polished malachite veined and fringed with dusky purple, and yellow-centred.

## **SPAWN OF THE SEA**

"The dewdrop slips into the shining sea."

So Edwin Arnold. Here is an observation illustrating the manner in which certain pellucid sea-drops materialise and ultimately shed themselves as living organisms "into the shining sea."

On November 6, 1908, the sea tossed up on the beach an exceptionally large and absolutely perfect specimen of the egg-cluster of that spacious and useful mollusc known as the Bailer Shell (*MELO DIADEMA* or *CYMBIUM FLAMMEUM*). Its measurements were: length, 16¼ in.; circumference at base, 12¾ in.; at middle, 11¼ in.; at apex 7 1/8 in. It weighed 1¾ lb. and comprised 126 distinct capsules. The photograph presents a candid likeness.

During the same month and the first two weeks of December portions of several other egg-clusters came ashore, and as they were in nicely graduated stages of development I was enabled to indulge in an exceptionally entertaining study—no less than the observation of the transformation of glistening fluid into solid matter and life. In passing it may be mentioned that the first and the last two months of the year appear to constitute the period when the offspring of the species see the light of day, proving that the natural impulses of some molluscs are subject to rule and regulation similarly to those of birds and other terrestrial forms.

Each of the capsules composing the cluster is a cone with the apex free and interior, while the base is external and adherent to its immediate neighbours, but not completely so throughout its circumference. It follows, therefore, that the cluster of capsules is hollow and that water flushes it throughout. In appearance it resembles a combination of the pineapple and the corncob, and to the base a portion of the coral-stem to which it had been anchored by its considerate parent was firmly attached.

When the cluster of capsules (the substance of which is tough, semi-transparent, gelatine, opal-tinted, soon to be sea-stained a yellowish green) is slowly expelled from the parent's body—I have been witness to the birth—each contains about one-sixth ounce of vital element, fluid and glistening. Physical

changes in this protoplasm manifest themselves in the course of a few days. The central portion becomes a little less fluid, and from an inchoate blur a resemblance to a diaphanous shell develops and floats, cloud-like, in a perfectly limpid atmosphere. Gradually it becomes denser though still translucent, as it seemingly absorbs some of the fluid by which it is surrounded. The model of the future animal, exact even to the dainty contours and furrows around that which represents the spire of the ultimate shell, is still without trace of visible organs. That, however, its substance is highly complex is obvious, for as imperceptible development progresses the exterior is transformed into a substance resembling rice tissue-paper—an infinitely fragile covering—which from day to day insensibly toughens in texture and becomes separate from the animal. Faint opaque, transverse ribs are at this stage apparent, though disappearing later on. Opacity is primarily manifested at the aperture of the infant mollusc where a seeming resemblance to an operculum forms, possibly for the protection of vital organs during nascency. This plaque of frail armour is, however, soon dismantled, and of course much more happens in the never-ceasing process than is revealed to the uninitiated.

As the calcareous envelope becomes opaque and solid, the animal within loses its transparent delicacy, and coincidentally the apex of the capsule opens slightly. In the meantime the fluid contents have disappeared, as if the animal had resulted from its solidification. The animal, too, is a very easy fit in its compartment, and incapable, in its extreme fragility of withstanding the pressure of a finger. Now it begins to increase rapidly in bulk and sturdiness; the shell becomes hard, and as the exit widens it screws its way out of a very ragged cradle, emerging sound and whole as a bee from its cell, all its organs equipped to ply their respective offices.

With pardonable affectation of vanity it has finally fitted itself for appearance in public by the assumption of three or four buff and brown decorations upon its milk-white shell, which quickly blend into a pattern varying in individuals, of blotches and clouds in brown, yellow, and white. In maturity the mollusc weighs several pounds, its shell has a capacity for as much as two gallons of water, and is coloured uniformly buff, while in old age infantile milk-white reasserts itself.

It is not for such as I am in respect of the teachings of science to say whether the development of the perfect animal from a few drops of translucent jelly—as free from earthly leaven as a dewdrop—is to be more distinctly traced, in the case of this huge mollusc than in other elementary forms. All that it becomes an unversed student of life's mysteries to suggest is that this example gives bold advertisement to the marvellous process.

Many of the secrets of life are written in script so cryptic and obscure that none but the wise and greatly skilled may decipher it, and they only, when aided by the special equipment which science supplies. In this case the firm but facile miracle is recorded in words that he that runs may read. Independent of microscope the unskilled observer may trace continuity in the transformation of jelly to life.

The sea-drop, lovely in its purity, knowing neither blemish nor flaw, becomes an animal with form and features distinctive from all others, with all essential organs, means of locomotion, its appetite, its dislikes, its care of itself, its love for its kind, its inherent malice towards its enemies—all evolved in a brief period from the concentrated essence of life.

"If, as is believed, the development of the perfect animal from protoplasm epitomises the series of changes which represent the successive forms through which its ancestors passed in the process of evolution" (these are the words of Professor Francis Darwin) what a graphic, what a luminous demonstration of evolution is here presented!

In a brief previous reference to this mollusc it was stated that the infants in their separate capsules were in a state of progressive development from the base to the apex of the cluster, those in the base being the farther advanced. Investigations lead to a revision of such statement. No favour seems to be enjoyed by first-born capsules. Development is equable and orderly, but as in other forms of life the contents of certain capsules seem to start into being with a more vigorous initial impulse than others, and these mature the more speedily. A sturdy infant may be screwing its way out of its cradle, while in a weakly and degenerate brother alongside the thrills of life may be far less imperative.

The pictures illustrate isolated scenes in the life-history of the mollusc, which in a certain sense offers a solution to, the conundrum stated by Job "Who, hath begotten the drops of dew?"

## **PROTECTIVE COLORATION**

July 17, 1909.

Found a small cowry shell of remarkable beauty on dead coral in the Bay. At first sight it appeared as



a brilliant scarlet boss on the brown coral, and upon touching it the mantle slowly parted and was withdrawn, revealing a shell of lavender in two shades in irregular bands and irregularly dotted with reddish brown spots; the apertures were richly stained with orange, and the whole enamel exceedingly lustrous. Most of the molluscs of the species conceal themselves under mantles so closely resembling their environments as to often render them invisible. In this case the disguise assumed similitude to a most conspicuous but common object of anomalous growth, seeming to be a combination of slime and sponge.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME CURIOUS BIVALVES

Though certain species of molluscs have their respective habitats, and that which is considered rare in one part may be common in another, there are few which have not a general interest for the scientific conchologist. Collectors prize shells on account of their rarity and beauty; the man of science because of the assistance they afford in the working out of the universal problems of nature. Neither a collector nor a scientific student, my attitude towards marine objects is that of a mere observer—an interested and often wonder-struck observer—so that when I classify one species of mollusc as common and another as rare I am judging them in accordance with my own environment and information, not from a general knowledge of one of the most entertaining branches of natural history. From this standpoint I may refer to four or five species which stand out from the rest in interest and comparative rarity.

An oyster (*OSTREA DENDOSTREA FOLIUM*), too mean of proportions, too dull and commonplace of colour to be termed pretty, worth nothing, and justifying, in appearances its worthlessness, is remarkable for the exercise of a certain sort of deliberate wit in accordance with special conditions. Nature provides various species of the great oyster family with respective methods of holding their own in the sea, and in the case under review she permits the individual to exercise a choice of two different methods of fixture as chance and the drift of circumstances decide its location. From the bases of the valves spring three or more pairs of hook-like processes which, if Fate decides upon a certain coral host, encircle a slim "twig," creating for the mollusc a curious resemblance to a short-limbed sloth hugging tightly the branch of a tree. When the spat happens to settle in places where coral is not available the hooks or arms are but crudely developed. It becomes a club-footed cripple, its feet adherent by agglutination or fusion to a rock or other and larger mollusc, dead or alive. In fact, the shrewd little oyster responds to its environment, clasping a twig with claws or cementing itself to an unembraceable host in accordance as contingencies insist.

Another mollusc (*AVICULA LATA*), sometimes found in company with the clinging oyster, resembles, when the fragile valves are expanded, a decapitated butterfly, brick-red in colour, with an overshirt of fine and elaborate network, orange tinted. The interior is scarcely less attractive, the nacre having a pink and bluish lustre, while the "lip" is dark red. This is found (in my experience) only in association with a certain species of coral (*GORGONIA*), which flourishes in strong currents on a stony bottom three or four fathoms deep. Apart from the unusual shape and pleasing colours of the shell, it is remarkable because it seems to be actually incorporated with its host. The foot of the mollusc is extended into a peduncle, consisting of fibres and tendons, by which the animal is a fixture to a spur of coral. At the point of union (to facilitate which there is a hiatus in the margins of the peduncle) the sarcode or "flesh" of the coral is denuded, its place being occupied by ligaments, which by minute ramifications adhere so intimately to the coral stock or stem that severance therefrom cannot be effected without loss of life to the mollusc.

On a single spray of ruddy *Gorgonia* several of these commensal molluscs may occur in various stages of development—the smaller no bigger than the wing of a fly and almost as frail, the larger three and four inches long, and each whatsoever its proportions securely budded on and growing from a spur, while frequently the valves of the large are bossed with limpets and other encumbrances. In appearance the shell represents a deformity in usurpation of a thin pencilate "growth" of coral a foot long, for the exterior colouration is that of the coral. Quite independent of their host for existence, these molluscs are not to be stigmatised as parasites, though the individual spur to which each is attached is invariably destroyed by the union, merely sufficient remaining for the support of the intruder. Natural science provides many illustrations of symbiosis, or the intimate association of two distinct organisms. This example may be out of the common, and therefore worthy of inclusion in a

general reference to the life of the coral reef.

A third species, rare in a certain sense only, is of a most retiring, not to say secretive, disposition. For several years I sought in vain a living specimen of a flattened elongated bivalve (*VALSELLA*), buff-coloured externally, very lustrous within, with a hinge the centre of which resembles a split pearl. The blacks could offer no information beyond that which was delightfully indefinite. "That fella plenty along a reef. You look out. B'mbi might you catch 'em!" "Tom," who never wilfully parades his ignorance, boldly asserted that they favoured rocks, but he had no name for them, and no living specimen was ever forthcoming to substantiate confident opinions.

An exceptionally low tide revealed several hitherto cautiously preserved secrets of the reef, among them the location of a species of sponge, dark brown, some semi-spherical, some turreted in fantastic fashion. Embedded upright in the sponges, like almonds in plum-puddings, so that merely the extremities of the valves were visible as narrow slits, were the long-sought-for molluscs. Judging by the extreme care of the species for its own protection—for it is ill-fitted in model and texture for a rough-and-tumble struggle for existence—one is inclined to the opinion that it must have many enemies. The valves are frail and brittle, and only when they gape are they revealed, and the gape is self consciously polite. The sponge embraces the slender mollusc so maternally that rude yawning is forbidden. It may lisp only and in smooth phrases, such as "prunes" and "prisms"; and, moreover, the host further insures it against molestation by the diffusion of an exceptionally powerful odour, which, though to my sense of smell resembles phosphorus, is, I am informed on indubitable authority, derivable from the active form of oxygen known as ozone. Experimentally I have placed these molluscs in fresh water, to find it quickly dyed to a rich amber colour while acquiring quite remarkable pungency. Even after the third change the water was impregnated.

Interest in the mollusc became secondary upon the discovery of the host and in consideration of the part it plays in the production of one of the special effects of coral reefs; but the mollusc serves another and timely purpose—purely personal and yet not to be disregarded. It indicates a dilemma with which the wilful amateur in the first-hand study of conchology is confronted. Although, as I have said, no local knowledge of identity was available, reference to a well-disposed expert secured the information that its title in science is *VULSELLA LINGULATA*; that some twenty species are known; that they all associate with sponges, and that possibly different species inhabit different kinds of sponges. It may seem unpardonably gratuitous on the part of one professedly ignorant to offer general observations upon natural phenomena; but as I find myself among the great majority who do not know and who may be more or less interested and anxious to learn, I claim justification in describing that which to me is novel and rare. In this splendid isolation I cannot hope to illuminate primary investigations with the searching light in which science basks unblinkingly, for the nearest library of text-books is close on a thousand miles away. Nor can I keep all my observations to myself. There are some which, like murder, "will out," conscious though I am of meriting the censure of the learned.

With this off my mind, let me return to the tenement sponges, which may be likened to so many independent and flourishing manufactories of ozone. Apart from the odour of brine common to every ocean and the scents of the algae and some of the flowering plants of the sea, which are similar all over the world, a coral reef has a strong and specific effluence. The skeletonless coral (*ALCYONARIA*) has a sulphurous savour of its own, and the echini and *bêche-de-mer* are also to be separately distinguished by their fumes. Anemones, great and small, seem to disperse a recognisable scent as from a mild and watery solution of fish and phosphorus. But of all the occupants of the reef none are so powerful or so characteristic in this respect as sponges. Puissant and aggressive, these exhalations are at times so strong as to almost make the eyes water, while exciting vivid reminiscences of old-fashioned matches and chemical experiments. Substantial, wholesome, and clean—though generated by a wet, helpless creature having no personal charms, and which, having passed the phase of life in which it enjoyed the gift of locomotion, has become a plant-like fixture to one spot—the gas mingles with other diffusions of the reef, recalling villanous salt-petre and sheepdips and brimstone and treacle to the stimulation of the mental faculties generally.

Invariably an afternoon's exploration of the coral reef is followed by a drowsy evening and a night of exceptionally sweet repose. No ill dreams molest the soothing hours during which the nervous system is burnished and lubricated, and you wake refreshed and invigorated beyond measure. I have endeavoured to account for the undoubted physical replenishment and mental exhilaration largely from the breathing of air saturated with emanations from the coral and sea things generally.

In the course of three hours' parade and splashing in the tepid water, ever so many varieties of gas more or less pungent and vitalising—gas which seems to search and strengthen the mechanism of the lungs with chemically enriched air, to tonic the whole system, and to brighten the perceptive faculties, have been imbibed. Exercise and the eagerness with which wonders are sought out and admired may account in part for present elation and balmy succeeding sleep, but the vital functions seem, if my own

sensations are typical, to receive also a general toning up. Twice a month at least a man should spend an afternoon on a coral reef for the betterment of body and brain. On the face of it this is counsel of perfection. Only to the happy few is such agreeable and blest physic proffered gratis. Yet the whole world might be brighter and better if coral reefs were more generously distributed. Breathing such subtle and sturdy air, men would live longer; while the extravagant life of the reef, appealing to him in fine colours and strange shapes, would avert his thoughts from paltry and mean amusements and over-exciting pleasures. The pomp of the world he would find personated by coral polyps; its vanities by coy and painted fish; its artfulness represented by crabs that think and plan; its scavenging performed by aureoled worms.

Although students of conchology are familiar with several species of LIMA, I am eager to include it in these haphazard references, because my first acquaintance with a living specimen afforded yet another experience of the versatility of the designs of Nature. It is truly one of the "strange fellows" which Nature in her time has framed. Living obscurely in cavities, under stones, inoffensive and humble, the Lima enjoys the distinction of being, the permanent exemplification of the misfit, its body being several sizes too large as well as too robust for its fragile, shelly covering. The valves are obtusely oblong, while the animal is almost a flattened oval, the mantle being fringed with numerous bright pink tentacles, almost electrical in their sensitiveness.

Though anything but rotund, so full in habit (comparatively speaking) is the body of the lima that the valves cannot compress it. Except at the hinges they are for ever divorced, an unfair proportion of the bulging body being exposed naked to the inclemency and hostility of the world. "All too full in the bud" for those frail unpuritanical stays, the animal seems to be at a palpable disadvantage in the battle of life, yet the lima is equipped with special apparatus for the maintenance of its right to live. By the expansion and partial closing of the valves it swims or is propelled with a curiously energetic, fussy, mechanical action, while the ever-active pink rays—a living, nimbus—beat rhythmically, imperiously waving intruders off the track.

The appearance and activities of the creature are such as to establish the delusion that it is not altogether amicable in its attitude towards even such a bumptious and authoritative product of Nature as man. Its agitated demonstrations—whatever their vital purpose may be—to the superficial observer are danger signals, a means of self-preservation, as a substitute for the hard calcareous armour bestowed upon other molluscs. The fussy red rays may impose upon enemies a sense of discretion which constrains them to avoid the lima, which, though hostile in appearance, is one of the mildest of creatures. The tentacles, too, have a certain sort of independence, for they occasionally separate themselves from the animal upon the touch of man, adhering to the fingers, while maintaining harmonic action, just as the tip of a lizard's tail wriggles and squirms after severance.

Most of the blocks of submerged, denuded coral are the homes of certain species of burrowing molluscs, the most notable of which are the "date mussels" (LITHOPHAGA). The adult of that designated *L. TERES* is over two inches long and half an inch in diameter; glossy black, with the surface delicately sculptured in wavy lines; the interior nacreous, with a bluish tinge. This excavates a perfectly cylindrical tunnel, upon the sides of which are exposed the stellar structure of the coral. A closely related species (*STRAMINEA*), slightly longer, and generally of smooth exterior, partially coated with plaster, muddy grey in colour, adds to the comfort and security of existence by lining its tunnel with a smooth material, a distinction which cannot fail to impress the observer. In each case the mollusc is a loose fit in its burrow, having ample room for rotation, but the aperture of the latter is what is known as a cassinian oval, and generally projects slightly above the surface of the coral.

The animal is a voluntary life prisoner, for the aperture has the least dimension of the tunnel. The genus is known to be self luminous—a decided advantage in so dark and narrow an habitation. It seems to me to be worthy of special note that an animal enclosed by Nature in tightly fitting valves should also be endowed with the power of mixing plaster or secreting the enamel with which its tunnel is lined and of depositing it with like regularity and, smoothness to that exhibited in its more personal covering which grows with its growth. The mollusc in its burrow in the depths of a block of coral, white as marble, with its own light and its self-constructed independent wall, appeals to my mind as evidence of the care of Nature for the preservation of types, while from such retiring yet virile creatures man learns earth-shifting lessons. A quotation from Lyell's "Principles of Geology" says that the perforations of Lithophagi in limestone cliffs and in the three upright columns of the Temple of Jupiter Serapis at Puzzuoli afford conclusive evidence of changes in the level of sea-coasts in modern times—the borings of the mollusc prove that the pillars of the temple must have been depressed to a corresponding depth in the sea, and to have been raised up again without losing their perpendicularity.

The date-mussels play an important part in the conversion of sea-contained minerals into dry land. Massive blocks of lime secreted by coral polyps being weakened by the tunnels of the mussels are the more easily broken by wave force; and being reduced finally to mud, the lime, in association with sand

and other constituents, forms solid rock.

A feature of another of the coral rock disintegrating agents is its extreme weakness. It is a rotund mollusc with frail white valves, closely fitting the cavity in which it lives. As it cannot revolve, the excavation of the cavity is, possibly, effected by persistent but necessarily extremely slight "play" of the valves; but the animal appears to be quite content in its cramped cell with a tiny circular aperture (generally so obscured as to be invisible), through which it accepts the doles of the teeming, incessant sea.

## CHAPTER XV

### BARRIER REEF CRABS

"Reasoning, oft admire  
How Nature, wise and frugal, could commit  
Such dispositions with superfluous hand."

MILTON.

So much of the time of the Beachcomber is spent sweeping with hopeful eyes the breadths of the empty sea, policing the uproarious beaches, overhauling the hordes of roguish reefs, and the medley concealed in cosy caves by waves that storm at the bare mention of the rights of private property, that he cannot avoid casual acquaintance with the scores of animated things which ceaselessly woo him from the pursuit of his calling. Should he be inclined to ignore the boldly obvious distractions from serious affairs, there are others, not readily discernible, which have singularly direct and successful methods of fixing attention upon themselves.

Roseate or sombre your humour as you patrol the reefs, it is liable to be changed in a flash into clashing tints by inadvertent contact with a warty ghoul of a sea-urchin, a single one of whose agonising spines never fails to bring you face to face with one of the vividest realities of life. A slim but shapely mollusc known as *Terebellum* or augur, to mention another conceited little disturber of your meditations, stands on its spire in the sand, and screws as you tread, cutting, a delightfully symmetrical hole in the sole of your foot, and retaining the core—perfect as that of a diamond drill.

Many and varied are the inconspicuous creatures with office to remind the barefooted trespasser that no charter of the isles and their wrecks is flawless, and that they are prepared to inflict curious pains and limping penalties for every incautious intrusion on their domicile. Few of the denizens of the unkempt coral gardens are more remarkable than the crabs. By reef and shore I have come literally into contact with so many quaint specimens, and they have so often afforded exhilarating diversion and sent brand-new startling sensations scurrying along such curious and complicated byways, that courtesy bids me tender a portrait of one of the family which (in appearance only) may be described as a dandy, and to tell of two or three others whose intimacy is invariably enlivening.

Shall I dispose of the dandy first? Perhaps it were better so, for I confess to a very slight acquaintanceship with him, and as I am ignorant, too, of its ceremonious as well as familiar title, the pleasure of a formal introduction is denied. In the portrait the ruling passions—modesty and meekness—are graphically displayed. When it lies close—and it moves rarely, and then with a gentle lateral swaying—the fancy dress of seaweed is a garment of invisibility. It is far more true to character alive than as a museum specimen, for its natural complexion is a yellowish grey, the neutral tint of the blending of sand and coral mud upon which it resides. The preserving fluid added a pinkish tinge to the body and limbs. Blame, therefore, the embalmer for the over-conspicuous form which is not in the habit of the creature as it lived. Neither are the plumes those of pomp and ceremony, but merely the insignia of self-conscious meekness—the masquerade under which the shrinking crab moves about, creating as little din and stir as possible, in an ever-hungry world. With such unfaltering art does it act its part that it is difficult to realise the crab's real self unless aided by mischance. Conscious of the terrors of discovery, it rocks to and fro, that its plumes may sway, as it were, in rhythm with the surge of the sea. Can there be such a thing as an unconscious mimic? If not, then the portrait is that of an ideal artist.

Those who know only the great flat, ruddy crabs with ponderous pincers and pugnacious mien, which frequent fish shop windows, can form but a very unflattering opinion of the fancy varieties which

people every mile of the Barrier Reef.

The struggle for existence in this vast, crowded, and most cruel of arenas is so appalling that the great crab family has been battered by circumstances into weird and fantastic forms. Only a few come up to the human conception of the beautiful either in figure or colouring. While some shrink from observation, others, though themselves obscure to the vanishing-point, seem to be endowed with a vicious yearning for notoriety.

A certain cute little pursuer of fame is absolutely invisible until you find it stuck fast to one of your toes with a serrated dorsal spur a quarter of an inch long. It is invisible, because Nature sends it into this breathing world masquerading, as she did Richard III, deformed, unfashioned, scarce half made-up. In general appearance it closely resembles a crazy root-stalk of alga—green and not quite opaque, and clinging to such alga it lives, and lives so placidly that it cannot be distinguished from its prototype except by the sense of touch. When you pick it gingerly from between your toes there is a malicious gleam in the pin-point black eyes, and then you understand that it is one of the many inventions designed for the torment of trespassers.

I have often sought specimens of this poor relation of the fish-shop window aristocrat, but invariably in vain, until I have found myself suddenly shouting "Eureka!" while balancing myself on one foot eager for the easement of the other, and the giggling demeanour of the imp as it parts company with his spur gives a sort of comic relief to the thrilling sensations of the moment. Upon examination this imp seems to be an example of arrested development. Whimsical fate has played upon it a grim practical joke, flattering it primarily by resemblance to a grotesquely valorous unicorn, and then, having changed her mood to mere pettishness, finished it offhand by adding a section of semi-animate seaweed.

Although among the commonest of the species, the grey sand crab, which burrows bolt-holes in the beaches, is by no means an uninteresting character. Surrounded by enemies, and yet living on the bare, coverless beach, its faculties for self-preservation are exceptionally refined. The eyes are elongated ovals, based on singularly mobile pivots, while the pupils resemble the bubble of a spirit-level. Not only is the range of vision a complete circle, but the crab seems able to concentrate its gaze upon any two given points instantly and automatically. To spite all its skill as a digger, to set at naught its superb visual alertness, the sand crab has a special enemy in the bird policeman which patrols the beach. Vigilant and obnoxiously interfering, the policeman has a long and curiously curved beak, designed for probing into the affairs of crabs, and unless the "hatter" has hastily stopped the mouth of its shaft with a bundle of loose sand—which to the prying bird signifies "Out! Please return after lunch!"—will be disposed of with scant ceremony and no grace, for the manners of the policeman are shocking.

This quick-footed sand-digger enhances its reputation by the performance of feats of subtlety and skill. Its bolt-hole is sometimes three feet deep, generally on an incline. Piled in a mound the spoil would inevitably betray the site of the operations to the policeman, thus seriously facilitating the duties of that official towards the suppression of the species. From remote depths the crab carries a bundle of sand. You remember the trenchant way in which Pip's sister cut the bread and butter, her left hand jamming the loaf hard and fast against her bib? Just so the crab with its bundle of loose sand, though it has the advantage in the number of limbs which may be pressed into service. The feat of carrying an armful of sliding sand in proportion to bulk about one-third of the body, is far away and beyond the capacities of human beings, but to the crab, which has acquired the trick of temporary consolidation by pressure, it is merely child's play. Arrived at the mouth of the shaft, it elevates its eyes (which in the dark have rested in neatly fitting recesses) for the purpose of a cautious yet sweeping survey. Seeing nothing alarming, it emerges with the alertness of a jack-in-the-box, races several inches, and scatters the load broadcast as the sower of seed who went forth to sow. Then, as suddenly, the crab pauses and flattens itself—its body merging with its surroundings almost to invisibility—preparatory for a spurt for home. During these exertions the intellect of the crab has been concentrated for outwitting the vigilance of enemies, for the plodding policeman is not singular in appreciation. The lordly red-backed sea-eagle occasionally condescends to such humble fare, and the crab must needs be alert to evade the scrutiny with which the eagle searches the sand.

This passing reference to the wit and deftness of the crab would be quite uncomplimentary in default of special notice of the plug of sand with which it stops its burrow. As a rule it is about an inch thick, and in content far more than a crab could carry in a single load. How does the creature, working from below and with such refractory material, so arrange that the plug shall be flush with the surface and sufficiently consolidated to retain its own weight? Of what art in loose masonry has the crab the unique secret? Shakespeare speaks of stairs of sand, and Poe laments the "how few" grains of golden sand which crept through his fingers to the deep; but who but a crab possesses the secret for the building of a roof of the material which is the popular emblem of instability and shiftiness?

The impartial student must not restrict his notions as to the possibilities of sand to the admirable

accomplishments of crabs. He may also inspect with profit the handicraft of a lowly mollusc which agglutinates sand-grains into a kind of plaque, in the substance of which numerous eggs are deposited.

To attribute manual dexterity and a calculating mind to a mere crab, is, no doubt, an insult to the intelligence of those who "view all culogium on the brute creation with a very considerable degree of suspicion and who look upon every compliment which is paid to the ape as high treason to the dignity of man." But the truthful historian of the capabilities of crabs, the duty of one who stands sponsor to some of the species and who has the hardihood to indite some of the manifestations of their intelligence, wit, and craft, must discard the prejudices of his race, abandon all flattering sense of superiority, forbear the smiles of patronage, and contemplate them from the standpoint of fellowship and sympathy.

In this spirit he watches another expert digger which has a sharp-edged shovel affixed to the end of each of its eight legs, and is so deft in their use that it disappears in the sand on the instant of detection, without visible effort, and almost as quickly as a stone sinks in water.

Unless a crab is a giant in armour, or is endowed with almost supernatural alertness, or is an artist in the art of mimicry, or unless it cultivates some method of rapid disappearance, it has little chance of holding its own in the battle raging unceasingly over the vast areas of the Great Barrier Reef.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BLOCKADE OF THE MULLET

"Up with a sally and a flash of speed  
As if they scorned."

The rains which came at the New Year flooded all the creeks of the Island. Accumulations of sand usually form beds through which the sweet water slowly mingles with the salt, but with the violence and impetus of a downpour of ten inches during the night, each torrent had cut a channel, through which it raced from the seclusion of the jungle to the free, open sea. Twice in the twenty-four hours the impassive flowing tide subdued the impertinence of each of the brawlers, smothered its gurgling, and forced it back among the ferns and jungle and banana-plants which crowded its banks.

The largest stream at high water was four feet deep. As I prepared to wade across George, the black boy, shouted over his shoulder towards a slowly swaying cloud in the deep pool overhung with foremost flounces of the jungle. The cloud was a shoal of sea mullet. Save for a clear margin of about three feet, the fish filled the pond—an alert, greyish-blue mass edged with cream-coloured sand. There were several hundred fish, all bearing a family resemblance as to size as well as to feature.

It was slack water. The fish were, no doubt, about to move down-stream to the sea, for all headed that way when the disturbing presence of man blocked the passage. A thrill went through the phalanx, and it swayed to the left and then to the right. The movement—spontaneous and mechanical—slightly elongated the formation, and three scouts in single file slid down to reconnoitre, and with a nervous splash as they scented danger, dashed back and blended imperceptibly with the mass.

"We catch plenty big fella mullet!" George exclaimed, as he gleefully splashed the water, and the cloud contracted and shrank back. The stream was about ten feet wide. Our equipment for sport consisted of a tomahawk and a grass-tree spear so frail that any of the mullet could have swum off with it without inconvenience.

Straddling the stream side by side we splashed and "shooed" when the slightest symptom of a sally on the part of the fish was betrayed. A few brave leaders darted down, generally in pairs, and flashed back in fright at our noisy demonstrations, and so the blockade of the mullet began.

While I stood guard shouting and "shooing" and making such commotion as I trusted would convince the fish that the blockading force was ever so much stronger and more truculent than it really was, George began to construct a pre-eminently practical wall. Its design was evolved ages upon ages ago by black students of hydrostatics and fish. George had imbibed the principles of its construction with his mother's milk. He cut down several saplings, and, screwing the butt ends into the soft sand about a foot apart, interlaced them with branches of mangrove and beach-trailers and swathes of grass. But the

tide began to ebb. The pent-up current, strong and rapid, frequently carried portions of the structure away. George had to duck and dive to tie the vines and creepers to the stakes close down to the sandy bottom. Though armfuls of leafage floated to the surface and rolled out to sea, George worked with joyful desperation. Presently the fish began to make determined rushes. Shouting and splashing, tearing down branches, capturing driftwood, diving and gasping, his efforts were unceasing. Understanding the guile of the fish, he sought to make the deeper part of the weir secure, and for an hour or so he laboured in the water with head, hands, and feet. While with deft fingers he weaved creepers and branches to the stakes, his feet beat the surface into surf and surge to the scaring of the fish to the remote limits of their retreat. But the tighter the weir became, the more the pressure was on it. Fast as repairs were made at one spot gaps appeared in another which demanded immediate attention. The quantity of material that our works absorbed was scarcely to be realised. But a double-ended, amphibious black boy can work every-day wonders. Not a single fish had escaped. We had the whole shoal at our mercy, for George had confidently provided against all contingencies.

Buoyant on the bosom of the stream came a good-sized log with raking, shortened limbs. Under its cover the fish sallied forth a hundred strong, strenuous in bravery and resolution. The log swept past me, making a terrible breach in our weir, through which many fish shot. Some leaped high overhead. Two landed on the sand, helplessly flapping and gasping. George occupied the breach, and as he waved his arms and shouted, a four-pounder, leaping high, struck him on the forehead. He sat down emphatically, and another gap was made. As he struggled to his feet the vanquished members of the assaulting party fled to the main host. Honours were with the besieged. Blood oozed from a lump on George's forehead, there were cruel breaches in the weir, the fish had gained confidence and knowledge of our works, and only two were prisoners.

Now the sallies became frequent. Sometimes the fish came as scouts, more often in battalions, and in the dashes for liberty many were successful. George toiled like a fiend. His repairs looked all right on the surface, but ever and anon considerable flotsam indicated vital gaps. In spite of splashing and "shooing" and the complications of the weir, we had had the mortification of seeing hosts escape.

Then George changed his tactics. Abandoning his faith in the weir, he converted it into what he called, in his enthusiastic excitement, "a bed." He laid branches of the weir so that the leaves and twigs interlaced and crossed, buttressing the structure with another row of palisades. His theory was that the fish, as the water became shallower, would cease their efforts to wriggle through, and, leaping high, would land on the bed and be easily captured. No preliminary shouting and splashing affected the solidity of that determined array. Mullet knew all about blackfellows' weirs and their beds. Some slid through. Many leaped, and, curving gracefully in the air, struck the "bed" at such an angle that it offered no more resistance to them than a sheet of damp tissue-paper. They sniggered as they went through it, and splashed wildly to the sea. They were grand fish—undaunted, afraid of no man or his paltry obstacles to liberty, up to every cunning manoeuvre.

Were we to be beaten by a lot of silly, slippery fish in a shallow stream? Never! January's unsheltered sun played upon my tanned, wet, and shameless back; the salt sweat coursed down my shoulders and dripped from my face. The scrub fowl babbled and chuckled, cockatoos jeered from the topmost branches of giant milkwood trees and nodded with yellow crests grave approval of the deeds of the besieged; fleet white pigeons flew from a banquet of blue fruits to a diet of crude seeds, and not a single one of the canons of the gentle art of fishing but was scandalously violated. It was a coarse and unmanly encounter—the wit, strategy, finesse, and boldness of fish pitted against the empty noise and bluster of inferior man and the flimsiness of his despicable barriers.

In silence and magnificent resolve they came at us. We fought with sticks and all the power of our lungs. Rest was out of the question. The leafy dyke and "bed" stood ever in need of repair; the sallies were continuous and determined. The "bed" was not made for those knightly fish to lie ignobly upon. A single fish would slip down-stream, and, gathering speed and effort, leap with the glitter of heroism in its eyes. One such George caught in his arms. Another slipped through my fingers and struck me on the shoulders, and I bore the mark of the assault for a week. George's brow was bleeding. Indeed, all his blood was up. His "heroic rage" was at bursting point. We had toiled for two hours and counted but three fish, while as many hundred had battled past our siege works. Quite as many remained, and time, as it generally does, seemed to be in favour of the attacking party.

Was Charles Lamb right when he spoke of "the uncommunicating muteness of fishes"? These beleaguered mullet surely exchanged ideas and acted with deliberation and in concert. All swayed this way or that in accordance, so it seemed, with the will of the front rank. A tremor there was repeated instantly at the rear. When a detachment made a bid for liberty it was in response to a common impulse. When a single individual started on a forlorn hope the others seemed to watch our hostile demonstrations as it leaped—flashing silvery lights from its scales—to prove the unworthiness of weirs and beds, and we, of the ranks of Tuscany, cheered if its deed of derring do was neatly and successfully

achieved.

Fish to the number of five having fallen into our clutches, we stood by and watched the rest. Most of them leaped gloriously to liberty. Some ignominiously wriggled. Others remained in the pool, their nerves so shattered by bluster and assault that they had not the melancholy courage to slip away. In his wrath—for blood still oozed from his forehead— George would have exterminated the skulkers, and, checked in his bloodthirstiness, he showered upon them contemptible titles while he cooked two of those we had captured. Wrapped in several folds of banana and "ginger" leaves, and steamed in hot sand, the full flavour of the fish was retained and something of the aroma of the leaves imparted. I was not, therefore, astonished when George, having eaten a three-pounder, finished off my leavings—nothing to boast of, by the way—and proceeded to cook another (for the dog); and Barry, I am bound to say, got fairly liberal pickings. The weather was close, and being satisfied, and, for once, frugal, George cooked the two remaining fish, and swathing them neatly in fresh green leaves, sauntered away, cooing a corroboree of content.

## CHAPTER XVII

### WET SEASON DAYS

"The north-east spends his rage; he now shut up  
Within his iron cave, the effusive south  
Warms the wide air and o'er the vault of heaven  
Breathes the big clouds with vernal showers distent."

#### THOMSON.

Just as in the spring a young man's fancies lightly turn to thoughts of love, so at the beginning of each new year in tropical Queensland the minds of the weather sages become sensitive and impressionable. All the tarnish is rubbed off the recollection of former ill manners on the part of the weather, when about the middle of January the wind begins to bluster and to abuse good-natured trees, shaking off twigs and whirling branches like a tipsy bully striving to dislocate a weak man's arm at the shoulder. We remember dubious events all too vividly when the recitation of them does not make for mutual consolation.

In January, 1909, for two days the sea burst on the black rocks of the islet in the bay in clouds of foam. It was all bombast, froth and bubble, or rather a gentle back-hander, for the cyclone was playing all sorts of naughty pranks elsewhere. But why were we apprehensive? In disobedience to the scriptural injunction, we had observed the clouds and the birds. Twice a flock of lesser frigate-birds, those dark, fish-tailed high-fliers which are for ever cutting animated "W's" in the air with long lithe wings—had appeared. Seldom do they come unless as harbingers of boisterous weather. On each recent occasion they had been absolutely trustworthy messengers. Watching them soaring and swooping, we said one to another: "Behold the cyclone cometh!" But it did not. With a passing flick of its tail it passed elsewhere.

Altogether, however, we had very queer weather and two or three "rum" sorts of nights. On the 19th the morning was calm, the sky brilliantly clear. A north-east breeze sprang up at noon. Deep violet thunder-clouds gathered in the west, and, muttering and grumbling, rolled across the narrow strait slowly and sullenly. Australia scowled at our penitent Island, threatening direful inflictions—lightning, thunder, and an overwhelming cataclysm. Behind that frowning Providence there was a smiling face. The good storm, albeit black and angry, behaved benignly. Gentle rain came, and a picturesque little electrical display to a humming accompaniment of far distant thunder, followed by a soothingly cool south-westerly breeze. Just at sundown the weather-god, repenting of his frown, bestowed a glorious benediction.

All afternoon a damp pall had overhung the Island, mopping up feeble sounds and strangely muffling the stronger. Now it was translated. Lifting so that the summits only of the hills were capped, the haze (for it became nothing more) assumed a luminous yellow saffron suffused with sage green. Against this singularly lovely, ample "cloth" branches and leaves of steadfast trees stood out in high relief. All the lower levels became transparently clear, the definition of distant objects magically sharpened, spaces translucent. In a sea which shone like polished silver the islet was a gem—green enamel, amethyst



rocks, golden sand. The bold white trunks of giant tea-trees glowed; the creamy blooms of bloodwoods were as flecks of snow; the tips of the fronds of coco-nut palms flickered vividly as burnished steel; the white-painted house assumed speckless purity. All light colours were heightened; ruddy browns and sombre greens seemed to have been smartened up by touches of fresh paint and varnish. An idealistic artist had revealed for once living tints and uncomprehended hues.

Was it not a landscape fresh from Nature's brush divinely transmogrified by one bold smudge of yellow-green haze? Or was the effect partly due to the dust raised by the golden fringe of the blue mantle which the sun trailed over the glowing hills? I know naught of the chemistry of colours, nor why this yellow-green medium should so clarify and etherealise the atmosphere. But was ever clear sunset half so affecting? This tinted, luminous cloud had bewitched the commonplace, converting familiar surroundings into fairyland itself. If all the world's a stage, this truly was one of the rarest transformation scenes.

What was about to happen? Surely this mysterious colouring portended some astounding phenomena? Again, nothing did happen, save a stilly night and grey.

## **VEGETATION AND MOISTURE**

It seems fitting and quite safe to point a moral, by allusion to certain conditions prevalent during 1907. Between January 1st and June 30th 80.80 inches of rain were registered. July, August, September, and October provided only 1.74 inches, which quantity bespeaks quite a phenomenal draught. The catchment area of the creek which discharges into Brammo Bay is less than forty acres, and for the most part consists of exceedingly steep declivities. The head of the creek is seven hundred feet above sea level, and its total length less than three-quarters of a mile. Yet, notwithstanding the circumscribed extent of the catchment, the steep, in places almost precipitous, descents, and that for months the rain was insufficient to cause a surface flow, the creek which had cut a gully or canyon forty feet deep across the plateau, never ceased running, the turbulence of the wet season having merely subsided into a tinkling trickle. During the dry period the atmosphere was the reverse of humid; but the almost impenetrable shield of vegetation—the beauty and glory of the Island—discounted loss by evaporation. One can well imagine that in the absence of this gracious protection the creek would cease to flow a week or so after the cessation of rain.

The marked but consistent decrease of water in the creek by day and its rise during the night having excited interest, a series of measurements was taken, the result being somewhat astonishing. One day's readings will suffice, for scarcely any variation from them was recorded for weeks, concurrent meteorological conditions undergoing no sudden or decided change while the experiment was in progress:

Sunday, November 10, 1907.

Inches. 6.30 a.m. 10 1/4 9 " 10 Noon (high tide) 6 5/8 3 p.m. 3 5.30 p.m. 1 1/2 6.10 " (sundown) 1 1/2 7.10 " 3 7/8 9 " 10 1/8

At 7 a.m. on the 11th and 12th the water stood at 10 1/4 inches and I assume that to have been the constant level throughout the night.

The conclusion I draw (rightly or wrongly) from the fact emphasised by these figures is that the mass of vegetation exercises a direct and immediate effect upon the flow of water by gravitation from the catchment. A continual and increasing demand for refreshment existing during the day, the root spongioles are in active operation intercepting the moisture in its descent and absorbing it, while with the lessening of the temperature on the going down of the sun reaction begins, the stomata of the leaves exercise their functions, and by the absorption of gas react on the root films, which for the time relax their duty of arresting the passage of minute particles of water, with a very definite result on the nocturnal flow.

## **THE ODOUR OF THE DEATH ADDER**

February 2, 1909.

Whenever I take my walks abroad I have the companionship of a couple of Irish terriers, enthusiastic hunters of all sorts of "vermin," from the jeering scrub fowl, which they never catch, to the slothful, spiny ant-eater, which they are counselled not to molest. Lizards and occasionally snakes are disposed of without ceremony, though in the case of the snakes the tactics of the dogs are quite discreet. Several

years ago the dogs (not those which now faithfully attend my walks, for more than one generation has passed away) attracted attention by yapping enthusiastically. I flatter myself that I understand the language of my own dogs sufficiently to enable me to judge when they have detected something demanding my co-operation in the killing. When assistance is needed, there are notes of urgent appeal in their exclamations. As a rule my opinion is not asked in respect of lizards, or rats, or the like; but snakes are invariably held up until an armed force arrives.

On the occasion referred to I found them in a frenzy of excitement, fainting and snapping at something sheltering at the base of a tussock of grass. Peering closely, I saw, half concealed beneath grass, sand, and leaves, what I took to be a death adder, which I summarily shot. Then it became apparent that the dogs had blundered, for the reptile was a lizard. The mistake in identity, was, however, excusable, for in size, shape, colouring, and marking it so closely resembled an adder that I was not readily convinced to the contrary. Placing the two pieces into which the shot had divided the creature in juxtaposition, I sympathised with the dogs more strongly, feeling certain that no one would have hesitated to give the harmless lizard a very bad character. Before firing the fatal shot the distention of the body had confirmed my opinion as to identity, and the method of partial concealment and of lying inert were significant of the dangerous little snake. I had no doubt at the time, too, that it emitted a deceptive odour, which, being similar to that of the adder, had been chiefly instrumental in exciting extraordinary suspicion on the part of the terriers.

Dogs of another generation were concerned in a repetition of this experience in its significant details more recently. Having crossed a creek ahead, frantic appeals were made, but before I could reach the spot the excitement got beyond bounds, and I saw one of them snap up something, shake it viciously, and toss it away with every manifestation of repugnance and caution. Again I presumed the squirming reptile to be an adder, for the dogs, with bristling backs and uplifted lips, walked round it gingerly, sniffing and starting as if it were most fearsome and detestable. The bulk of the reptile gradually subsided, confirming the opinion that the dog had actually killed an adder, a feat I had never known it perform. Investigation again proved that an innocent lizard parading as an offensive snake had lost its life. Does not this evidence suggest that the lizard assumes the similitude and the odour of the adder, its tactics of concealment, and its characteristic habit of puffing itself out in order to warn off its foes? The spontaneous, unsuborned, and independent evidence of two sets of dogs cannot be wholly disregarded.

Testimony confirmatory of the contention that adders do diffuse a specific odour, too subtle for man's perception though readily detectable by the sensitive faculties of lower animals, and that such odour affrights and therefore protects them from the reptiles, is contained in Captain Parker Gillmore's work, "The Great Thirst Land." Having killed a small specimen of the horned adder—the "poor venomous fowl" with which Cleopatra ended her gaudy days—and having handled it to examine the poison glands and returned to his pony, he writes: "As soon as I advanced my hand to his head-stall to reverse the reins over his head, he shied back as if in great alarm, and it required some minutes before he would permit me to closely approach. The reason of this conduct in so staid and proper-minded an animal is obvious. In handling the adder some of the smell attached to its body must have adhered to my hands."

When four dogs and one horse, all apparently honourable and well brought up, agree on such a point, to theorise to the contrary would be ungracious.

## **NEPTUNE'S HANDICRAFT**

February 16, 1909.

An easterly breeze coincident with a flowing tide occasionally (though not invariably) creates a gentle swirl in Brammo Bay, a swirl so placid as to be imperceptible in default of such indices as driftwood. Under such a condition Neptune makes playthings which possibly in some future age may puzzle men who happen to ponder seriously on first causes. I recall an afternoon when such playthings were being manufactured abundantly. Globular, oval, and sausage-shaped dollops of dark-grey mud were twirling and rolling on the fringe of listless wavelets. The uniformity of the several models and their apparent solidity excited curiosity. Upon investigation all the large examples were more or less coated with sand. Some were so completely and smoothly enveloped that they appeared to be actual balls of sand and shell grit. The mass, however, was found to be mud mixed with fine sand, with generally a shell or portion thereof, or a fragment of coral as a kernel or core. In fact, each of the dollops was a fair sample of the material of the ocean floor extending from the inner edge of the coral to the beach.

With so many samples in view one could observe the whole process of formation. The crescentic sweep of the wavelets rolled fragments of shell or coral in the mud, successive revolutions adding to the respective bulks by accretion. As the tide rose each piece was trundled on to the sloping beach, to

be rolled and compressed until coated with a mosaic of white shell chips, angularities of silica and micaceous spangles, the finished article being cast aside as the tide receded.

Sometimes the wavelets did the kneading and rolling so clumsily that the nodule was malformed, but the majority were singularly symmetrical, evidencing nice adjustment between the degree of adhesiveness of the "pug" and the applied force of the wave. Several weighed nearly a quarter of a pound, while the majority were not much bigger than marbles, and the oval was the most frequent form.

Is it reasonable to conjecture that some of these singular formations which Neptune turned out by the score during an idle afternoon may be preserved—kernels of sedimentary rock each in a case of sandstone— throughout the wreck of matter to form the texts of scientific homilies in ages to come?

## **THE ATROCITY OF THE SNAKE**

September 28, 1909.

A red snake discovered in a coop with a hen and clutch of chicks. The coop had been deemed snake-proof, but the slim snake had easily passed in at the half-inch mesh wire-netting in front. Upon investigation it was found that the snake had swallowed one chick (and had thereby become a prisoner), had killed three others and maimed a fifth so that it died, and that the hen had killed the snake by pecking its head. The snake (a non-venomous species) was about a yard long and had killed the chicks by constriction. If snakes are in the habit of killing more than they can eat of the broods of wild birds, how enormous the toll they take!

## **CHAPTER XVIII**

### **INSECT WAYS**

"Some day ere I grow too old to think I trust to be able to throw away all pursuits, save natural history, and to die with my mind full of God's facts instead of men's lies."—CHARLES KINGSLEY.

August 2, 1909.

A lanky grasshopper with keeled back and pointed prow flew before me, settling on a leaf of blady grass, at once became fidgety and restless; flew to another blade and was similarly uneasy. It was bluff in colour with a narrow longitudinal streak of fawn, while the blades of grass whereon it rested momentarily were green. Each time it settled it adjusted itself to the blade of grass, became conscious of discomfort or apprehensive of danger, and sought another. Presently it settled on a yellowing leaf, the tints of which exactly corresponded with its own. The longitudinal streak became absorbed in the midrib of the blade, and the insect rested secure in its invisibility. The event demonstrated the purpose of its previous restlessness.

### **CARNIVOROUS WASPS**

October 6, 1909.

This morning the soda siphon (which had not been used for a couple of days) refused duty, owing to a plug of terra-cotta-coloured clay. Upon the spout being probed the gush of gas expelled a quantity of clay and thirty-five small spiders, representative of about six different species. The spout had been converted into a nursery and larder by a carnivorous wasp, for in addition to the moribund spiders stored for the sustenance of future grubs were several unhatched eggs. Such wasps are exceedingly common, some building "nests" as large as a tea-cup, the last compartment being fitted with an elegantly fashioned funnel, the purpose of which is not obvious. If these nests are broken up, after the hatching out, the grubs are found several in each compartment—feasting on the comatose spiders or caterpillars stored for their refreshment. Others of the species build a series of nests, detached or semi-detached, and shaped in resemblance to Greek amphora. Another species selects hollows in wood in which the eggs and insects are scaled. The larger wasps are not fearful of attacking so-called

tarantulas, one sting rendering them paralytic.

November 10 1909.

Blue has a decided fascination for the bloodsucking "March" flies. In the "blue" tub of the laundry hundreds are lured to suicide, while the other tubs alongside count no voluntary victims. Blue clothing attracts scores, whereas the effect of any other colour is normal upon the appreciative sense of the flies. I am not well assured whether an attack of the "humph"—"the humph which is black and blue"—is not also diagnosed by the contemplative insects and forthwith attended to. Certainly if one has the misfortune to have become associated for the time being with devils of cerulean hue, the company of the flies seems all the more persistent and provocative of vexation. Imagination reels before the consequences of a blue costume, "all's blue," and the thrice intensified attacks of the indolent but persevering blood-suckers.

November 16, 1909.

Found a flat hairy spider, about 1 in. in diameter of body, mottled pale brown and grey, brooding over a flat egg capsule almost of the same tints as itself. It was on the trunk of the jack fruit tree, and so closely resembles the egg-capsule produced by contiguous fungi as to be absolutely invisible unless the gaze happened to be concentrated on the spot. No doubt in my mind that the similitude of the spider, together with its egg-capsule, to the adjacent discs of fungi enabled it to escape detection. When disturbed the spider whisked into absolute invisibility. I inspected the trunk of the tree for several minutes before I found it, within six inches of its original resting-place, perfectly still, acting the part of an obscure vegetable.

## TARANTULAS AND TARANTISMUS

A few months ago I read in a text-book a dogmatic assertion to the effect that the so-called tarantulas were perfectly innocent of venom, and formidable only to the insects on which they prey. The great, good-tempered fellow, as uncouth in its hairiness as Nebuchadnezzar during his lamentable but salutary attack of boanthropy, is regarded with a good deal of suspicion, if not dread, though it pays for its lodging by reason of its large appetite, which latter statement seems self-contradictory. To satisfy its pangs of hunger it captures numbers of small insects which, willy nilly, tenant our homes.

In well-ordered establishments the aid of a tarantula or two in the suppression of insignificant undesirable creatures should, it might be argued, be unnecessary. Indeed, does not the presence of a fat, flat fellow lurking behind a rafter or in some gloomy corner, ever ready to seize cockroach or beetle, imply lack of order? Yet I have known homes where the tarantula was an honoured, if not a petted, lodger. When it had cleared one room it was coaxed on to a card and thereon transported to the next, and so it went the rounds. The children were wont to say that it knew its carriage, and would sidle on it whenever it was presented. To those of us who live in the bush, and who suffer fresh incursions almost every hour of the day, the help of a long-limbed, obese-bodied spider whose docility is beyond question, whose non-poisonous character is vouched for by high authorities, is by no means unwelcome.

But in spite of negative knowledge I have had my suspicions that the tarantula was not altogether wholesome in his anger, and now I have proof in support of my doubts. In a cool, dark cavity under a log in the bush were two huge representatives of the race. Each had its own compartment, a smooth, worn gallery, and they appear to have been on good terms until the moment of disturbance, for which each seemed to blame the other. They fought. It was a very brief, casual, and unentertaining encounter; but in less than half a minute one was dead, shrivelled and shrunk as though fire had passed over it. As no dismemberment or wound was apparent, I was fairly well satisfied that poison, very rapid in its effect, was at the service of the tarantula when its anger was aroused.

The next fact settled the point. Tom, the black boy, felt a nip on the arm as he put on a clean shirt an evening or two ago, and, reversing the sleeve, found a tarantula. Blood was oozing from two tiny incisions, the space between which was slightly raised. For two days Tom suffered pain in the arm, which became slightly swollen, headache, and great uneasiness.

Reading my text-book, I found that the original tarantula spider (from which the Australian species are misnamed) is so called from the town of Tarentum, in Italy. Among the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood it was a deeply-rooted belief that if any one was bitten by a tarantula he would be instantly inflicted with a singular disease known as tarantismus, which exhibited itself in two extremes, the one being a profound and silent melancholy and the other a continual convulsive movement of the

whole body. It was thought that this disease could only be cured by music, and that a certain tune was needful in each particular case. This was the legend.

It will be remembered that among the tales told by "a great traveller" to Pepys was one on the subject of the tarantula. He says that all the harvest long (about which time they are most busy) there are fiddlers go up and down the fields everywhere in expectation of being hired by those who are stung.

Of the disease there is no doubt, and that it could be cured by dancing stimulated by music is a natural conclusion. Each patient indulged in long and violent exercise, which produced profuse perspiration; he then fell exhausted, slept calmly, and awoke cured.

For the best part of a day Tom lay stretched on his face in the sun. Like David the psalmist, he refused to be comforted. A profound and silent melancholy subdued the wandering spirit which invariably manifests itself on Sunday. He just "sweated out" the day he usually devotes to hunting, and on Monday was himself again, save for a greyish blue tinge encircling each of the little wounds on his arm.

Though it is certain that the tarantula of Italy and the spider which robbed Tom of his Sunday are of different species, yet one is struck by the similarity of the toxic effects of the bite with that of the manifestations of the disease of tarantismus. The fact that after a good sweating—hot sand and unshaded sun are fairly active sudorifics—all untoward effects (physical and mental) passed away seems to suggest close intimacy between the symptoms of the poison of tarantula and the disease.

I do not apologise for thus gravely recording an incident of the bush which has neither humour nor romance to recommend it, because I think, friendly as I am to the "tarantula," the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth—should be told about him. Like the pet pussy-cat, "if you don't hurt him he'll do you no harm"; but put him in a tight corner and offer him violence and he will heroically defend himself and be very nasty about it. Having studied Tom's demeanour while under the effects of the poison, I am satisfied that if one desires a visit from "divinest melancholy" without any of the thrills of poetry, let him provoke an angry tarantula to assault him. All "vain, deluding joys" will pass away, and for twenty-four hours he will be as dull as a log, and as sweatful as a fat Southerner in a canefield.

The local name of the house-haunting "tarantula," though befitting and unique, imposes a singularly slight strain upon the resources of the alphabet. What combination of eight letters could be softer and more coaxing? And yet the startled Eves of Dunk Island were wont not only to specialise the spider but to shriek out affright at its unexpected presence by the exclamation "Oo-boo-boo!"

To prove that the "Oo-boo-boo" is not always victorious in the fights which take place in the dark, let me tell of a combat between a giant and a slim-waisted orange and black wasp. The latter buzzed about angrily, and, following up a feint, stung the "Oo-boo-boo," which became nerveless on the instant and fell. As it was all too heavy to fly away with, the wasp dragged it along the ground with much labour and incessant fuss. The terra-cotta larder was in a hollow log, and only after immense exertions and many failures was the limp carcass tugged to the spot. Then there was more buzzing than ever, for the wasp discovered that its prey was many sizes too large for the clay compartment prepared for it. No amount of trampling and shoving of the limp tarantula was of any avail. Several minutes elapsed before the obvious fact dawned upon the baffled insect. Then it abandoned its efforts at compression, and with many loads of moist clay moulded a special compartment in which the tarantula, still in a state of suspended animation, was snugly stowed.

Just one more. A wasp dropped on the bench a few inches from my nose—a tiny wasp with a rollicking gait. Closer inspection showed half a wasp only. It had been neatly severed at the delicate waist and on the thatch above was an Oo-boo-boo—a big Oo-boo-boo—and it seemed to me to be beaming with that broad, self-satisfied expression that the cat wears when it has eaten the canary.

## **CHAPTER XIX**

### **INTELLIGENT BIRDS**

#### **I. A BIRD SCOUT**

Among those birds of North Queensland jungles which have marked individualistic characters is that known as the koel cuckoo, which the blacks of some localities have named "calloo-calloo"—a mimetic term imitative of the most frequent notes of the bird. The male is lustrous black, the female mottled brown, and during most parts of the year both are extremely shy, though noisy enough in accustomed and quiet haunts. The principal note of the male is loud, ringing, and most pleasant, but its vocabulary is fairly extensive. Sometimes it yelps loud and long like a puppy complaining of a smart whipping, sometimes in the gloom of the evening it moans and wails pitifully like an evil thing tortured mentally and physically, sometimes it announces the detection of unwelcome intruders upon its haunts with a blending of purr and hiss.

When "calloo-calloo" comes to the islands, resident blacks look to the flowering of the bean-tree, for the events are coincident; while as they understand all its vocal inflections an important secret is often revealed to them by noisy exclamations. Living in flowerland among the tops of the trees, the bird is favourably located for the discovery of snakes, but being strong and lusty there is reason to believe that the presence of slim green and grey arboreal species is ignored. The important office that it holds in the domestic economy of the blacks is in the detection of carpet snakes, which to them form an ever welcome article of diet. Thus when "calloo-calloo" shouts "snake" in excited, chattering phrases they run off in the hope of being able to find the game, and generally one suffices to rid the bird of a deceitful and implacable enemy and to provide the camp with a substantial meal.

A few months ago a friend who owns a fruitful estate fronting one of the rivers of the mainland, who was not aware of the aptitude of the bird, was working with his blacks when "calloo-calloo" gave voice. "That's one!" exclaimed Dilly Boy, as he rushed into a thick patch of jungle; "he bin lookout snake!" The boss, concluding that Dilly Boy had merely invented a plausible excuse for a spell, smiled to himself when he came back in half an hour wearing an air of philosophic disappointment. "That fella snake along a tree; bin lookout; too much leep [leaf]. That calloo-calloo, him sing out proper. Him no more humbug!"

Huge carpet snakes frequently coil themselves so carefully among parasitic ferns and orchids in the trees that it is impossible to detect them from below. A couple of days after work was proceeding in the same locality when a snake, 12 feet long, was found and killed, but the fact was then not accepted as proof of the theory of the blacks. In the course of a few days the bird again proclaimed "snake," and all the blacks hastened to the spot to set about a systematic search. Applying the detective principle of isolation to various parts of the tree in which by general consent (corroborating the evidence of the bird) the snake was concluded to be, the blacks at last decided that the only possible place of concealment was a mass of elk's-horn fern encircling the trunk about 40 feet from the ground. One of them thereupon climbed the tree, and soon a carpet snake, 14 feet 6 inches long and 12 inches in girth, was writhing on the ground. It is well known that these snakes are frequently found in pairs, and no doubt the "calloo-calloo" had signified the presence of the mate on the occasion of the first alarm.

Other instances of the shrewdness of the bird and its care for the wellbeing of the order generally by detecting and proclaiming the presence of the universal enemy might be cited. One authority asserts that the bird and the snake are nearly always found together, and seems to imply that a friendship exists between them, for the bird is referred to as a "messmate" of the snake. "The bird," he writes, "flies over the snake with a 'clucky' chirp, and whenever the natives hear it in the dense scrubs they sneak in to discover the reptile, which is caught by being grabbed at the back of the head."

In heralding the flower of the bean-tree, and thus awakening thoughts of the beans, and in indicating snakes (both desirable and indeed essential articles of food), the "calloo-calloo" performs such valuable service that it is highly commended. Those who are familiar with the unreflective omnivory of the blacks and their indelicate appetites generally, may with difficulty credit the fact that in those districts in which the bird is recognised as a trustworthy guide it is honoured, and under no circumstances will they kill it. Of course, the blacks of North Queensland in native worth have not much art in the killing of birds, but in every case "calloo-calloo" is tabu.

One instance may be quoted. A great outcry was heard on the edge of the jungle, and upon investigation a grey falcon and a "calloo-calloo" were found in such preoccupied "holts" that both were captured. Here was an opportunity for a meal. The birds were parted, and the falcon given over to the custody of a gin for execution, while the "calloo-calloo," which was dazed, was petted and revived until it at last flew away with a glad call, the blacks assuring a witness, "B'mbi that fella look out snake belong me fella!"

## II. DO BIRDS PLAY?

A somewhat too rigorous critic of the antics of birds has expressed the opinion that playfulness is

unknown among them, that their occasional friskiness is not an exhibition of lightness of heart, but merely a martial exercise. The corroboree of native companions (*ANTIGONE AUSTRALASIANA*) may certainly be the practice of a defensive manoeuvre, though it has the appearance of a graceful dance. A partially disabled bird will pirouette on tiptoes and flap its wings wildly in the face of its foe, and it is reasonable to imagine that the great birds in community would keep themselves well trained in their particular methods of self-defence.

A flock of dotterels bobbing, bowing, skipping, and shouldering one another may be merely practising some evolution with serious intent, though it is far more natural to conclude that the frail little birds are in holiday humour. For all their exercises, they have but one resort in the presence of a superior foe or an alert single enemy, and that is in hasty and inconsiderate flight.

From my own experience may be drawn proof of the contention that birds do practise defensive and offensive tactics, and also that they have their moments of unreflecting play.

The cassowary (*CASUARIUS AUSTRALIS*) is a skilful fighter. It hits out with such force and precision that a weaponless man who stands before the bird when it is angry and vicious is ridiculously overmatched. The great bird is so quick that you do not realise that it has got its blow in first until you see the blood flow. It strikes with its middle toe, and that toe is a lance, keen if not bright. How does the regal bird of the jungles of North Queensland acquire this lightning-like stroke? The answer is, by constant and intelligent practice while young. A year or two ago I had frequent opportunities for observing a pair of young cassowaries patiently, yet playfully, performing martial exercises. They were about the size of a full grown bustard (say, 28 lb. weight); but if their bulk had been in ratio to their lightheartedness and playfulness, they would have loomed large as bullocks.

Their favourite spot was round and about a stout post about three feet high, the ground encircling which had been beaten down by constant use to polished smoothness. That the ruling passion of the young birds during their idle hours was determination to acquire skill and alertness there can be no doubt. Invariably the game began in a particular way. One of the pair striding round the post—apparently oblivious of its existence—would lurch against it as a man inspired with rum might treat a lamp-post intent on getting in his way. Leering at the post for a second, the bird would march round again to shoulder it roughly a second time. Then a queer look of simulated petulance and indignation would spread over its features, and, taking in its measure, the bird would lash out at the post with grim earnestness. A cyclonic attack ensued. With many feints and huddling up of its neck, and dodges, and ducks, and lateral movements of the head quick as thought, the post was chastised for its insolence and stolid stupidity. It seemed to be hit in several places at one and the same moment. Its features bore ever increasing scores and furrows, for it was used for hours every day as a punching-ball.

When one bird grew tired the other imitated most laughably the antics of its brother, first ignoring the presence of the post, and then, having lurched dreamily against it, assaulting it with unrestrained fury. Play and significant offensive tactics were undoubtedly blended in the pastimes of the cassowary.

Before the boldest of these birds grew to maturity it became such an expert boxer and so pugnacious and truculent that it was declared unfit to be at large, and as the State offered no secure asylum the death penalty was pronounced and duly carried into effect. By good luck I happened along before all the roast leg had been disposed of, and in spite of testimony to the contrary have pleasure in declaring that, notwithstanding the heroic training to which the youthful bird had subjected itself, the flesh was as tender and as gamey as that of a young plain turkey.

The other case in point may be briefly cited. While yet young there came into our possession a magpie (*GYMNORHINA TIBICEN*), to which as soon as it was fit for responsibilities full liberty was cheerfully granted. Breakfast, several tiffens, lunches, and afternoon snacks, and a full evening's dinner was provided. The dish of scraps was always available. At will the pet flew in and out of the kitchen, and if by chance food was not spread out at the accustomed place it protested loudly, and always effectively. Although a large quantity of food was self-earned, there was always a substantial meal in reserve.

The bird spent many wayward hours endeavouring to sing. No cultured relative was present to teach the notes of its kind, so that in default it learned the complete vocabulary of the domestic poultry, besides the more familiar calls and exclamations of its mistress, the varied barks of two dogs, the shrieks of many cockatoos, the gabble of scrub fowls.

The bird also began to play in semi-human style, performing marvellous acrobatic feats on the clothes-line, and lying on its back juggling with a twig as some "artists" do with a barrel in the circus. A white-eared flycatcher took up its abode near the house, and the magpie, after a decent lapse of time, admitted the stranger to its companionship. The wild, larderless bird, however, had little time to play. All its wit and energies were devoted to the serious business of life. It knew none of the games that the

magpie invented save one, and that was a kind of aerial "peep-bo" to which the brainier bird lured it by means of a prize.

The magpie found a moth, big of abdomen, fat, and brown, a tempting morsel to any insectivorous bird. Envious of the dainty, the wagtail fluttered and skipped about the magpie with cheerful chatter; but the fluttering moth, daintily held by the extremity of its body, was alternately presented and denied. They danced about a bush, the magpie tantalisingly holding the moth for acceptance and hopping off as the wagtail was about to snatch it. To the tame bird, fortified by knowledge that its meals were provided, it was all fun. To the hungry wild one the moth dangled temptingly before it and whipped disappointingly away was a meal almost to be fought for. It was a game equally sincere but of varied interest. The one assumed a whimsical air, chuckling in encouraging tones; the other took it all in earnest.

At last, unable to restrain an exclamation of delight, the magpie unwarily slackened its hold, and the moth fluttered off to be snapped up on the instant by the wild bird and gulped without ceremony. After this the game was frequently played, but the magpie had invariably to make it worth the while of the wagtail by offering a prize in the shape of some tit-bit.

Do not these cases support the theories that birds sharpen their faculties by the exercise of defensive and offensive tactics, and also that they do indulge in irresponsible play?

### **III. BIRDS WHICH HAVE REASONED**

If one begins to reflect upon the mental attributes of inferior animals, how aptly is evidence in support of a favourite theory presented? Are the actions of birds due to automatic impulses or hereditary traits? Is instinct merely "lapsed intelligence," or do birds actually reflect? Are they capable of applying the results of habit and observations in respect of one set of circumstances to other and different conditions? John Burroughs expresses the opinion that birds have perceptions, but not conceptions; that they recognise a certain fact, but are incapable of applying the fact to another case. I am almost convinced that some birds are capable of logical actions under circumstances absolutely new to them, and as a bright and shining affirmation quote "Baal Burra."

Beautiful in appearance, for it was what is generally known as a blue mountain parrot (red-collared lorikeet), its cleverness and affectionate nature were far more engaging than all the gay feathers. It came as the gift of a human derelict, who knew how to gain the confidence of dumb creatures, though society made of him an Ishmaelite. Vivacious, noisy, loving the nectar of flowers and the juices of fruits, Baal Burra was phenomenal in many winsome ways, but in a spirit of rare self denial I refrain from the pleasure of chronicling some of them in order to give place to instance and proof of the reasoning powers of an astonishingly high order.

Are apologies to be offered, too, for the homeliness of the example—its unrelieved domesticity? I must begin at the very beginning lest some necessary point be lost, and the beginning is porridge! A small portion was invariably left for Baal Burra. On the morning of this strange history a miniature lagoon, irregular in shape, of porridge and milk had settled in the very centre of the dry desert of plate. In response to customary summons to breakfast, Baal Burra skipped along the veranda. It was a daily incident, and no one took particular notice until unusual exclamations on the part of the bird denoted something extraordinary. By circumnavigating the plate and at the same time stretching its neck to the utmost it had contrived to convert the shapeless lagoon into a perfectly symmetrical pond just out of the reach of the stubby tongue. Hence the scolding. Three witnesses—each ardently on the side of the bird—watched intently. Decently mannered, it refused to clamber on to the edge of the plate, for it was ever averse from defilement of food. The tit-bit was just beyond avaricious exertions—just at that tantalising distance and just so irresistibly desirable as might be directly stimulative of original enterprise towards acquirement.

The chatter and abuse continued for a couple of minutes. Then the bird stood still while seeming to reflect, with wise head askew after the manner of other thinkers. Hurrying, to its playthings—which happened to be at the far end of the veranda—it selected a matchbox, dragged it clatteringly along, ranged it precisely close to the plate, mounted it, and from the extra elevation sipped the last drop with a chuckle of content. That the bird on deliberation conceived the scheme for over-reaching the coveted food I have not the slightest doubt.

Baal Burra bestowed frank friendship on a fat, good-humoured, yellow cat, fond of luxury and ease during the day, a "rake-helly" prowler at night. Into Sultan's fur Baal Burra would burrow, not without occasional result, if the upbraiding tongue was to be believed. Baal Burra would fill its lower mandible with water from a drinking dish and tip it neatly into the cat's ear, and scream with delight as Sultan



shook his sleepy head. To dip the tip of the cat's tail into the water and mimic the scrubbing of the floor was an everyday pastime. In addition to being an engineer and a comedian the bird was also a high tragedian. In the cool of the evening upon the going down of the sun the cat and the bird would set out together to the accustomed stage. Baal Burra burrowing through the long grass, painfully slow and cheeping plaintively, while Sultan stalked ahead mewing encouragingly. The tragedy, which was in one act, was repeated so often that each became confidently proficient, while the setting—free from the constraints of space—helped towards that degree of deception which is the highest form of art. Often we feared lest Sultan, carried away by enrapt enthusiasm, would unwittingly sustain his part even to the lamentable though natural DÉNOUEMENT. Baal Burra was, of course, the engaging and guileless victim, while Sultan, with triumphant realism, rehearsed a scene ruthlessly materialised elsewhere.

Climbing into a low-growing bush, Baal Burra would become preoccupied, innocently absorbed in an inspection of the young shoots and tender leaves which it seemed to caress. Assuming a ferocious mien, Sultan approached soliloquising, no doubt, "Ah, here is another silly wild-fowl! Come, let me indulge my bloodthirstiness!" His eyes glittered as he crouched, his tail thickened and swayed, his ears were depressed, his whiskers and nose twitched, his jaws worked, his claws were unsheathed and sheathed spasmodically as he crept stealthily towards the apparently unconscious bird. After two or three preliminary feints for the perfect adjustment of his faculties and pose, he bounded into the air with distended talons well over his screeching playmate. The scene would be rehearsed several times before Sultan, tired of mummery and eager for actualities, slunk yawling into the bush, while Baal Burra, whimpering in the dusk, waddled home to be caged.

Towards the further justification of the argument two cases in which scrub fowl (MEGAPODIUS DUPERREYI TUMULUS) are concerned may be cited. Being a previously recorded fact, the first is excusable only on the grounds of its applicability to a debatable point.

1. On a remote spot in a very rough and rugged locality, hemmed in by immense blocks of granite, is a large incubating mound. Save at one point it is encompassed by rocks, but the opening does not grant facilities for the accumulation of vegetable debris, yet the mound continually increases in dimensions. At first glance there seems no means by which such a large heap could have been accumulated for the birds do not carry their materials, but kick and scratch them to the site. A hasty survey shows that the birds have taken advantage of the junction of two impending rocks which form a fortuitous shoot down which to send the rubbish with the least possible exertion on their part. The shoot is always in use, for the efficacy of the mound depends upon the heat generated by actually decaying vegetation. Did the birds think out this simple labour-saving method before deciding on the site for the mound, or was it a gracious afterthought—one of those automatic impulses by which Nature confronts difficulties?

2. As I wandered on the hilltops far from home I was astonished when Tom, the cutest of black boys, dropped on his knees to investigate a crevice between two horizontal slabs of granite filled with dead leaves and loam. The spot, bare of grass, was about twenty yards from the edge of a fairly thick, low-growing scrub where scrub fowls are plentiful. I was inclined to smile when he said, "Might be hegg belonga scrub hen sit down!" He scooped out some of the rubbish—the crevice was so narrow that it barely admitted his arm—and finally dug a hole with his fingers fully fourteen inches deep, revealing an egg, pink with freshness.

A more unlikely spot for a scrub fowl to lay, could hardly be imagined. There was no mound, the crevice being merely filled flush, and the vegetable rubbish packed between the flat rocks did not appear to be sufficient in quantity to generate in its decay the temperature necessary to bring about incubation. Yet the egg was warm, and upon reflecting that the sun's rays keep the granite slabs in the locality hot during the day, so hot, indeed, that there is no sitting down on them with comfort, I perceived that here was evidence on which to maintain an argument of rare sagacity on the part of the bird, and that the hypothesis might be thus stated: This cool-footed cultivator of the jungle floor had during the casual rambling on sunlit spaces become conscious of the heat of the rocks. Being impressed, she surveyed the locality, and of her deliberate purpose selected a spot for the completion of her next ensuing maternal duties which, while it scandalised the traditions of her tribe, presented unrealised facilities.

This was a natural incubator, certainly, but superior to those in common use in that the solar heat stored by the stone during the day rendered superfluous any large accumulation of vegetable matter. Surely it is but a short and easy step from the perception of solar heat to the conception that such heat would assist in the incubation of eggs. None but a mound-builder who, of course, must have general knowledge on the subject of temperatures and the maintenance thereof, could conceive that these heated rocks would obviate the labour of raking together a mass of rubbish. Further, her inherent perception that moist heat due to the fermentation was vital towards the fulfilment of her hopes of posterity would avert the blunder of trusting to the dry rocks alone. The hot rocks and a small quantity of decaying leaves stood in her case for a huge mound, innocent of extraneous heat. Having, therefore

more time to scratch for her living, she would naturally become a more robust bird, more attractive to the males, and the better qualified to transmit her exceptional mental qualities to her more numerous offspring.

These are the bare facts. Let those who believe that birds are capable of taking the step from the fact to the principle continue the trains of thought into which they inevitably lead. Will this particular scrub fowl by force of her accidental discovery start a revolutionary change in the life-history of mound-builders generally? Or will the bird—? But there are the facts to conjure or to play with.

## CHAPTER XX

### SWIFTS AND EAGLES

#### I. A RARE NEST

Among the resident birds one of the most interesting from an ornithological standpoint is that known as the grey-rumped swiftlet (*COLLOCALIA FRANCICA*), referred to by Macgillivray as "a swallow which Mr. Gould informs me is also an Indian species." That ardent naturalist is, therefore, entitled to the credit of discovery. Sixty-one years had passed since Macgillivray's visit, during which no knowledge of the life-history of the bird which spends most of its time hawking for insects in sunshine and shower had been revealed, when a fragment of a nest adhering to the roof of a cave on one of the highest points of the Island attracted attention. Submitted to an expert (Mr. A. J. Campbell, of Melbourne, Victoria), the identity of the builder was guessed. Subsequently I had the satisfaction of finding a colony close to the water's edge, on the weather side, where the birds had frequently been seen darting among blocks of granite almost obscured by jungle.

No nests were found in crevices deemed to be favourable spots, though the predilection of the genus for gloom was appreciated, but upon the exploration of a confined cave the excited flutterings of invisible birds betrayed a hitherto well-kept secret. When my eyes became accustomed to the dimness I saw that the roof of the cave (which is fairly smooth and regular with an inclination of about thirty degrees) was studded with nests. Fifty-three were placed irregularly about the middle of the roof, some in pairs, none on the walls. Some were not quite finished; twenty contained a single white egg each; none contained young. All were adherent to the stone by a semi-transparent white substance resembling isinglass, with which also the fine grass, moss, and fibre composing the nests were consolidated. The vegetable material of the first fragmentary nest (found September 17, 1908) was quite green and the gluten moist and sticky. Those now described (two months later) were dry and tough, the dimensions being 2 to 2½ inches across and about ¾ inch deep. The cave is only about 30 feet above high-water mark and the entrance the birds favour is, strange to say, averse from the sea and much obscured by leafage.

After the first fright the birds became quiet and confident. A young one flew into my half-closed hand, and I detained it for a while and it never struggled. Another tried to snoodle into the shirt-pocket of the black boy who accompanied me. Several brushed against our faces. Clouds partially obscured the sun and what with the screen of foliage and the prevailing gloom of the cave we could not always distinguish the nests. When the sun shone brightly all were plainly discernible, those with the single pearly egg being quaintly pretty. As they flitted in and out of the cave, the birds were as noiseless as butterflies save when they wheeled to avoid each other. Those which were brooding, as they flitted over the nests or clung to the edges, uttering a peculiar note hard to vocalise. To my ears it sounded as a blending of cheeping, clinking, and chattering, yet metallic, and not very unlike the hasty winding up of a clock.

One bird flew to her nest a foot or so from my face and clung to it. To test its timidity or otherwise I approached my face to within two inches, but she continued to scrutinise me even at such close quarters with charming assurance. Then I gently placed my hand over her. She struggled, but not wildly, for a few seconds and then remained passive with bright eyes glinting in the gloom. She was a dusky little creature, the primaries, the back of the head, neck, the shoulders, and tail being black, but when the wings were extended the grey fluff of the base of the tail was conspicuous. After a few minutes I put her back on the nest, and she clung, to it having no shyness or fear. I noticed that the beak was very short, the gape very large, the legs dwarfed, and the toes slender.

We remained in the cave for about half an hour, during which time the birds came and went indifferent to our presence. As far as I am aware members of the species never rest save in their headquarters, clinging to the roof or the nests and never utter a sound except the reassuring, prattle upon alighting on the edge of the nest. It was interesting to note that while many young birds were fluttering about in the cave none occupied a nest, and eggs were in successive stages of incubation, as proved by appearance and test.

The fact that the nests of these swifts are cemented with coagulated saliva establishes analogy with that other member of the family which builds in the caves of frowning precipices near the sea, making edible nests greatly appreciated by Chinese gourmands, some of whom maintain the fantastic theory that the swift catches quantities of a small, delicately flavoured fish which it exposes on rocks until desiccated, to be afterwards compounded into nests. The ancients were wont to believe in the existence of hostile mutuality between the swifts and the *bêche-de-mer*, though they have little in common in respect of appearance, attributes, and habits. If memory serves, one of the genera had the specific title of *HIRUNDO*, founded on the faith that the swift, by flying over the sea-slug exposed by receding tide, and vexing it by jeers, caused it to exude glutinous threads which the swift seized and bore away to its cave to be consolidated and moulded into a nest. To the fable was appended a retributive moral, viz., that the *bêche-de-mer* occasionally revenged itself by expelling such a complicated mass of gluten that it became a net for the capture of the swift, which was slowly assimilated by its enemy. The Chinese, it may be said, with but slight perversion of fact, show equal partiality for the respective emblems of speed and sloth.

Since the dates mentioned it has been ascertained by personal observation that the breeding season of the swiftlet extends over four months, during which probably four young are reared, each clutch being single. The nests do not provide accommodation for more than one chick, which before flight is obviously top large for its birthplace. Looking down into the cave, the eggs well advanced towards incubation seem to have a slight phosphorescent glow. The earliest date so far recorded of the discovery of a newly laid egg is October 14th, but there is reason to believe that the breeding season begins at least a month earlier. On January 10th this year (1910) half the nests in the cave originally described contained eggs, in most of which (judging by opacity) incubation was far advanced, while in several were young birds, some newly hatched, others apparently ready to depart from their gloomy, foul-smelling quarters. These latter clung so determinedly to their nests with needle-like toes that the force necessary to remove them would certainly have caused injury.

It may be remarked that the breeding season of the nutmeg pigeon is also protracted over a third of the year—from September to the end of January, two or three single successive clutches being reared. The pigeon is a visitor, the swift a resident.

## II. THREE FISHERS

At the outset it is almost incumbent to announce that this is not a fish story. It is not even a story, though fish play a secondary part in it. Therefore it should not make shipwreck of the faith of those who smile and sniff whensoever a fish or a snake is informally introduced in print. The imagination of some observers of the wonders of natural history paints incidents so extravagantly that their illustrative value is depreciated if not entirely distorted.

As I would wish to establish a sort of general confidence with any chance reader of these lines who, like myself, finds no need for exaggeration in the chronicling of observations, being well aware that Nature with the ease of consummate art outwits the wisest and laughs at the blotches of the boldest impressionist, it seems but common politeness to explain that though the Island may be romantic, the art of romancing is alien from its shores, albeit (as some one has hinted) that in imagination reverently applied lies the higher truth.

The distance from the mainland is not so great as to deprive the Island of generally distinctly Australian characteristics. It was, no doubt, in the remote past, merely a steep and high range of hills separated from other hills and mountains by plains and lagoons. Delicate land shells, salt-hating frogs, and subtle snakes are among the living testifiers to past connection with Australia, but while all the animals and nearly all the birds native to the island are common on the mainland, several mainland types are conspicuously absent.

If, therefore, the birds and mammals seem in these literal chronicles to have little ways of their own, may they not owe obedience to true and abiding circumstances—a kind of unavoidable fate—due to isolation? It would indeed be singular if an island so long separated from Australia as to possess no marsupial did not impress certain idiosyncrasies upon its fauna and flora. It would be absurd to contend that as a rule, the untamed creatures carry any marks of distinction, but I have had the

opportunity of studying facts of which I have never been fortunate to have confirmation either by reading or by "swapping lies" with other students of Nature.

Occasionally when bewilderment has come I call to mind what Mrs. Jarley said of her waxwork, and let the case pass: "I won't go so far as to say that, as it is, I've seen waxwork quite like life but I've certainly seen some life that was exactly like waxwork." When I see a crab not easily distinguishable from a piece of sponge and a piece of sponge far more like a crab generally than the crab, that unconsciously mimics it, and possessing just as much apparent animation, I am content to be tricked in many other ways by the good mother of us all.

Having ventured so far by way of preface, it is quite possible that the reader may have concluded that something exceptionally marvellous is to follow. Disappointment was inevitable from the first. The relation of some of the quaint distinguishing traits of the Island fauna must be left until the historian imagines that he has established a reputation for subduing, rather than heightening, the tone of his facts. This introduction has not a particular but a wide bearing.

Chief among the birds of prey are the osprey, the white-headed sea-eagle, and the white-bellied sea-eagle. The great wedge-tailed eagle (eagle-hawk) is a rare visitor, and is not a fisher. The others are resident and are industrious practisers of the art which, according to their interpretation, is anything but gentle. As they indulge in it, the sport is so rough and boisterous and clumsy that one wonders that so many fish should be caught. Each soars over the sea in circles at a height of about 60 feet or 80 feet, and when fish are seen flies down and, plunging into the water, seizes its prey with its talons. Unless the bird is watched closely its attitudes while preparing for the downward cast and during the descent are misunderstood. "And like a thunderbolt he falls" is quite, according to local observations, an erroneous description of the feat performed by the fishing eagle. Take as an example of the others the actions of the noble bird the white-headed sea-eagle. As it circles over the blue water its gaze is fixed and intent. Flight seems automatic—steady, fairly swift, rippleless. Immediately a fish is sighted, attitudes and poses become comparatively strained and awkward. Flight is checked by the enormous brake-power of outspread tail, and backward beating wing. The eagle poises over the spot, stretches out its legs, and extends its talons to the utmost; flies down in a series of zig-zags, and with the facial expression of the dirty boy undergoing the torture of face-washing, plunges breast first with outstretched wings with a mighty splash into the water. Disappearing for four or five seconds, it finds it no easy task to rise with a two-pound mullet.

Splendid as the feat undoubtedly is, it does not coincide with the description usually given. Have we not often been told of the headlong, lightning like drop that almost baffles eyesight? The circumstance that baffles is that fish are so unobservant or so slow that they do not always, in place of sometimes, escape. For the excuse of the fish it must be acknowledged that very few members of the tribe are fitted with eyes for star-gazing. The eagle captures a dinner, not by the exercise of any very remarkable fleetness or adaptiveness or passion for fishing, but because of certain physical limitations on the part of the fish.

"As is the osprey to the fish, who takes it  
By sovereignty of nature."

The subserviency of fish to the osprey was noted by the ancients, who attributed a fabulous power of fascination to the bird so that as it flew over the ponds the fish "turned their glistening bellies up" that it might take liberal choice. Certainly some limitation on the part of the fish seems to operate in favour of the osprey, otherwise the clumsy fisher would oft go hungry.

It goes against the grain to speak slightly of the knightly, white-headed sea-eagle—a friend and almost a companion; but as any one may see that it fishes not for the sport but for the pot, and that the plunge into the water is a shock that is dreaded, no injustice is done. Some birds—and they the most graceful—seem to fish for sport alone. These three fishers fish because, like Kipling's kangaroo, they have to—only the kangaroo hopped.

Now, the white-headed sea-eagle, which seems, and with good reason, to be proud of its ruddy back, appears to have no enemy of its kind. While the osprey and the white-bellied sea-eagle fall out and chide and fight, it looks down from some superior height and placidly watches the fish trap, for though knightly it is not above accepting tribute, for it likes fish though it hates fishing.

The great osprey seldom crosses the bay without a challenge from its stealthy foe, the white-belly. The voices of both are alike in their dissonance though different in quality and tone, and the smaller bird is invariably the aggressor. This is how they fight, or rather engage in a vulgar brawl which has in it a smack of tragedy. The osprey, with steady beat of outstretched wing, flies "squaking" from its agile

enemy, who endeavours to alight on the osprey's back. Just as white-belly stretches its talons for a grip among the osprey's feathers, the osprey turns—and turns without a tremor in its long, sweeping wings—to shake hands with white-belly. For a moment the huge bird rests on its back, silhouetted against the luminous sky, to interlock talons with its nimble foe. But white-belly is fully alive to the risk of getting "into hoults" with so heavy a weight, for on the instant it swoops up with a harsh cry of rage or disappointment. With but a single flap and no quiver of wing the osprey rights itself and sails away (a methodic, unflurried flight) with fleeter white-belly in pursuit, which when within striking distance swoops again, to be faced by the grim, outstretched talons of the osprey, who has turned in flight with machine-like precision. So swift and sudden is the discreet upward swoop of the white-belly that it almost appears to be a rebound after contact with the bigger bird. So the scrimmage, or, to be exact, screamage, proceeds, for each party to it tells the whole Island of its valour, and business stands still as the series of most graceful, yet savage, aerial evolutions is repeated until the rivals are blotted out by distance.

Once I saw a bunch of feathers fly from the osprey's back. The aerial capsize had not been timed with accustomed accuracy. Weight told, and it speedily shook itself free; but I am waiting for the day when, in mid-air, the osprey and the white-bellied sea-eagle shall clasp hands. It will be an exciting moment for the sea-eagle. The osprey is a cuter as well as a heavier bird, and, in the phrase of the blacks, "That fella carn let go!"

When the osprey comes skirting the hollows of the hills for cockatoos, its hunger will be unsatisfied until, by elaborate and disdainful manoeuvres, the cockatoos are induced to take flight. Perched on the top of a tree, they may jeer in safety as long as they like; but let the flock fly into the open and the osprey will be surprised if it does not get one, and that which is singled out it follows "like a grim murderer still steady to his purpose." Now is the time for this, greatest of the three fishers, to, wax fat and become pompous, for its diet is to be varied with nutmeg pigeons, and the pigeons have come in their thousands and tens of thousands, and if the eaglets do lack and suffer hunger, it will be on account of the laziness of their parents.

For all its laborious fishing, the red-backed sea-eagle is sometimes deprived of its spoil by a bird much inferior in size and weight and which has not the slightest pretensions to the art. An eagle had captured a "mainsail" fish (banded dory) which loomed black against its snowy breast as in strenuous spirals it sought to gain sufficient height whence to soar over the spur of the hill to its eyrie. The fish, though not weighty, was awkward to carry, and the presence of the boat rather baffled the bird, which was shadowed in envious though discreet flight by a white-bellied eagle. Low over the water, close to the fringe of jungle the eagle flew, when a grey falcon dashed out, snatched from its talons the wriggling fish, and with one swoop disappeared under a yellow-flowered hibiscus bush overhanging the tideway. The falcon is no match for the eagle; but, most subtle of birds of prey, it had watched the perplexity of its lord and master, and with audacious courage taken advantage of a moment's embarrassment.

## CHAPTER XXI

### SOCIALISTIC BIRDS

Repeated observations and diary records have established August 12th as the beginning of the local "bird season." About that date two of the most notable birds arrive from the North—the nutmeg pigeon (*MYRISTICIVORA SPILORRHOA*) and the metallic starling (*CALORNIS METALLICA*). Having spent five months in Papua, Java, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula, the former revisit the islands for incubating purposes.

Where the metallic starlings spend their retreat I know not; but they return with impetuous haste, as if absence had been disciplinary and not for pleasure. They assemble in glittering throngs, shrilly discussing their plans for the season, without reserve debating important concerns of house and home. Shall the tall Moreton Bay ash in the forest be again occupied and the shabby remnants of old nests designedly destroyed before departure last season be renovated, or shall a new settlement be established and the massive milkwood-tree overtopping the jungle be selected as a capital site? Discussion is acidulous and constant. For days the majority of the burnished citizens do little else but talk, while the industrious few begin, some to build nests on the sites of the old, others to lay hasty foundations among the leaves of the milkwood. Each faction wishes to carry its point, for ever and anon

both rejoin the main body and proclaim and testify. Then all adjourn to the disputed sites successively and join in frantic commotion until some sage makes an entirely original proposition, and off they all go on a flight of inspection and abruptly end all differences of opinion by favouring a tree which appears to have no distinctive merits.

These delightfully engaging birds have been known to nest in a particular tree for a quarter of a century, and again they may select a different site every year. Though I have no evidence in confirmation of the theory, I am inclined to think that arboreal snakes are influential in causing changes. Although the domed nests must be difficult for even a snake to enter so large a congregation of noisy birds would inevitably attract these slim nocturnal marauders.

Moreover, a case may be cited in support of the theory. In a Moreton Bay ash (*EUCALYPTUS TESSELERIS*), not far from this spot, there nested a pair of white-headed sea eagles, a pair of cockatoos, and a colony of metallic starlings, four or five hundred strong. The memory of man knows not the first settlement of this amicable community, which remained until during temporary absence the blacks were suborned to climb the tree to secure the eggs of the eagle. They also helped themselves to a few of the callow starlings. The sea eagles and cockatoos discarded the tree forthwith, and the starlings in a couple of years. And why? Because, in my opinion at least, the eagles had policed the tree, killing offhand any green or grey snake which had the stupidity to sneak among the nests. When the policemen went to another beat the snakes took to frightening the unprotected birds and to the burgling of their nest. This incident caused a revision of the protective laws. They are much more explicit, and the pains and penalties for the violation of them are now absolutely unholy in their truculence.

During the 1909 season a serious diminution was noted in the number of metallic starlings and nutmeg pigeons. In the case of the former I am at a loss to account for the cause of the comparatively few visitors—always highly esteemed and admired and preserved from interference—except on the theory of the outbreak of an epidemic or in the possible fact that they are falling victims to the feminine passion for fine feathers.

The Grouse Disease Commission has found a recognised period in the fluctuations of the number of those game birds. During a cycle of sixty years there recur the good year, the very good year, the record year, the bad disease year, the recovery, the average, and the good average. The round is said to be almost invariable. So may it be with the metallic starling.

With the nutmeg pigeons the case is different. Here we have direct evidence of the desolating effects of the interference of man. Congregating in large numbers on the islands to nest, and only to nest, these birds offer quite charming sport to men with guns. They are the easiest of all shooting. Big and white, and given to grouping themselves in cloudy patches on favourable trees, I have heard of a black boy, with a rusty gun, powder, and small stones for shot, filling a flour-sack full during an afternoon. It is, therefore, not strange that men shoot 250 in an hour or so. The strange thing is that "men" boast of such butchery. On the very island where this bag of 250 was obtained a little black boy, twelve years old, killed four pigeons with a single sweep of a long stick. He did not boast—to his father and mother and himself the four birds represented supper; but in the case of the sportsman it might be asked, how many of the butchered doves went into the all-redeeming pot?

These pigeons are one of the natural features of the coast of North Queensland, in the conservation of which the State and the Commonwealth are concerned. It may be contended that the extermination of a species represented by such multitudes is impossible. But while the history of the passenger pigeon of North America is extant such argument carries no weight.

When the birds are, so to speak, shot on their nests or sitting in their crowded dormitories a whole season's natural increase may be discounted by an afternoon's wretched "sport." If nutmeg pigeons are to be preserved as one of the attractions and natural features of the coast of North Queensland, extensive sanctuaries must be established. Strict prohibition might be enforced for a period of, say, five years to enable the colonies to regain their population, and thenceforward they might—if the shooting of sitting birds is still deemed to be "sport"—be allowed a "jubilee" every second year.

If the unrestricted molestation is permitted, the day is not far distant when indignation will arise and lovers of Nature will ask passionately why a unique feature of the coast was allowed to be obliterated in blood. True sportsmen would unanimously rejoice in the permanent preservation of birds elegant and swift of flight, not very good to eat, and which visit us at a time when inhospitality is a wanton crime.

For this indulgence of my feelings I have, I am aware, laid myself open to censure. It is foreign to, indeed, quite out of place in, a book which professes neither message nor mission. Yet, mayhap, some kindred spirit having influence and judicious eloquence at command may read these lines. Then the birds need not much longer fear the naughty local man. Long may the dulcet islands within the Barrier

Reef burst morn and eve into snowy bloom as the pigeons go and come!

So having soothed my fretfulness by irresponsible scolding, consigned countless white pigeons to inviolable sanctuary and thereby confirmed to perpetuity the charter under which a bustling interchange of seeds and the kernels of fruit-trees between isle and mainland is maintained, I am at liberty to chronicle certain every-day incidents in the establishment of a colony by those other companionable birds, metallic starlings, also under engagement to Nature as distributing agents.

Whereas the bulk of the traffic of the pigeons is with the mainland, that of the metallic starlings is purely local, though, perhaps, just as important. The insular communities do not venture for their merchandise across the water, and those of the mainland have no dealings with the isles.

Reference has been made to the disappointment occasioned by the violation of a colony at the instance of a semi-professional egg-snatcher, and of the subsequent abandonment of the tree which had been used as a building site by the birds as far back as the memory of the blacks went.

The tree was in the midst of the forest, and season after season upon the return of the members of the colony they assembled in the vicinity, but never again built in the neighbourhood. Last season, however, the pent-up exasperation of years found a certain sort of relief, for a new colony was started in a Moreton Bay ash-tree not a hundred yards away and in full view from my veranda. There are five other colonies of these socialistic, disputative birds on this Island; but they happen to be in out-of-the-way spots, where continuous detailed observation of their habits and customs would be impossible. Hence, when I saw the noisy throng gather together discussing the imperious business of nesting, I watched with eager and hopeful anticipation. About the third day from the first demonstration in favour of the particular tree building operations began, and thenceforward daily notes were taken of the doings of the colony. Great pleasure was found in being the spectator of the establishment of a new colony.

In 1908 the earliest arrivals appeared, on August 2nd—eight days before the herald of the nutmeg pigeons. The colony the history of which it is proposed to relate was no doubt an offshoot of the first brood of those which had arrived on that date. Circumstances exist which persuade me that the shining *Calornis* rear two broods during the season. Nutmeg pigeons rear as many as three young successively.

Just about the time the site of the new colony was selected young birds were fairly numerous, so that it seems safe to assume that, expelled from parental nests, they determined to set up an establishment on their own account forthwith. In their industry they seemed to display the defects and advantages of the quality of youth—enthusiasm, impulsiveness and vigour, inexperience, haste, and irrelevance.

Let the diary notes tell of the enterprise as scrutinised through the telescope:

Nov. 15. Shining *Calornis* (all young birds, mottled grey and black with green sheen on back) busy surveying tree (Moreton Bay ash) on plateau to the north.

16. Birds seem inclined to build.

17. Notice that the birds are in pairs; no old, full-plumaged among them.

18. First beginning of nests. About thirty birds. All seem very excited and full of business.

20. Several nests well forward. Other parts of the tree now being occupied.

22. Seventeen nests; some nearly complete

23. Eighteen nests; several apparently complete, save for the overhanging entrance. Many quarrels and squabbles in the family, for the nests are in groups and in close quarters.

27. Three new nests, or rather foundations thereof.

Dec. 1. Now 25 nests. Those which appeared to be near completion are still being added to. Many have entrances, so that one of the pair works from inside, placing and threading the materials. Sometimes one sits for a long time with the head protruding, as if testing the comfort of the nest. Squabbles are frequent. The backs of some betray a lovely green sheen in the sunshine, with rich purple at the base of the neck.

4. After two days' heavy rain the birds are as busy as ever. Many flirtations. The great want of the colony seems to be insect powder.

5. The tree now is in full flower. I watch the birds making feints at bees and butterflies visiting the blooms but they do not seem to catch insects. Fruit, seeds, and nuts form their diet. The nests, which

are composed of tendrils and pliant twigs elaborately intertwined, are domed, and in size somewhat less than a football.

6. Birds very busy. Most of the nests appear to be fit for habitation. Work is suspended at sundown. They do not roost in the tree. Have not detected their resting-place; but it seems to be some distance in the jungle.

7. Sunset (6.45). The birds disappeared from vicinity of the tree almost immediately, though twilight lasted half an hour.

8. Three minutes before sunrise (5.48) birds' voices heard as they approached trees. They were in three or four companies in a bloodwood-tree, where they flirted and fussed and made violent love; then in a trailing mob flew noisily and began work in haste and excitement, one eager bird manipulating a long, slender, partly dry leaf, industriously trying to fit it in various spots. Finding its due place, the limp leaf was thrust in among the compact twigs and tendrils. The leaf was seized close to the stalk, which was deftly inserted, then it was gripped a trifle farther back and pushed and re-gripped, the process being repeated rapidly until nothing but the tip remained visible.

9. Most of the exterior of the nests is now finished. Work continues briskly on the lining, though the material used therefor does not seem to be different from the bulk. When one of a pair has disappeared inside of the tunnel-like entrance, if the other arrives it clings to the threshold until its mate emerges, and then briskly enters. This evening work was suspended at 6.40—cloudy. A few butterflies still flitting about the flowers.

10. Another new nest. As with the others, a few tendrils are laid across dependent sprays of leaves, engaging and intertwining them. These represent the foundations upon which the superstructure is partly built, but both sides and dome are made to entangle other frail branches and leaves, so that the nest is supported throughout its various parts. A considerable quantity of material is lost from each nest, owing to the difficulty of contriving to make initial tendrils engage the leaves and pedicels. The space for the circular entrance is sketched out at quite an early stage. In this colony with few exceptions it faces the south, and is so overhung by a veranda as to be undiscernible except from immediately below.

The situation of the nests on the extremities of the outermost branches, parts of some being lower than the leaves to which they are attached, is no doubt an illustration of acquired sagacity. Such impetuous birds living in large communities, and thus compounding a savour calculated to attract arboreal snakes, would in the course of nature take precautions. The nests in position and design represent the crystallisation of the wit of the bird in antagonism to the wile of the snake.

In the morning, fuss, fierce purpose, and hurry are shown. As the afternoon wears on, less and less industry prevails. Work is suspended at 6.45 p.m. when the last of the crowd hastily departed. Before sundown all are spent and weary. Some of the birds begin to darken on the sides of the upper part of the breasts. The purple sheen on the back of the neck is more brilliant. There is a glowing patch, too, at the base of the tail, though the other parts of the back are dingy with a green tinge in reflected light. The nuptial costume is fast becoming, more attractive.

14. Nests were not deserted until 7.30 p.m. The last half-dozen birds, alert and anxious, dashed off upon a common impulse noisily. They roost in the jungle adjoining.

15. A more sedate condition prevails in the demeanour of the birds, due peradventure to domestic responsibilities. Fewer are about, and they spend leisure moments on the top of or near the nests, while others pop in and out. Are these signs of the beginning of egg-laying?

17. Egg-laying undoubtedly begins, though improvements to nests, which seemed to be finished over a week ago, occupy odd moments.

20. Two past days have been dull and showery. Quietude reigns; a tendril or twig is occasionally threaded or poked into the nests. The male muses on the top of the nest, or closely adjacent thereto. The female pops in and out of apparently cosy quarters. Circumstances point to the conclusion that most of the nests contain eggs.

21. Good deal of rain, which bothers the birds. They play about excitedly in one company. Towards evening very few are about. The nests are deserted, though five or six birds in one mob are in a neighbouring tree.

22. Heavy rain and never-ceasing squalls. No sign of the birds, though a few notes of passers-by were heard. Finer evening.



23. Fine and calm. Nests deserted all morning. Late afternoon many returned, though not, I think, the full company. They seem to be inspecting and repairing the nests.

24. Did not see any of the birds.

25. At 3 p.m. several appeared—some entering the nests two at a time, though without customary fuss and excitement.

26. Full company in possession throughout the day. Several (which are assumed to be males) are better plumaged, the breasts being streaked with black, and the backs much more lustrous.

27. Serious business of incubation deprives the colony of customary gaiety and impulsiveness. While the female sits close, the male perches on top of the nest, occasionally beguiling the time by inconsequent repairs and petty squabbles with next door neighbours. How brilliant are their eyes, especially when they sparkle with spite—flame red and flashing.

28. I am astonished at the sobering effect of pending domestic troubles. Is it that the sitting hen is responsible for the great part of the gaiety and impulsiveness, as well as for the quibbles and brawls that often disturb the happy family? Whatever the cause, whoever responsible, order and tranquillity reign, each expectant father spending hours demurely on his respective nest, a model of staid deportment, though ever ready to resent intrusion on the part of a friend. Portending cares sit heavily on the young and inexperienced colonists.

29. All quiet and industrious. Fancy that the chicks are well forward—rather to my surprise.

Jan. 2. Very rainy all morning. Did not see any of the birds until the weather cleared. Though the nests looked sodden, the owners were cheerful and noisy—a tone of pleasure because of the return of the sunshine being, as I fancied, noticeable.

3. Busy all day. At 6.45 a.m. all gathered in a company on the topmost branches, and after two or three preliminary flights to the accompaniment of much commotion and chattering, dashed into the jungle with a unanimous and most acidulous shriek. One of the nests is hanging in shreds.

4. This morning the birds were engaged for some little time pulling their nests to pieces, strands of tendrils being jerked out and cast away with a contemptuous fling. Most are still fairly rotund and compact, and appear to be weather-proof, while others are already loopholed and ragged. The duty was performed in a most haphazard, halfhearted way. Beneath the tree are many varieties of seeds and nuts, and portions of fruits, but no egg-shells. After the members of the colony had swooped and swept about as if practising military manoeuvres, sometimes silently but generally to the accompaniment of much shrieking in unison, the tree was entirely deserted for the rest of the afternoon.

5. Before 7 a.m. dismantlement of nests was resumed with enthusiasm and deliberate purpose, shreds being twitched out and cast down. A good deal of chatter. There are a few completely feathered youngsters, the breasts being almost pure white, but not more than one to each nest. Most of the nests have no output, in which case the responsible birds have no assistance in the work of destruction. Late in the afternoon all were very busy again, repairs to nests engaging attention. The birds are so unsettled that I am puzzled. Occasionally one would sit in a semi-dismantled nest snoodling down cosily and peering out with shining eyes, the glow and glitter of which from the darksome entrance have a jewel-like effect. While the one sat close and still the mate would repair the exterior, and in a flash of electric suddenness all would dart out of the tree to swoop about as if to perfect themselves in an exercise designed towards the evasion of the dash of a hawk.

6. Early again the wrecking of the nests began; but was soon abandoned, the colony being deserted for the last part of the day.

7. Demolition very casual. The birds are averse from working in the rain, and, to-day several showers have occurred.

8. Notwithstanding light rain the duty of demolition began at 6.30 a.m. As much energy and purpose are expended withdrawing the strands by a series of tugs as were displayed in the building. Occasionally the whole branch from which the nest is pendant sways with the work of a single bird, the eyes of which glitter the more fiercely as it pulls and jerks at an obstinate strand. Twenty-five birds are counted, so it would seem that the enterprise has failed in respect of increase. No doubt some are absent. Both young and old birds take part in the work of destruction. One, I notice, has a black blotch on his otherwise mottled breast, while his back shines with the polished radiance of a soap-bubble.

9. Tree visited at odd intervals—not at all during early morning. Dismantlement proceeds halfheartedly.

10. Very early, the morning being fine and clear, the birds resumed in a playful, lackadaisical way the demolition of the nests; without apparent cause, save the shriek of a passing cockatoo, they fled into the jungle. Did not see them again until late in the afternoon.

11. Again the birds visited the reserve early. Shortly before sundown I counted sixteen. They were resting silently on the sodden remains of the nests, for there have been heavy showers; some were picking idly at loosened strands as if merely to beguile time. Now and again they fly briskly and noisily in close company—always "diagonalising." Failure to add largely to the population of birds does not seem to have damped the gaiety and impulsiveness of the erratic flights. They are as sprightly in their confabulations and as spiteful in their squabbles. The founders of the colony were, I am convinced, this season's birds. If so they could not have been more than two months old when they began to build. The young brood from old-established colonies hatched out just about two months before these appeared.

12. Yesterday's occupations and recreations repeated. The inheritance of parasitic intruders, to cut off which the nests are torn to pieces, now depends on unsubstantialities.

13. This morning, the flock assembled at break of day, and began, some to extricate tendrils from, others to repair woebegone nests. When the sun shone on the tree the plumage of the birds gleamed with almost dazzling iridescence, the shoulders green, the back of the neck purple and lake of the richest hue.

14. One casual visit to the tree was observed.

15. No visit.

16. No appearance until late in the afternoon, when four, wildly flying, settled for a few minutes and departed shrieking. The tree is not now a home, merely a rendezvous.

And so the history ends. Next August, no doubt, the surviving members of the colony will return, all fully feathered in glossy black, and with eyes aflame, to complete the destruction of the nests—according to habit—and build afresh.

Dec. 10 (1910). True to attributes, the bird's returned yesterday. To-day the one nest which had withstood a year's buffeting was demolished offhand, and twenty-two are now being built with frantic haste.

Dec. 12. To the solidification of the joy of the Isle no less than four new colonies are being established close at hand, the very tree which was raided years ago being again occupied by a jubilant and clamorous crowd. One of the new colonies is over one hundred nests strong. Does this regeneration signify the beginning of a favourable phase analogous to that discovered by the commission previously referred to in respect of grouse?

## CHAPTER XXII

### SHARKS AND RAYS

Among the commonest of fish in the shallow waters of the coast are the rays, of which there are many species—eighteen, according to the list prepared by Mr. J. Douglas Ogilby. Some attain enormous size, some display remarkable variations from the accepted type, and at least two are edible though not generally appreciated, for the hunger of the littoral Australian is not as a rule sufficiently speculative to prompt to gastronomic experiment, else food that other nations cherish would not be deemed unclean. Between sharks and rays relationship exists, for a certain ray has been sneered at as only a flattened-out shark. There are five species of shark-like rays, which have all the outward form and appearance and vagrant mode of life of their prototype, and four species of sharks that might pass as rays. One of them, with a big head, tadpole-like tail and generally frayed and sea-tattered appearance, is, in fact, accepted in some quarters as a ray, while the shovel-like skate is commonly regarded as a shark.

The most delicately flavoured of the rays is known as the "blue-spotted" (*DASYBATUS KUHLI*). It does not appear to attain a large size, but it is fairly common, and is one of the most comely of the creatures of the coral reefs, the bright blue decorative blotches on a ground of old gold being most

effective. It is often found in a few inches of water perfectly motionless, and on being disturbed flutters and glides away swiftly and with little apparent effort. Roasted on an open fire, when a large proportion of the pungent oil escapes, the flesh is pleasant, though possessing the distinctive flavour of the order, which is, however, acceptable at all times to the palate of the black.

One of the formidable sting rays—dark brown in colour (probably *DASYBATUS THETIDES*, Ogilby), which revels on oysters—has the habit of burying itself in the mud, leaving an angular depression, corresponding to the size of the body, from which the pedestal eyes alone obtrude. In such position it is difficult for the inexperienced to detect the fish until by misadventure it is trodden on, in which circumstance one of two manoeuvres is adopted. Either it flaps and flounders in the slush so that the intruder is startled and jumps clear, or else it lashes out with its whip-like tail in the endeavour to bring into play its serrated weapon, charged with pain, and fearsome on account of the blood-poisoning effect of the mucus with which it is coated.

Ox-rays (*UROGYMNUS ASPERRIMUS*) grow to a great size, their backs being so armoured with thick-set stellate bucklers on a horn-like skin, that to secure them a heavy-hefted weapon and a strong right arm are necessary. But among the largest of the family is that known as the devil fish (*MOBULA* sp.), which, upon being harpooned, sinks placidly to the bottom, and adhering thereto by suction, defies all ordinary attempts to raise it. This often basks in calm water or swims slowly close to the surface, when the pliant tips of its "wings," appearing at regular intervals above the surface, create the illusion of a couple of large sharks moving along in rhythmic regularity as to speed and muscular movement. Rarely, and apparently only by mischance, does a ray take bait; but when hooked it affords good sport, for its impassive resistance is incomprehensibly great in comparison with its size, and comparable to the pull of a green turtle which in its wanderings has become foul-hooked.

An exciting coursing match entertained me not long since, not only as an exhibition of wonderful speed and agility, but because of the wit with which the weaker creature eluded pursuit. Three hundred yards from the beach the dorsal fin of a huge hammer-head shark obtruded about two feet as it leisurely quartered a favourite hunting-ground. A sudden swirl and splash indicated that game had been sighted, and the next instant an eagle or flying ray (*STOASODON NARINARI*) leaped out of the sea with prodigious eagerness to reach the beach. In a series of abrupt curves the shark endeavoured to head off the ray, which, as its pursuer gained on it, shot out of the water over the shoulders of the shark, each leap being at least ten feet high. In rising it seemed to switch the shark with its thong-like tail, although apparently in almost despairing fright. After at least a dozen agile and desperate efforts, each timed to just elude the rush of the shark, both came into shallow water in which the quick and regular contours of the shark stirred the mud in a wavy pattern; it became baffled, and in a few seconds the ray slowly, and with infinite caution, "flew" (and that is the correct term to apply to a fish the movements of which in the water are analogous to the flight of a bird) into such meagre depths that the shark would have been stranded had it followed. No ripple indicated its discreet course within a few feet of the water line and it maintained its way for about two hundred yards parallel with the beach, while the shark furiously quartered the sea off shore.

On the occasion of a similar hunt a ray blundered fatally because of the steeper incline of the beach. When about ten feet off the shore instead of a lateral it took a directly forward "flight," landing six feet up on the dry sand, where it fell an easy victim to a black boy, perhaps not as hungry or as ferocious as the shark, but equally partial to rays as food and incapable of any self-denying act.

Though the relationship is well defined, the shark makes no distinction in favour of the ray when in pursuit of food. Indeed, certain members of the predatory family seem to delight chiefly in a diet of rays, and perhaps as a result of this persistent pursuit has the shape of the latter been evolved, since it enables them to take refuge in water so shallow that even a small shark would inevitably be stranded. Timorous by nature, the smaller rays parade the beach-line, while the larger are better able to hold their own in deep water. Although as a rule solitary of habit, there seem to be occasions on which rays become gregarious, when a considerable extent of sandy shallow has been observed to be actually paved with motionless but vigilant individuals, the edge of the "wing" of one overlapping that of the next with almost perfect regularity.

The monstrous grey-striped tiger shark (*GALEOCERDO TIGRINUS*) in my experience generally keeps to deep water and hunts singly; but a recent event sets at naught other local observations and at the same time provides graphic proof of the rapacity and hardihood of the species. About a hundred yards out from the beach, as we started on a strictly sordid beachcombing expedition to the scene of the squashed wreck of a Chinese sampan, a shark betrayed itself by the dorsal fin quartering the glassy surface of the sea. Equipment for sport consisted of an axe, a crowbar, a trivial fish spear, and a high-velocity rifle. Pulling out noiselessly, a trail of oily blood was intersected and the next moment a huge shark appeared, carrying in its jaws a black ray, which it mouthed unceasingly.

Intent upon its meal, the shark ranged parallel to the boat so that its length could be accurately gauged. It was nearly sixteen feet long, while the ray was almost as large in proportion. The relative sizes may be estimated by the standard of a man bearing between his teeth a tea-tray, Not the least anxiety or apprehension was manifested by the shark at the presence of the boat. It rose frequently to the surface, and all its movements being discernible as it swam close to the bottom in a preoccupied manner, the boat was easily manoeuvred to be within almost touching distance whensoever the head emerged. In quick succession three out of the four bullets the magazine contained penetrated its body just abaft the pectoral fins. A brief flurry followed each shot, and then the shark, with passive fixity of purpose, resumed the mangling of the ray, which with extended, backward strained eyes, seemed to implore rescue from its fate. Were any other means of response to so tragic an appeal available? The crowbar! Hastily made fast to the stern line, it was hurled harpoon-like with energy sufficient to batter in the forehead of a bullock. But the listless implement bounced off the head of the shark as a stick from a drum, provoking merely a contemptuous wave of the tail which seemed to signify a sneer. The axe was also employed with negative results, for the difficulty of delivering an effective blow from the boat could not be overcome.

All the sea about became ruddy, and the lust for still more of the shark's blood being imperative, we returned to the beach, obtained a fresh supply of ammunition, and a whale harpoon. In the meantime the blood previously shed had spread far and wide, and instead of a solitary gormandising shark a full half-dozen rollicked and revelled in the stained area, all alike in size and alike, too, in absolute indifference to the boat. Owing to the featherweight heft the harpoon failed in penetrative force, and with the first tug invariably withdrew.

Frequently the sharks came within arm's length of the boat, and though neither ammunition nor the bumps of the homely crowbar nor the pin-pricks of the harpoon were spared, nor shouts of exultation when an individual lashed out under the sting of a bullet, not a shark was in the least perturbed. They romped about the boat, if not defiant at least heedless of all the clamour and puny assaults, appearing to challenge to combat in their natural element. The temper of the school was such that, no doubt, all the occupants of the boat would have been accounted for had they by some foolish miracle squandered themselves in the blood-stained sea. By this time the shark which had first attracted attention had disappeared with its prey, distressed and unseaworthy on account of several leaks; and the others followed one by one, and not altogether in the best condition imaginable, judging by the oily bubbles and tinges beyond the limits of the bay.

On a quieter day I swam off to the anchored boat for some forgotten purpose, which accomplished I prepared to slip off the stern when a dark-coloured shark intervened, moving steadily along parallel to the beach. Giving it precedence, I swam ashore without resting and watched the big fish slide like a shadow up into the corner of the bay, where it rested. Tom, the sport-loving black boy, being on the scene, his flattie was soon afloat, and with a disdainful thrust of the harpoon he impaled the creature, which did not exhibit the least sign of life. Hauled to the surface, Tom declared it to be dead—that it had died from natural causes ere the harpoon had touched it. Had ever shark taken quieter exit from this hustling world! It was about six feet long and fairly robust, and while being towed ashore wallowed helplessly, floating belly up and submitting without a spasm of protest to nudges and slaps of the oars and prods with the heft of the harpoon, but no sooner did it touch the sand and its snout shoot into the foreign element than a furious fight for life began. Did ever shark display such agility! Wriggling and lashing with its tail, almost had it swept me off my feet and dragged me into the sea; but Tom came to my aid, with a sudden and judiciously timed tug as it swerved, the game was landed, to continue extraordinary antics on the sand, though Tom was armed with a tomahawk.

When the struggles had ceased post-mortem examination was made. The stomach was empty, but the liver promised so much oil that Tom extirpated it and all other internal organs, and not until mutilation was complete was any peculiarity about the jaws and teeth noticed. These subsequently, proved that we had captured, not a shark but a ray—Forskal's shovel-nosed ray (*RHYNCHOBATUS DJIDDENSIS*), which Tom, for all his knowledge of sea things, had never before seen. Curiously examining the jaws, he laid a rude forefinger on the tessellated plate which stands in the species for teeth, and the disorganised remains, true to the ruling passion, crunched, and Tom ruefully consoled the finger for a fortnight. Hitherto his opinion, founded on contemporary experience and the traditions of his race, had been that a shark would never fight a live man. Was it not the refinement of irony that he should well nigh be deprived of the best part of a finger by a dead ray masquerading as a shark!

Many blacks refuse to eat shark because of totemic restrictions; but where no tribal contrary law prevails, several of the species are cooked and eaten without ceremony, but with most objectionable after effects to those who are not partial to such fare. The specific odour of the shark seems to be intensified and to be made almost as clinging as that of musk, being far more expressive than the exhalation of a camp gorged with green turtle. Discreet persons encounter such a scene as the do the jade Care—by passing on the windy side.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE RECLUSE OF RATTLESNAKE

"Live forgotten and die forlorn."

TENNYSON.

Am I, living in or rather off the land of magnificent distances, entitled to claim as a neighbour a friend one hundred miles away? Sentiments obliterate space. With the lonesome individual who dwelt in an oven-like hut of corrugated iron on rocky, sunburnt Rattlesnake Island, and who lost the habit of living a few years ago, I was on social terms—terms of vague but cosy intimacy. On occasions of our rare meetings we found ideas in common. Peradventure similarities of environment focussed similar thoughts. Perhaps abnormal temperaments gave rise to becoming tenderness and sympathy. Whatsoever and howsoever the mutual sentiment, it is of the past.

The history of the Recluse of that undesirable island, a mass of granite and thin, unkindly soil is far removed from the prosaic. His was the third life sacrificed because of the lust of man to own the unromantic spot. He came to be known as "The Recluse of Rattlesnake," but the pain of his life lies in the fact that his seclusion was not voluntary.

The earlier history of the "Recluse" embodies nothing very extraordinary. Men have fallen in love as impetuously as he. The prologue of the little drama in which he played the leading part was neither new nor strange. The originality came after, and then only was it understood how completely the divine passion had shattered his soul.

This, then, is the record of a part of his life—its dominating theme—its dramatic and pathetic ending.

A fine young fellow they were wont to call him—blue-eyed, fair-haired, sharp and shrewd and up to all the moves as becomes a man alert and successful in business. Truly a universal favourite, for he was good-humoured and amiable, full of wit and smart sayings. They say, too, that she who had pledged her troth to him was just as fine a girl as he was man. There came news to him of the death of a relative in Old England, with a summons thither to take his share of a fortune. He tarried no long time, for had he not left his heart behind him? But—and so the story goes, whether true to the letter I do not vouch—when he landed in Australia once again it was to learn that he had been slighted. His love affair hopelessly damned, he at once began to drift. The drift ended pitiably after half a lifetime—to him a lifetime and a half.

"God! we living ones—what of our tears  
When a single day seems as a thousand years?"

For a decade or more he lived on the Island, his resources slender and uncertain. Often he was on the verge of starvation. Once he told me that, driven by the pangs of hunger, he had trapped quail, which he had trained to come to his whistle to eat the crumbs which fell from his table during those rare times when he fared sumptuously. Then his tender-heartedness forbade him to kill them. But hunger is crueller than either jealousy or the grave, and one by one his plump pets were sacrificed. He had two faithful companions—mongrel dogs, "Billy" and "Clara"—and the wistful, beseeching inquiry in the gaze of those two dogs when he talked at them before strangers significantly showed how frequently and earnestly he talked to them when there was none else to share his confidences.

Now Rattlesnake Island, though close to a populous port, is one of the more remote parts of the State of Queensland. News travels to and from it at uncertain, fitful, and infrequent intervals. The Boer War had progressed beyond the relief of Ladysmith stage ere the Recluse of Rattlesnake knew that the Old England he loved so well and proudly was up and asserting herself. At odd times a sailing boat would call, but the Recluse was beginning to be what the polite folks benevolently term "strange," and he would not always appear unless he knew his visitors. Then he was among the most agreeable and entertaining of men, full of anecdote and episode and quiet but true humour. A shrewd observer of natural science, he availed himself of unique opportunities for practical study. He conned first-hand the book of Nature, written large and fair, and illuminated with living designs. My one memento of him is the stiletto of a prodigious sting-ray. He had never seen a larger, nor have I nor any one to whom I have shown it. The weapon measures 9½ inches by an average width of half an inch. The birds that came to his island, the reptiles, the frogs, and the fish of the sea—he knew them all—and could tell quaint, fairy-

like stories of his association with the creatures that had become too familiar to be the least afraid of him.

One day a boat anchored off his bay, but the Recluse was not to be seen, nor was the punt that he used found, nor were there any recent signs of occupation about the exterior of the hut. In due course official search was instituted. We may neglect or be indifferent to a man while he is known to be in the land of the living; when he is not and until the mystery of his fate is cleared up he becomes the object of earnest solicitude.

In the comfortless dwelling was found a diary which told its own tale of lonesomeness and starvation. Is there real pathos in the last writings of this once vigorous and independent man?

May 19. Waded with spear all over flats for rays. Did not get a shot at any. Very short commons.

May 23. I miss the tea and tobacco. Dug last row of sweet spuds. Very patchy in size, but a perfect God-send just now.

May 26. Last kerosene. No reading at nights now.

He records catching a sting-ray and getting oysters.

June 2. Not a sign of a ray. Have to live off potatoes a bit. They, too, will soon be done.

June 4. Added a P.S. to letters. A month gone and no chance to send them.  
Hard cheese!

June 6. Another week will see me in extremis. Wish I had a fishing-line.

June 7. Got some oysters. Oh for a good beefsteak or a chop! No sign of any boat. Lord help me!

June 9. Nearly skinned the oysters. What will I do when they are finished?

June 10. Dull; cold. Thank God for the sweet potatoes! They are my only food now. No rays about; no fish in the trap, and the whole coast of the island almost stripped of oysters. Only one candle left to cheer the night.

June 11. Miserable and hungry.

June 17. Cold and clear. Did not sleep well. The hunger woke me often.  
This is fearful work.

On the 19th he got some coco-nuts, which were first-rate. With coco-nuts and an occasional ray, he ekes out an existence, hungry, cheerless, without light, without tobacco. A copy of "Barnaby Rudge" and a few old papers represent his reading matter. He is glad when daylight comes.

July 3. Craft lay-to off Lorne Reef. Signalled by flag and fire from hill. They took no notice. Strange! Government cutter, I think.

So his life drags on. He tries to re-read by firelight "Barnaby Rudge," which he must almost know by heart, but it is of no use. In the taming of a monitor lizard he finds much amusement, recording his satisfaction—"Goanna quite friendly."

July 6. Caught a small rock-cod; roasted it for supper.

His satisfaction after a good meal is evident from the entry—

"Quite happy and contented."

His hopes rise and fall on a diet of oysters and coco-nuts.

On July 22nd he hails with delight "a tin box of pears and condensed milk" which drift on to the reef. These have been in the water for weeks "but some are good." He writes thankfully "the milk is grand."

The diary described his life during the next few months "in a sort of way." He builds a punt which he christens the GREAT EASTERN, the launching of which is briefly chronicled: "Launched the GREAT

EASTERN. Sank below Plimsoll mark—like a sieve." He returns disheartened from one or two trial trips, having to "man the pump." 'He complains of having to dig up and eat little miniature sweet potatoes and asks piteously: "What am I to do? I'm hungry and have nothing else!" His feet become cut and sore, and in every day's entry is a plaintive wail at the pain.

Sept. 9. Treasure—a stranded coco-nut, quite good. A rare treat. My teeth are sore through not being used.

Sept. 26. This continuous hunger begins to tell. My blood's poor and sores won't heal. Can't help it! I can't better my lot in any way so must just endure it.

Octr. 31. Surely to goodness something will happen to put an end to my long drawn out misery. No sleep last night.

A "Goanna" that he killed and ate was a God-send.

Now. 6. Disappointed! Made sure of truffles after rain. None. No grub. I get weaker and weaker. Can hardly crawl.

Now. 11. Done up! Lay down and went to sleep. No sign from shore. The good Lord pity me in my weakness!

Novr. 12. Never thought I could get so weak and live. No sign anywhere. Must try to catch some big green frogs—good food.

Novr. 13. So awfully weak.

Novr. 14. Too weak to look out for . . . (the writing becomes unintelligible). Wrote my old friend . . . making over all property here to him absolutely. Blowing too hard for punt. I dare not try to walk I'd never get back.

The final entry is dated Nov. 15th:

"Caught three big frogs, cleaned and stewed them—delicious—like chicken! What fools we are with our likes and dislikes!"

They searched the adjacent island and the coastline, and finally concluded that the Recluse, having made a desperate attempt to reach the mainland in his wretched punt, had become overcome with exhaustion, and had drifted away to drown when the boat swamped in the breakers.

Six weeks or so after the date of the final entry in the diary a Chinese fisherman found a punt near the mouth of a mangrove creek on the mainland. In it was a skeleton, a fish spear, some empty oyster shells. A few fair hairs adhered to patches of dried skin on the skull.

So the tale is told—a brief, passionate love idyll a strange, tedious, and tragic epilogue.

Were ever the days and dreams of a strong man more completely dismantled and dismembered by a passing flick of Cupid's wing!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### HAMED OF JEDDAH

"Caravans that from Bassora's gate  
With Westward steps depart;  
Or Mecca's pilgrims, confident of fate  
And resolute of heart."

More of a Dutchman in build than Arab—broad-based, bandy-legged, stubby, stolid, and slow; spare

of his speech, but nimble with his fingers in all that appertains to the rigging and working of small boats, as much at ease in the water as a rollicking porpoise—such is Hamed of Jeddah.

His favourite garment is a light green woollen sweater. He wears other, but less obvious things. His green sweater sets all else at naught. If it be a fact that one of the pleasures to which the true Mohammedan looks forward in the region of the blest is to recline in company with the Houris on green sofas while contemplating the torments of the damned, Hamed was merely foretasting that which is to come. The everlasting green sweater became a torture—at least to me. Perhaps he was aware of the fact, and because he knew that my damnation is inevitable his unsoothing preliminary was merely human. For Hamed is amicable in all respects.

Though his sentiments may be truly Arabian, his figure, as I have remarked, is a travesty on that of the typical Arabian—the Arab of the boundless and comfortless desert. I have tried to picture him as a lean and haughty mameluke in loose, white robes, mounted on a dust-distributing camel, and, lance in hand, peering ferociously across the desert

"The desert with its shifting sand  
And unimpeded sky."

But the tubby form in the green sweater and those bleached dungarees shortened in defiance of all the prescriptions of fashion, positively refuses to be glorified. Except for his swarthiness Hamed is unreconcilable to the ideals of an Arab, and he has a most heretical dislike to the desert. All his best qualities are under suppression on dry land. He is the Arab of the dhow. His eyes are muddy. The pupils begin to show opacity. He follows slowly and with stumbling steps through the bush and often misses his way, for he cannot see far ahead and you cannot always be looking backward and hailing him. Still, he is never lost. When he fails to recognise landmarks and his guide is out of sight, his cup-shaped ears detect the faintest call of the sea. Then he works in a direct course to the beach, where everything is writ large and plain to his understanding. Of his own motive he never ventures inland without a compass, and with that in his hand he is safe, even in a strange place and out of sound of the sea.

Hamed tells a wonderful story of a ride that befell him in his early youth. By the way, there is something to be said of his age which, according to his own account, varies. Sometimes he is 72, then 48, and again 64 and 35. Like the present-day almanacs of his race, his age is shifty and uncertain. Hamed's ride occurred "a long time ago"—that hazy, half-obliterated mark on life's calendar. Pious Mohammedan that he is, he undertook a pilgrimage to Medina. To that holy orgy he rode on a donkey. So miraculous was the chief event of the journey that it is due to Hamed that his own uncoloured version should be given.

"So hot the sun of my country you carn ride about alonga a day. Every time you trabel alonga night—sit down daytime. We start. We ride all night. I ride alonga dunkee. Sit down one day, ride night time. Dunkee he no go quick—very slow. I am tired. That dunkee tired. B'mbi that dunkee he talk. He say —'Hamed, you good man, you kind man. Suppose you no hammer me too much I take you up, alonga Medina one time quick.' I say, 'I no want hammer you.' My word, that dunkee change!—dunkee before, horse now—Arab horse. Puff! We along Medina! Wind bin take 'em!" With the wind in his favour Hamed does wonders even now—at sea. It was not seemly to suggest to him that cynical memory dulled the polish of his story; but if there really are chinks in the world above at which they listen to words from below, did the Prophet smile to hear the parable by which his devout and faithful follower brought his own ride on the flying mare up to date?

Having the unwonted privilege of cross-examining a man who had ridden or rather been wafted to Medina specially that he might do homage at the Tomb of the Prophet, I asked a few questions respecting the famous coffin. Was it a fact that the coffin hung in the air on a wire so fine that no one could see it? Was it, in fact, without lawful visible means of support?

Hamed would neither deny nor confirm the legend. "I dunno what people you! I bin tell-straight my yarn go one time like wind to Medina. What more you want? I dunno what kind people you!" One mystery at a time is enough for Hamed.

Hamed now deals in oysters. In the trade he had a partner—a fair lad of Scandinavian origin named Adolphus. All these orientals have extraordinary faith in the medicinal properties of the gall of out-of-the-way creatures. That of a wallaby is prized; of a "goanna" absolutely precious; while in respect of a crocodile, only a man who has leisure to be ill and is determined to doctor himself on the reckless principle of "blow the expense," could afford any such luxurious physic. It is reckoned next in virtue to a text from the Koran written on board: "Wash off the ink, drink the decoction, and lo! the cure is complete." So, too, if the Lama doctor has no herbal medicines he prescribes something symbolic. He



writes the names of the remedies on scraps of paper, moistens the paper with saliva, and rolls them into pills, which the patient tosses down with the same perfect confidence as though they were genuine medicaments, his faith leading him to believe that swallowing a remedy or its name is equally efficacious.

A "goanna" scrambled for safety up a small tree. Adolphus undertook to kill it. Hamed insisted on preemption of the gall, while yet the quaking reptile certainly had the best title to it; but Hamed stood below and some distance off, for he was nervous. Adolphus climbed the tree, killed the "goanna" offhand, and threw it so that it fell close to Hamed, and Hamed fell in a spasm of fright, upon recovering from which he chased fair, fleet-footed, laughing Adolphus for half an hour—murder in his pearly eyes, a mangrove waddy in his hand, frothy denunciations on his lips, and nothing on his body but the green sweater. Peace was restored on the presentation to him of the all-healing gall; and then Hamed apologised, almost tearfully, explaining, "That goanna, when you chuck heem, close broke heart of me!"

A dissolution of partnership was then and there decided on, and Hamed thus detailed his sentiments to me:—

"That boy, I like heem too much. Good-for-working boy. Me and heem make 'em three-four beg oyster every day. He bin say: 'You carn be mate for me!' He go along two Mulai boy. Dorphy [Adolphus] carn mek too much now—one sheer belonga him, Mulai boy two sheers. Carn beat me—one sheer one man." Hamed has clean-cut notions on the disadvantages of multiplicity of partners.

Hamed has been to Europe, and there—he does not mention the country—he was initiated into the mysteries of making Irish stew. In an outburst of thankful confidence for some little entertainment at the table he let out the secret in these terms: "Eerish sdoo you make 'em. Four potats, two ungin, hav-dozen garleek, one hav-bucket water." At first it appeared that he had obtained his knowledge from a passionate vegetarian, but upon reflection we concluded that in his opinion meat was so essential an item that it was to be taken for granted. Any one wishing to try the recipe would be safe in adding "meat to taste."

Hamed revels in chillies, fiery, red, vitriolitic little things that would bring tears to the eyes of a molten image. Even his recipe for porridge (likewise obtained during his ever-memorable European travels) is not complete without them: "Alonga one hand oot-meal, pannikan water, one hav-handful chillies. My word, good fellow; eatem up quick; want 'em more."

Possibly Hamed might be considered by some folks a "common" man. He is far from that, and the very opposite from commonplace, for some of the magic of the coral seas has tintured his blood. His career as a pearl-shell diver has been illuminated by the discovery of pearls—big and precious. In his youth and buoyancy he gambled them away. Now that his heart is subdued and slow he still looks for pearls, and tempts coy Fortune with dramatic sincerity and most untempting things. He wants one pearl more, that he may acquire the means of travelling to his native land. Hamed of Jeddah would die there.

So strenuous is his desire for one smile on the part of Fortune that Hamed's favourite topic is pearls, and of the good old days when, if a man found a patch where the grass was not too thick, he might pick up as many as a hundred shells in a day. Under conditions and circumstances all in favour, the diver relies upon an inevitable infirmity on the part of the oyster for the revelation of its whereabouts.

"When man he dibe," says Hamed, "that go'lip quick he shut 'em mout. Carn see 'em. Subpose open mout, man quick he see 'em—shove-em alonga beg."

At the peril of its life the oyster gapes.

Hamed cherishes thoroughly Oriental theories, too, for the wooing of Chance, who (for Chance is very real and personal to him), he declares, presides over the fortune and the fate of divers.

"Last night I bin drim. My word—good drim. Subpose you gibe one fowl he make lucky—we get good pearl. Must be white fowl. Black fowl!"—(and here he lowered his voice to a mysteriously confidential whisper) "no good; spoil 'em lucky!"

Months have elapsed since the sacrifice of the white fowl and the pouring of its blood to the accompaniment of droning supplications on the face of the contemptuous sea, and albeit the divination was cheerfully suspicious, the sulky jade still look askance, and Hamed is still far from Jeddah.

## **HAMED PREACHES**

When Hamed of Jeddah left just before Christmas with four "begs" of over-mature oysters, intended for the tickling of European palates, he was not elated by the nearness of the hallowed time. Indeed, his state of mind was quite contrary. He had none of that peace and goodwill towards men with which those of us who are not Mohammedans adulate the approach of the season.

His one-time partner, the fair and fleet-footed "Dorphy," had deserted him for good and sufficient cause, and his hard old heart rebelled against priggish Christians and their superior ways. Some of the tardiness of age has come upon him. Though he had "worked" the oysters with all the resourcefulness of the lone hand, the marketable results were less in bulk than formerly. "Dorphy" had been wont to resort and classify Hamed's gleanings, for Hamed's eyes are misty; also his desire to emulate "Dorphy's" quickness was so ingenuous that in lieu of oysters he would frequently stow away flat stones and pieces of coral. Such things may be abomination in the eyes of the conscientious oyster-getter, but with Hamed they helped to fill the "beg." Vain old Arab! He deceived no one—in the end not even himself, for none of his fakes passed the final inspection of clear-sighted "Dorphy," with whom the moralities of the firm rested, but who in Hamed's eyes was a finicking precisian.

For weeks after his partner's withdrawal from the business Hamed was perplexed. The swing of the seasons set the tides adversely. Hence his complaint—"Water no much dry. Carn dry long. No good one man work himself. Subpose have mate he give hand along nother man. One man messin' abeaut. One small beg oyster one day. My word, 'Dorphy' smart boy—good-for-working boy!"

As a lone hand—his honour thrown upon himself—Hamed was so precise and methodic that by the time the second "beg," had been painfully chipped off semi-submerged rocks, the first was past its prime. When the third was full, the first was good merely in parts. On the completion of the fourth "beg" one passed the neighbourhood of the first on the other side with a precautionary sniff. It contained self-assertive relics.

But Hamed took all four "begs" with him in his little cutter, and "Billy," the toothless black boy, who lisped not in affectation but in broad and conscious profusion, for a blow from a nulla-nulla years ago deprived him for ever of the grace of distinct articulation, sailed with him. No sensation of sorrow fretted me when on that lovely Monday morn I saw the sail of the odoriferous cutter a mere fleck of saintly white on the sky-line among the islands to the north. Can so lovely a thing be burdened with so ponderous a smell? Will it not—if two more days of windless weather prevail—ascend to the seventh heaven and tarnish the glitter of the Pleiades? I mused as I strolled on the tide-smoothed beach of my own scented isle.

Before his departure, Hamed had realised that his oysters had passed the phase which Christians in their absurd queasiness prefer. Perhaps he designed to trade them off on coloured folks with less sensitive organs and no dainty prejudices. But his temper was consonant with, at least, my perception of the condition of his oysters. It was bad; and he spoke harsh things of white men, and of Christmas and of the doings of Christians during the celebration of the birthday of the Founder of their faith. Perhaps he was paying off in advance for the scorn with which his fragrant oysters were sure to be received.

When a man who is with us, but not of us, deliberately expresses his opinions about our faulty ways and contradictory customs, and when the critic is disinterested, in matters of religion at any rate, however humble he may, be, it is instructive to treat him as a philosopher. The art of learning is to accept the teachings of everything, from a blade of grass to an epic poem. Hamed moralised in angry mood. All the better. Neither flattery nor fear was in his words.

The impatient oysters fuming in the tiny hold of his cutter merely gave to his tongue a defiant stimulus. To me they were pathetically pleading for a belated watery grave. A quaint sort of eloquence took command of Hamed's tongue, and I suffered the oysters gladly as I listened.

"Ramadan! Ah! One month!" There were worlds of meaning and longing in those few words. The pious Mohammedan, the exile, the patriot spoke, uttering a prayer, a sigh, and a glorious hope in one breath. "Ramadan! In my country one month holiday—quiet, clean, no row. First time burn old clothes."

"Come fill the cup, and in the fire of spring,  
The winter garment of repentance fling."

"Wash everything. Clean out house. Put clothes clean—white like anything. Sit down. One day eat nothing. Then feast plenty. Good goat of my country—more fatter." (It was a graceless cut, for the previous day I had given him a well-grown kid). "No messin' abeaut. Plenty talk with friend. Walk about bazaar. Full up people—clean, nice. No row—nothing. Subpose I make lucky. I find one pearl, I go along my own country for Ramadan!"

With half-shut eyes Hamed dwelt silently on the bliss of his faraway home, and woke snappily to the crude realities of his Christian environment.

"Chrissmiss!" he sneered—" nothing. Messin' abeaut! You want to see drunk man—Chrissmiss, plenty! You want to see row, plenty—Chrissmiss! You want lissen bad language, plenty Chrissmiss! Subpose I am at that place Cairnsee, Chrissmiss, I take my flattie anchor out along inlet—keep quiet. My heart broke altogether from that drink. Chrissmiss—mix 'em up plenty with drink and messin abeaut! Good job you keep out of the way when Chrissmiss he come!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### YOUNG BARBARIANS AT PLAY

"Behold the child by Nature's kindly law,  
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw."

#### POPE.

Not all the energies of the blacks of North Queensland in their natural state are absorbed in the search for and pursuit and capture of food; nor are all their toys imitative of weapons of offence or the chase. They have their idle and softer hours when the instincts of the young men and maidens turn towards recreations and pastimes, in some of which considerable ingenuity and skill are exhibited, whilst their elders amuse themselves by the practise of more or less useful domestic arts. Children in their play are just as enthusiastic, preoccupied, and noisy as white children, and the popularity of a game is subject, likewise, to spasmodic exclusiveness. While the particular inclination lasts no other game is held to be worth a rap for rational black boys to play, but the relish the more speedily degenerates. In the ordinary concerns of life a black boy is incapable of self-denial. His intensity for the time is almost pathetic; his revulsion comic. Hence the cycle of the games is brief. There are wide and dreary intervals.

Dr. Walter E. Roth, ex-Chief Protector of Aborigines, and now Government Resident at Pomeroy River, British Guiana, devotes a pamphlet to descriptions of the "Games, Sports, and Pastimes" of Queensland blacks, but since the work has not yet been published unofficially, and since my own limited observations are confirmed generally by him, there seems justification for offering references to a few of the means by which the primitive people wile away time in good-humoured, gleeful pastime. One feature of the sports of the blacks is that they play their game for the sake of the game, not to gain the plaudits of an idle crowd or in expectation of reward. Rivalry there undoubtedly is among them, but the rivalry is disinterested. No chaplet of olive-leaves or parsley decorates the brow of him who so throws the boomerang that it accomplishes the farthest and most complicated flight. As the archers of old England practised their sport, so do the blacks exhibit their strength and skill, not as the modern lover of football, who pays others to play for his amusement, and who, possibly, knows not the game save as a spectator.

Some of the pastimes of the blacks are, of course, derivative from the most engrossing passion of the race, the pursuit of game—animals, birds, and fish—for food. Dr. Roth describes a pantomime in which three young girls take part, and which is imitative of the felling of a tree for the purpose of securing honey stored by bees in a hollow limb. Every detail of the process is illustrated by expressive gestures, even to the indication of the respective locations in the limb of the good comb (which is tabu to women), and the inferior stuff (old brood and drippings) to which the inferior sex is welcome. The whole episode is graphically mimicked, down to the mixing of the honey with water as a beverage.

But such games have not come under my personal knowledge, and as I wish to confine myself to those which I have witnessed, my catalogue must needs be trivial, and far from exhaustive even in respect of the district in which they are, alas! becoming obsolete. In these days of opium and rum, leisure moments are not generally devoted to "becoming mirth."

The very first toy of the blacks in this neighbourhood is the most cosmopolitan of all. No race of infant exercises over it a monopoly. It belongs as well to the palace as the hovel, for it is none other than the rattle. If proof were wanting that infants the world over have perceptive qualities in common, and that the universal mother employs like means for the development of them, the rattle would supply

it. Here the toy which each of us has gripped with gladness and slobbered over is found not altogether in its most primitive form. It might, indeed, be classed as an emblem of arrested development in art, for better things might reasonably be expected of grown-up folks who in their infancy were wont to use such a neat means of charming away fretfulness. The toy is a tiny spherical basket of neatly interwoven thin strips of cane from one of the creeping palms, in which is enclosed one of the smooth, hard, lead-coloured seeds of the CAESALPINIA BONDUCELLA. The rattle, which is known by the name of "Djawn," seems to be quite as effective as the more elaborate but less neat varieties employed to amaze and pacify the infants of civilisation. Similar seeds are used by Arabian children for necklaces, hence the specific botanical name of the plant.

Measured ethnologically, perhaps the most primitive pastime is also one of the most interesting, for it seems to indicate the evolution of the spear. It may readily be believed that a black boy playing with a grass dart exhibits one of the early stages which the spear passed ere it reached its present form in the hands of his father with a wommera. As the boy grows up, so does his spear grow with his growth, and lengthen with his length. The grass dart is merely a stem of blady grass (IMPERATA ARUNDINACEA), which the blacks know as "Jin-dagi," shortened to about fifteen inches by the severance of the leaves, which is usually accomplished by a quick nip with the teeth. The dart is taken between the thumb and the second finger, the truncated ends of the leaves being pressed against the tip of the first finger, by which and the simultaneous impulse of the arm the dart is propelled. Accurate shots may be made with the missile, which has a range up to about thirty yards, with a penetrative force sufficient to pierce the skin. Occasionally the boys of the camp in opposing sides indulge in mimic fights, when the air rustles with the darts, and the yelling combatants exhibit expertness as marksmen as well as extraordinary shrewdness in the special protection of the face and other exposed and tender spots, and skill in dodging and parrying.

The "Wee-bah," another toy weapon (also obtained from blady grass), might be designated an arrow, the flight, though not the impulse, being similar. A single stem of grass is shortened to about fifteen inches. By being drawn between the nails of the thumb and the first finger, the web is separated from the midrib for about three inches. The sportsman pinches the web end loosely between the lips. The split ends, held in the left hand, are bent over a thin stick in the right hand. Upon the stick being moved smartly forward, the web peels from each side to the midrib, which shoots ahead with an arrow-like flight in the direction the marksman designs.

Velocity, accuracy, and range are remarkable. The arrow will penetrate the skin (the stem having an awl-like point) at a distance of ten or fifteen yards, and twenty yards is not an uncommon limit to its range. This is used for killing small birds, as well as in idle sport. A few handfuls of blady grass supply a sheaf of missiles, and with such cheap ammunition the sportsman is justified in providing himself profusely when intent upon the destruction of shy birds. Noiseless and rapid, if the shot misses there is no disturbing effect on the nerves of the bird. A dry twig falling or a leaf rustling has no more elemental shock than the flight of the dart. The unconscious bird hops about its business unconcerned until a dart does its work. Birds which fall to this most inartificial weapon are very small, but a black boy does not despise the most minute morsels of food. He wastes nothing, and in such respects is superior to many a white sportsman, who often shoots that for which he has no appetite, and glories in a big bag irrespective of the capacity of his stomach. No doubt the black boy, too, experiences the same exultant passion when his grass dart impales a pert wren, as does his prototype when the thud of a turkey on the plains is as an echo to the report of his gun. The black boy sings off the feathers, slightly scorches the flesh of his game and munches it whole, secures another sheaf of darts, and goes a-shooting again.

Darts are also improvised from blady grass by two other methods, each a prototype of the spear and wommera. The midrib is severed and the web peeled therefrom for a few inches as in the "Weebah." The loose ends of the web being retained between the thumb and the second finger, the midrib peels off completely when the hand is propelled, the impulse being transmitted to the dart. This, perhaps, is the earliest and most primitive application of the principle embodied in the wommera. In the third method the midrib is similarly severed and the web peeled for about two inches; but the stalk is held in the hand, and, being jerked forward, the midrib being torn from the web flies off, though not under accurate control as to direction.

Quite as early a toy as the grass dart is the boomerang made by a boy's father, or a companion older than himself, and which the youngest soon learns to throw with skill. He graduates in the use of weapons nicely graded to suit his growing strength, spending hours day after day in earnest, honest exercise, until some other game happens to become irresistibly fashionable.

A weapon intermediate between the "Jin-dagi" and the full-length spear of manhood is the scape of the grass-tree (XANTHORRHEA ARBOREA), with which youths fight furious battles, gradually perfecting themselves in elusive tactics and in the training of hand and eye. A favourite set target is the bulbous formicary of the white ant which disfigures so many of the trees of the forest. Along tracks

where the spears are readily available there are few white-ant nests untormented by two or three. A strong reed which flourishes on the margins of watercourses is played with similarly, and by the time the youth has put aside youthful things and has learnt to fashion a spear of tough wood he is an expert.

In order to acquire dexterity, the fish spear in the first instance is a mere toy, and is used in play with as much vivacity and preoccupation as marbles and tops and kites are by boys of Australian birth. A coloured boy, in all the joyous abandon of the unclad, sports with a spear suitable to his height and strength for a month together, floating chips and scraps of bark in the water as targets, until hands and eyes are brought into such subjection that the art is, as it were, burnt into his blood, and a miss becomes rare. In the meantime he has also practised on small fish, and soon he is a regular contributor to the larder.

What is known as the "Piar-piar" accomplishes the flight of the boomerang, and is therefore termed familiarly the "little fella boomerang." Before attempting to describe the toy, it is interesting to note that the word "boomerang" is alien to these parts (Dunk Island), though in almost universal use among the blacks. "Wungle" is the local title. The "Piar-piar" is made from a strip from the side of the leaf of one of the pandanus palms (PANDANUS PEDUNCULATUS). The prickles having been sliced off with a knife or the finger nails, two distinct half-hitches are made in reverse order. Each end is shortened and roughly trimmed, the knots creased and squeezed to flatness between the teeth and lips, and the toy is complete, the making having occupied less than a minute. Before throwing the ends are slightly deflexed.

The toy is held in the right hand lightly between the thumb and the first and second fingers, concave surface down, and is thrown to the left with a quick upward turn of the wrist. After a short, rapid flight almost on the plane of the hand of the thrower, the toy soars abruptly upwards, and taking a sinistral course, returns, twirling rapidly, to the thrower, occasionally making two complete revolutions. The ends are deflexed prior to each throw. Boys and youths are fond of the "Piar-piar," and men of sober year's do not disdain it, being frankly pleased when they succeed in causing it to execute a more prolonged and graceful flight than ordinary.

Another toy which has the soaring flight of the boomerang is made out of two portions of the leaf of the pandanus palm stitched together in the form of a St. Andrew's Cross. It is thrown like a boomerang, the flight being circular, and when it is made to complete two revolutions round the thrower that individual is manifestly pleased with himself. This is known as "Birra-birra-goo."

Another form of aeroplane, "Par-gir-ah," comes from the pandanus palm—its parts being plaited together. This is thrown high and descends spirally, twisting so rapidly throughout its course that it appears to be a solid disc. This is also used as a windmill, being affixed to a spindle. Children run with the toy against the wind and find similar ecstasy to those of whites of their age and kidney.

The sea-beach supplies in plenty a missile which, from the hands of a black boy, has a fantastic flight. This is the bone of the cuttle-fish ("Krooghar"), which, when thrown concave surface down against the wind and after the style of the boomerang, whirls rapidly and makes a decided effort to return. It is also thrown along the surface of the sea as white boys do "skipping stones," often reaching astonishing distances in a wonderful series of skips.

"Cat's cradle" is popular in some camps, the ingenious and complicated designs into which the string is woven far outstripping the art of the white man, and leaving his wondering comprehension far behind. Toy boats and canoes are favourite means of passing away time by those who live on the beach; and while little girls dandle dolls of wood and bark, their brothers and cousins laboriously chip stones in the shape of axes, and used formerly to make fish-hooks of pearl shell, in imitation of the handiwork of their elders. Boys are also given to trundling a disc of bark, centrally perforated for a short cord, the art of the game being to give the disc, while it revolves, an outward inclination. In these degenerate days the top of a meat-tin is substituted for the decent bark disc, in the making of which nice art was exhibited.

Several of the games of the youngsters are bad imitations of the sports of the white. Just as their fathers find joy in a greasy, blackened, imperfect pack of cards, throwing them down with significant gestures, but in absolutely perfect ignorance of the rules of any game or capacity to appreciate any number greater than three—so do the children make believe to play cricket with a ball worlds away from a sphere (for it is none other than a pandanus drupe), and a bat of any waddy.

But it is due to the crude folks who owned Australia not so very long ago, to say that they had invented the top before the usurpers came along. Tops are made from the fruit of one of the gourds which ripens about the size of a small orange, the spindle being a smooth and slender piece of wood secured with gum. The spinning is accomplished by revolving the spindle between the palms of the hands, some being so expert in administering momentum that the top "goes to sleep," before the eyes

of the smiling and exultant player. Dr. Roth chronicles the fact that the piercing of the gourd to produce the hum has been introduced during recent years. The blacks of the past certainly had no ear for music, but now no top which cannot "cry" is worth spinning.

A more primitive top is the seed-vessel of the "Gulgong" (*EUCALYPTUS ROBUSTA*), the pedicel of which is twirled between the thumb and second finger. Such tops, of course, are the common property of bush boys, white and black, but the latter seem to be more casual in the spinning, though deriving quite as much glee therefrom.

A similar top but of larger size is the unripe fruit of the "Kirra-kul" (*EUPOMATIA LAURINA*), which resembles an obtuse peg-top, and is spun from the peg.

The "Kirra-kul" tree provides also the means of obtaining that joy in loud explosions which is instinctive in the boy, whatsoever his race or colour. Young, lusty shoots several feet long, and full of sap, are placed in the fire for a few minutes, and upon being "bashed" on a log or other hard substance the heated gas contained in the pithy core bursts out with a pistol-like report.

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods—  
They kill us for their sport."

The cruelty of the average boy, his insensibility to, or carelessness of, the pain of others and of inferior creatures is exemplified by the treatment which the "Pun-nul" (March fly) receives. That an insect which occasions so much exasperation and pain should receive small mercy at the hands of a vexed and sportful boy is not extraordinary, and so he provides himself with entertainment and takes vengeance simultaneously. The hapless fly is impaled with an inch or two of the flowering spike of blady grass to which a portion of the white inflorescence adheres, and is released. Under such handicap flight is slow and eccentric, often, indeed, concentric, and the boy watches with unfeigned delight while his ears are soothed by the laboured hum.

"Blue-bottle" and "March" flies provide another sort of cheerful sport in which no little malice is blended. Some boys make tiny spears from the midrib of the frond of the creeping palm (*CALAMUS OBSTRUENS*), which, balanced on the palm of the left hand, are flicked with deadly effect, continual practice reducing misses to the minimum. Where the grass-tree grows plentifully the long, slender leaves are snapped off into about six-inch lengths and are used similarly to the creeping palm darts and with like accuracy. Hours are spent killing the big, lumbering, tormenting flies which infest the camp, and towards which no pity is shown, for do they not bite and bloodsuck night and day?

These incomplete and casual references to a very interesting and engrossing topic may be concluded by a reference to a particular spear. Since it consoles and comforts the solitary walks of an aged man, steeped to the lips in the superstitions of his race, and haply ignorant of, or indifferent to, the polyglot pastimes of the younger generation soiled by contact with the whites, the spear, though not a weapon of offence or of sport, is serious and indeed vital to the peace of mind of its owner. He is one of the few who were young men when the white folks intruded upon the race, with their wretched practical ways and insolent disregard of the powers of the unseen spirits, against whom "Old Billy," as his ancestors were wont, still acts on the defensive. "Old Billy" never ventures into the jungle without his spear, though throughout his long and expectant life he has never had occasion to use it. He fears what he knows as "Bidgero," a phantom not quite as truculent as the debil-debil, but evil enough to strike terror into the soul of an unarmed black boy, old or young.

The spear is slender and jointed, the grip being 4 feet 9 inches and the shaft 8 feet. Its distinguishing merit consists of an array of barbs (the serrated spurs of sting-rays) fifteen in number, and ranging in length from 1½ inches to 4½ inches. In the first eight inches from the point are five barbs, the second being double, and the rest are spaced irregularly in accordance with the respective lengths of the barbs, which are in line. "Old Billy" does not allow any one to handle the spear and will not part with it, no matter how sumptuous the price, for would he not, in default, be at the mercy of any prowling, "Bidgero?"

He describes its use with paucity of speech, effective passes, horrible grimaces, and smiles of satisfaction and victory, which make mere words tame. Suppose you ask, "When that fella Bidgero come up, you catch 'em?" "Old Billy" throws himself into an hostile attitude, in which alertness, determination, and fearsomeness are vividly displayed. "O-o-m!" (The thrust of the spear.) "Ha-a-a-ha!" (The spear is given an excruciating and entangling half-turn.) And "Old Billy" exclaims, still holding the imaginary "Bidgero" at the spear's length: "That fella Bidgero can clear out! Finish 'em!" The spear has penetrated the unlucky and daring phantom, several of the barbs have become entangled in its vitals, the enemy is at "Old Billy's" mercy, and since "Old Billy" has no such element in his mental constitution,

there would be one "Bidgero" less in the land if there were any reality in the business. "Old Billy's" manoeuvres and tactics are so grim, skilful, and terrible that one may well hope that he may never be mistaken for a ghost, while within thrusting distance of his twelve foot "Bidgero" exterminator. Yet the young boys smile, when they do not openly scoff, because of his faith in the existence of a personal "Bidgero," and in the efficacy of his bristling spear, which many of them regard as an old man's toy.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### TOM AND HIS CONCERNS

#### DOMESTIC AND OTHER BRAWLS

Tom, who holds himself well in reserve, stood once before an armed and angry white man, defiant, unflinching, bold.

As I have had the privilege of listening in confidence to both sides of the story, and as the main facts are minutely corroborative, I judge Tom's recitation of them to be quite reliable.

He was "mate" at the time of a small cutter, the master of which could teach him very little in practical seamanship. The captain was rather hasty and excitable. Tom never hurries, fusses, or falters, be the weather never so boisterous afloat or the domestic tribulations never so wild ashore. When Nelly, his third wife, tore her hair out by the roots in double handfuls and danced upon it, Tom calmly observed, "That fella make fool belonga himself!" But when she rushed at him, clawing blindly, he promptly and without the least consideration for her sex, silenced her for the time being with a stone. The sudden peace after Nelly's squeals and yells of temper was quite a shock; and when she woke her loving-kindnesses to Tom were quite engaging. Tom will ever be master in his own humpy.

To tell of that other incident that caused Tom to look wicked and so bellicose. The captain of the cutter lost half a crown. His excitement began to simmer at once. A hasty general search was made without result, every nook and corner of the boat and all the captain's garments and the belongings of Tom and the other blacks being ransacked. The money declined to be found, and the captain, like David of old, refused to be comforted, and further following the fashion of the psalmist, said in his haste all blacks are thieves. Tom put on the stern, sulky, sullen aspect that so becomes him, and when he was individually challenged with the theft, disdainfully told his master, "Me no take your money! You lost em yourself!"

This calm, plain statement of fact so angered the boss that, calling Tom a cowardly thief, he yelled, "You take my money! I shoot you!"

It is placing rather a paltry valuation even on the life of a black fellow to threaten to shoot him for the sake of half a crown; but the death penalty has been exacted for far less, according to the boastful statements of self-glorifying white men. The boss was raging. He groped in the locker for his revolver, while Tom took a side glance at a tomahawk lying on the thwart.

Presenting the revolver, the boss yelled, "You rogue, Tom! You steal my money! I shoot you!" Tom changed his sulky demeanour for the pose and look that a camera has preserved, saying, "My word! you shoot one time, straight. Suppose you no shoot one time straight, look out."

The shot was never fired.

I asked Tom what he would have done suppose the revolver had been fired and he not killed.

"My word! Suppose that fella he no kill me one time, I finish him one time quick alonga tomahawk!"

In the course of the day the half-crown was found under the stern sheets, where the boss had been sitting.

To coolly face death under such circumstances is surely evidence of rare mental repose.

Once Tom had a jovial misunderstanding with his half-brother Willie, who cut a neat wedge out of the rim of Tom's ear with a razor. He had intended, of course, to gash Tom's throat, but Tom was on the alert. In revenge and defence Tom merely sat upon Willie, who is a frail, thin fellow, but the sitting

down was literal and so deliberate and long-continued that Willie was all crumpled up and out of shape for a week after. Indeed, the "crick" in his back was chronic for a much longer period. Tom was half ashamed of this encounter, and while glorying in the scar with which Willie had decorated him, excused his own conduct in these terms:

"Willie fight alonga razor. He bin make mark alonga my ear. My word! Me savage then. B'mbi sit down alonga Willie. Willie close up finish. Me bin forget about that fella altogether. When Willie wake up he walk about all asame old man l-o-n-g time!"

With whatsoever missile or weapon is at hand Tom is marvellously expert. As we rested in the dim jungle after a long and much entangled walk, a shake—a poor, thin thing, about four feet long, wriggled up a bank ten or twelve yards off, just ahead of a pursuing dog. On the instant Tom picked up a flake of slate and threw it with such precision and force that the snake became two—the tail end squirmed back, to be seized and shaken by the dog, and the other disappeared with gory flourish under a root.

Most of Tom's feats of marksmanship, though performed with what white men would despise as arms of precision, end seriously. Yet on one occasion the result was broadly farcical. He has a son, known to our little world as Jimmy, who, like his father, is given to occasional sulks, a luxury that even a black boy may become bloated on. Tom does not tolerate that frame of mind in others. The attentions of "divinest melancholy" he likes to monopolise for himself, and when Jimmy becomes pensive without just cause, Tom's mood swerves to paternal and active indignation—which is very painful to Jimmy.

Jimmy, in the very rapture of sulkiness, refused to express pleasure or gratitude upon the presentation of a "hand" of ripe bananas. Tom's wrath at his son's mute obstinacy reached the explosive climax just as he had peeled a luscious banana. He sacrificed it, and Jimmy appeared the next instant with a moustache and dripping beard of squashed fruit as an adornment to his astonished face. Then he opened his mouth to pour forth his soul in an agonising bleat. Tom got in a second shot with the banana skin. With a report like unto that which one makes by bursting an air-distended paper bag, the missile plastered Jimmy's cavernous mouth, smothered his squeal, and sat him down so suddenly that Tom thought his "wind" had stopped for ever. Kneeling beside the boy, he set about kneading his stomach, while Jimmy gasped and glared, making horrible grimaces, as he struggled for breath. Nelly, nervous Nelly, concluding that Tom was determined to thump the life out of Jimmy, assailed him with her bananas and vocal efforts of exquisite shrillness. Just as matters were becoming seriously complicated, Jimmy rolled away, scrambled to his feet, and fled, yelling, to the camp, firm in the belief that his doting father had made an attempt on his young life.

## **THE LOGIC OF THE CAMP**

Poor half-caste Jimmy Yaeki Muggie, a pleasant-voiced lad, who always wore in his face the slur of conscious shame of birth, died apparently from heart failure, an after-effect of rheumatic fever. Tom and Nelly mourned deeply and wrathfully. Smarting under the rod of fate, they sought with indignant mien counsel upon the cause of death.

Jimmy was a young fellow. Why should a young man, who had been lusty until a couple of months ago, die? Somebody must have killed him by covert means. In the first outburst of grief they blamed me. Tom declared, with passion in his eyes, that I had killed Jimmy by making him drunk. The charge was not absolutely groundless, for when the yellow-faced fellow was chilly with a collapse, I had administered reviving sips of whisky-and-water.

Yes, Tom declared in an angry mood, and with the air of one who washed his hands of the whole sad business, the doses of whisky had killed Jimmy. As Tom indulged to the fulness of his heart in the luxury of his woe, he began to reflect further, and to change his opinion.

He mentioned incidentally that whisky was "good." "Before you gib em that boy whisky, he close up dead-finish. B'mby he more better."

Then he began vehemently to protest against the malign influence of some "no good" boy on the mainland, and Nelly, eager to satisfy her own cravings for some definite cause for the ending of the life of a strong boy, supported Tom's vague theories quite enthusiastically. To each distinct natural phenomenon blacks assign a real presence. Even toothache, to which he is subject, Tom ascribes to a malignant fiend, so he asks for a pin which, without a wince, he forces into the decaying bicuspid. His theory is that the little "debil-debil" molesting it will abandon the tooth to attack furiously the obtrusive pin. The affliction upon the camp had certainly been wrought by some boy who had been angry with Jimmy. The how and the why and wherefore of such malignant influence mattered not.

There was the dead boy rolled in his blanket, with a petrified smile on his thin lips. Obviously death



was due to some illicit control of the laws of Nature. No one but a black boy could so grossly intercept the course of ordinary events as to produce death. Such, at least, was the logic of the camp.

Reflecting still deeper, and always with Nelly's unswerving corroboration, Tom began to urge that Jimmy had been poisoned.

"Yes," said Nelly, quite cheerfully, "some boy bin poison em. What's the matter that boy want poison Jimmy? Jimmy good fella!"

"Who poison that boy?" I asked.

"Some fella alonga mainland. .He no good that fella!"

"He bin sick long time. Poison kill em one time quick!"

Tom dissented. "Some boy make em poison slow. I know that kind."

Then he explained. "Some time 'nother fella tchausey belonga Jimmy. He wan make Jimmy shout. Jimmy no wan shout for that boy. They have little bit row."

"That boy wouldn't poison Jimmy because he no shout," I reasoned. "Everybody liked Jimmy."

"Yes," said Tom. "Sometime he might have row."

With an air of mystery, Tom continued: "When that boy have row, he get bone belonga dead man, scrape that bone alonga old bottle. When get little heap all asame sugar, put into tea. Jimmy drink tea. B'mby get sick—die long time. Bad poison that."

Nelly's grief, which had been shrilly expressed at intervals, became subdued as she listened to Tom's theories. To her mind the whole mystery had been settled. There need be no further anxiety, and only formal expressions of grief.

During the rest of the evening the wailing was purely official. Tom's wit had so circumstantially accounted for the event, that it ceased to be solemn.

The next day they dug a hole five feet deep in the clean sand at the back of the humpy, and there Jimmy was laid to rest with the whole of his personal property, the most substantial of which consisted of an enamel billy, plate, and mug. The Chinese matting on which he had slept was used to envelop the body, and the sand was compressed in the grave.

But Tom and his family had gone. He said—and the deep furrows of grief were in his face: "Carn help it. Must go away one month. I bin think about that boy too much."

## **TOM'S PHILOSOPHY**

Tom had been so long intimately associated with cynical white people that several of the more fantastic customs of his race are by him contemned. Accordingly I was somewhat surprised to discover, after a few weeks of rainless weather, during which the shady pool at the mouth of the creek whence the supplies for his camp are drawn had decreased in depth, that he had been slyly practising the arts of the rain-maker.

As a matter of fact Tom was not in need of water, but, calculating fellow that he is, he foresaw the probability of having to carry it in buckets from the creek for the house, and to obviate such drudgery he shrewdly exercised his wit. A thoughtful, designing person is Tom—ever ready to accept the inevitable, with unruffled aboriginal calm, and just as willing—and as competent, too—to assist weary Nature by any of the little arts which he, by close observation of her moods, has acquired, or the knowledge which has been handed down from generation to generation. As it was the season of thunderstorms, he craftily so timed his designs that their consummation was not in direct opposition to meteorological conditions, but rather in consistency with them. Captain Cook found the ENDEAVOUR in a very tight corner on one occasion, out of which he wriggled, and in recording the circumstance wrote: "We owed our safety to the interposition of Providence, a good look-out, and the very brisk manner in which the ship was manned." In a similar spirit Tom's art was exemplified. He watched the weather, while he coaxed the rain.

Some rain-makers tie a few leaves of the "wee-ree" (*CALOPHYLLUM INOPHYLLUM*) into a loose bundle, which is gently lowered into the diminishing pool, in which he then bathes; but all are presupposed to observe the clouds, so that the chances of the non-professional being able to blaspheme

because of non-success are remote. Tom slightly varied the customary process, though he accepted no risk of failure. Cutting out a piece of fresh bark from a "wee-ree"-tree, he shaped it roughly to a point at each end, and having anchored it by a short length of home-made string to a root on the bank, allowed it to sink in the water.

A few yards away, towards the centre of the pool, he made a graceful arch of one of the canes of the jungle (*FLAGELLARIA INDICA*) by forcing each end firmly into the mud, and from the middle hung an empty bottle. The paraphernalia was completed on the Saturday, when the weather was obviously working up to a climax, but I was not made aware of Tom's plans, and as one of the tanks was empty, on the following Monday, with his assistance, I cleaned it out, remarking to him with cheerful irony:

"Now we get plenty rain. Every time we clean out this little fella tank rain comes. You look out! Cloud come up now! We no want carry water from creek."

That night a thunderstorm occurred, during which half an inch of rain fell, to the overflowing of the tank.

In the morning Tom smilingly told of his skill as a rain-maker, while admitting that the cleaning out of the little tank had also a certain influence in the right direction. It was, a pleasant, gentle rain, too, nothing of the violent and hasty character such as Tom had designed, but again he had a plausible explanation.

"Suppose I bin put that mil-gar in water deep, too much rain altogether. We no want too much rain now. After Christmas plenty." Tom asserts that the deeper the pool in which the "mil-gar" is submerged the heavier and more continuous the downpour; but as heavy rain is not liked, only vindictive boys who have some spite to work off indulge in such wanton interference with the ordinary course of the wet season.

The submerged bark which attracts the rain Tom calls "mil-gar," and the suspended bottle (a saucer-shaped piece of bark is generally used) serves to catch PAL-BI (hailstones), which, being, uncommon, are considered weird and are eaten in a dare-devil sort of spirit. In this case PAL-BI had but the remotest chance of getting into the bottle, and for that reason (according: to Tom) none tried. "Suppose I bin put bark all asame plate—look out plenty!"

Many natural phenomena are associated in the folklore of the blacks with untoward events. The rainbow (*AM-AN-EE*) is not regarded by them as a covenant that the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh, but as an evil omen, a cause of sorrow, for to whomsoever shall bathe in the sea when the bow is seen in the cloud evil is certain to befall.

Unprotesting Nelly is assured of this by her own sad experience. In tones of deep conviction, which permit of no manner of doubt, she tells me that *AM-AN-EE* caused the death of her infant—"brother belonga Jimmy." She had bogied at Toorgey-Toorgey, when to her dismay the harbinger of disaster appeared to spring out from the sea. In a week the child was born-dead.

Both father and mother have the tenderest thoughts of that breathless image in bronze. I saw it. Its features were refined, the nose sharp and symmetrical, and the mouth a perfect Cupid's bow. Its expectant repose thrilled me, for it was the realisation of that which Dickens said of little Nell—"a creature waiting for the breath of life."

No marvel they mourned, that Nelly cut her arms with splinters of glass, that she still regards the lovely rainbow with resentment tempered by fear.

Tom does not respond to cross-examination. He thinks his own thoughts and says but little. When he is communicative his veracity is the less to be trusted. Many a time have I sought his opinions on the serious import of life—to find that he has none. His thoughts are concentrated on things which affect the immediate moment. Since he is mentally incapable of denying himself the most trivial recreations upon which his wishes have dwelt, restraint is succeeded by despairing, uncontrollable moroseness pathetic in its genuineness. How could such a temperament reflect upon the future? He is no doctrinaire; he does not credit existence after death—"When you dead, you finish!"

"But," I suggested, "plenty of your country men think about another place when you die—finish."

"Yes, some boy he say when you dead you go long another place. L-o-n-g way. More better place, plenty tucker, no work, sit-down, play about all day. When you come alonga that place father, mother, brother, sit-down—no more can die!"

Then I put a customary question: "Yes, what all go alonga that place like when you die? You father old man when he die. He old man now alonga that good place? Little Jinny young when she die. That fella

young along that place? That piccaninny belonga Nelly—piccaninny alonga that place?"

"Yes, all asame when you die you along that place."

"Good boy and bad boy-rogue, all go one place?"

"Yes. Rogue he got one heaby spear right through. Go in here (indicating the middle of his chest), come out alonga back. Sore fella. That spear fight em inside. My word! Carn pull em out. He no die. Too much sore fella!"

## **DEAD—FINISH**

Since the foregoing was penned Tom has realised the supreme fact of existence. He is dead, and is buried in dry, hot ground away from the moist green country which he knew so well, and was wont to love so ardently.

Although he was "only a black fellow," yet was he an Australian by the purest lineage and birth—one whose physique was example of the class that tropical Queensland is capable of producing, a man of brains, a student of Nature who had stored his mind with first-hand knowledge unprinted and now unprintable, a hunter of renown, and in certain respects "a citizen impossible to replace."

Given protection from the disastrous contact with the raw, unclean edge of civilisation, he and others, his fellows, might have lived for a score of years longer, and in the meantime possibly the public conscience of Australia might have been aroused, and his and their last days made wholesome, peaceable, and pleasant.

There is something more to be said about Tom in order that the attempt to show what manner of man he was may be as complete as the inexorable regulation of death permits.

Strong and substantially built, so framed that he looked taller than the limit of his inches, broad-chested, big-limbed, coarse-handed, Tom's figure differed essentially from that of the ordinary type, and as his figure so his style and mental capacity. Serene in the face of perils of the sea, with all of which he is familiar, he was afraid of no man in daylight, though a child might scare him after dark.

Tom was not as other blacks, for he loved sport. It was not all a question of pot-hunting with him. Apart from the all-compelling force of hunger, he was influenced by the passion of the chase. Therefore was he patient, resourceful, determined, shrewd, observant, and alert. His knowledge of the ways of fish and of the most successful methods of alluring them to his hook often astonished me. He saw turtle in the sea when quite beyond visual range of the white man. Many a time and oft has he hurled his harpoon at what to me was nothingness, and the rush of the line has indicated that the aim was true. He would say when fifty yards of line were out the particular part of the body in which the barbed point was sticking. If it had pierced the shell, then he must play with the game cautiously until it was exhausted and he could get in another point in better holding locality. If the point had entered the shoulder, or below the carapace to the rear, or one of the flippers, he would haul away, knowing that the barb would hold until cut out. When restrained from the sea for a few days he became petulant and as sulky as a spoilt child, for, in common with others of the race, he was morally incapable of self-denial. Big and strong and manly as he was, he became as an infant when circumstances compelled him to forego an anticipated excursion by water, and rather than stay in comfort and safety on dry land would—if he had so set his mind—venture over six miles of stormy sea in a flattie little more commodious than a coffin. He was, on such an occasion, wont to say, "No matter. Suppose boat drowned, I swim along shore, tie em Nelly along a string," meaning that in case of a capsized he would swim to dry land, towing his dutiful, trustful spouse.

Although by nature a true lover of the sea, his knowledge of the plant life of the coast was remarkable. Among his mental accomplishments was a specific title for each plant and tree. His almanac was floral. By the flowering of trees and shrubs so he noted the time of the year, and he knew many stars by name and could tell when such and such a one would be visible. Yet, though I tried to teach him the alphabet, he never got beyond "F," which he always pronounced "if." Perhaps his collapse in literature may have been due to persistent efforts to teach him the difference between "F" and "if" vocalised. He may have reasoned that so finicking an accomplishment was not worth acquiring. In his own tongue he counted thus:—

Yungl One

Bli Two

Yacka Any number in excess of two—a great many.

But in English he did not lose himself until he had passed sixty—at least, he was wont to boast of being able to comprehend that number.

Tom was a bit of a dandy in his way, fond of loud colours and proud of his manly figure. When the flour-bag began to sprinkle his moustache he plucked out one by one the tell-tale hairs until his upper lip became almost barren, but remorseless Time was never made to pause. Though many a white hair was extirpated, Tom was as much at fault as most of us who seek for the secret of perpetual youth, or to evade the buffets of old Father Time.

Opium and rum lured Tom away during the last four years of his life. He was sadly degenerated when I saw him for the last time, and several months after, in a mainland camp, he quarrelled with his half-brother Willie—the same Willie who many years ago in honourable encounter cut a liberal nick out of one of Tom's ears with a razor. Willie probed Tom between the ribs with a spear. While he lay helpless and suffering representatives of the police force visited the spot and the sick man was taken by steamer to a hospital, where he passed away—peradventure, in antagonism to his own personal belief, to that "good place" fancied by some of his countrymen, where tucker is plentiful and opium and rum unprocurable. And unless in that "good place" there are fish to be caught and turtle and dugong, and sting-rays to be harpooned, and other sport of the salt sea available, and dim jungles through which a man may wander at will, and all unclad, to chop squirming grubs out of decayed wood and rob the rubbish mounds of scrub fowls of huge white eggs, and forest country where he may rifle "bees' nests," Tom will not be quite happy there. He was ever a free man, given to the habit of roaming. If there are bounds to that "good place," he will discover them, and will peer over the barricades longingly and very often.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### "DEBILS-DEBILS"

"As, however, there is no necessity whatever why we should posit the existence of devils, why, then, should they be posited?"

Some of the blacks of my acquaintance are ardent believers in ghosts and do posit the existence of personal "debils-debils." Seldom is a good word to be said of the phantoms, which depend almost entirely for "local habitation and a name" upon the chronicles of old men steeped to the lips in the accumulated lore of the camps. Many an old man who talks shudderingly of the "debil-debil" has lived in daily expectation of meeting some hostile and vindictive personage endowed with fearsome malice, and a body which may be killed and destroyed. Therefore, when the old man ventures into the dim spaces of the jungle he is invariably specially armed and his perceptive faculties strained to concert pitch, while the unseen glides always at his elbow providing unutterable thrills, lacking which life would be far less real and earnest.

Only one record has come to my knowledge of the presence of a benign "debil-debil." All the other stories have been saturated with awesomeness and fear. A very intelligent but excessively superstitious boy now living on the Palm Islands was wont to entertain me with graphic descriptions of the one species of "debil-debil" which he feared, and of the most effective plan for its capture. He was under the belief that a live "debil-debil" would be worth more as a curio than "two fella white cockatoo." He imagined that if a "young fella debil-debil" could be caught—caught in the harmless stage of existence—I would give him a superabundance of tobacco as a reward, and that I would keep it chained up "all asame dog" and give it nothing but water. I was frequently warned "Subpose me catch em young fella 'debil-debil' when he come from mother belonga him, no good you give him much tucker. Gib him plenty water. He got fire inside. Smoke come out alonga nose." Given the possibility of its capture, there was no reason why I should not indulge the frugal joy of having a small and comparatively innocent "debil-debil" on the chain. Did not the legendary Maori chiefs keep such pets for the torment of their enemies? Mine would have to console itself with the astonishment and admiration of friends, for, alas! I have not, to my knowledge, an enemy worthy the least of the infernal pangs. Moreover, out of our abundance of rain we could well spare an occasional meat-tinful of water for the cooling of its internal fires.

Now, the method of capture of a piccaninny "debil-debil" was this: Certain manifestations, not explainable and not visible to white men, had revealed to the blacks that a favourite resort of the

species was the sand spit of the Island. Two boys who were wont to discuss their plans, and even to practise them, decided that they must first observe the habits of the "debil-debil," and so arrange to catch the young one when the backs of the parents were turned, for, of course, designs against a full-grown specimen were not only futile, but attended with infinitely greater risks of personal injury than George would accept for love or money. They procured about fifteen yards of cane from one of the creeping palms, from which they removed all the old leaf sheafs and adventitious rootlets, making it perfectly smooth. Crouching low, each holding an end of the cane, which was strained almost to rigidity, the boys, in their demonstration of the feat, were wont to sweep continuously over a considerable area with the idea of getting the cane on the nape of the neck of the assumed "debil-debil," and then to suddenly change places, so that it became ensnared in a simple loop by which the baneful beast was to be choked to submission.

Upon my suggestion a thin line used in the harpooning of turtles was substituted for the cane, with which, however, some most realistic and serious preliminary work towards perfection in the stratagem of "debil-debil" capture had been accomplished in valorous daylight. But though the boys gave many exhibitions of their skill and of the proper attitude and degree of caution, the correct gestures and facial expression for so momentous a manoeuvre, they could never be persuaded to put their skill to the test at the spot where "debils-debils" most do congregate after dark, the consequences inevitable on failure being too diabolical to contemplate.

The conditions never seemed to be absolutely favourable for the deed, for the boys anxiously persuaded me of the craft and alertness of the evil one. Either the night was too bright or too gloomy, or it was so calm that the "debil-debil" would be sure to hear their approach, or so windy that they themselves might possibly be taken unawares. They insisted that "debils-debils" suffered from certain physical limitations; they could not cross the sea—hence the variety native to the Island might be different from the mainland species, and would therefore demand local study before being approached with hostile intentions. I was wont to point out that since the sea presented an impassable barrier, the sand spit, drawn out to a fine point, was just the spot where a piccaninny might be easily rounded up, if it were detected in a preoccupied mood. I suggested that I might be at hand to encounter any untoward results in case of a bungle, but was met with the positive assertion that no "debil-debil," however young and unsophisticated, would "come out" if it smelt a white man.

One of the boys went so far as to select the chain with which the captive was to be secured, and the empty meat-tin whence it was to be schooled to take the only form of nourishment judicious to offer. That he did most truly and sincerely believe the existence of "debils-debils" we had proof every evening, for he would sit at the door of his grass hut, maintain a big, dancing fire, and sing lustily under the supposition that a good discordant corroboree was the most effective scare. Though alleged to be obnoxiously plentiful, the boys could never screw up their courage to the point of a real attempt to apprehend the dreaded enemy to their peace of mind.

Two blacks in the employ of a neighbour went to sleep under an orange-tree early one afternoon, and slumbered industriously while the others worked. The quiet of the drowsy time was, however, suddenly shocked by a great outcry, when the two lazy ones raced towards the workers with every manifestation of fear in their countenances. They declared that while they had slept a piccaninny "debil-debil" had "sat down" on the orange-tree which had afforded them shade, and that when they woke up it was there—"all a same flying fox." All moved cautiously up, and sure enough, hanging head down, was what my friend took to be a veritable flying fox; but he was in a hopeless minority. All scornfully out-voted him, and to this day the blacks assert that "a piccaninny debil-debil" so closely resembles a flying-fox that none but a black boy can tell the difference.

Again, a black boy and his gin slept in an outhouse across the door-space of which they, as usual, made a fire. In the morning, Billy found himself, not in the corner where he had gone to sleep, but close to the fire, and moreover his left arm was "sore fella." With a dreadfully serious face he related his experiences. In the middle of the night a "debil-debil" had entered the hut and, seizing him by the arm, had dragged him towards the door, but being unable to cross the fire, had been compelled to abandon otherwise easy prey. The aching arm proved that he had been dragged by a superior force, and the absence of tracks was assurance that none other than a "debil-debil" could have clutched him. The episode was accepted as one more proof of the horror of "debils-debils" of fire, and of the necessity of such a precautionary measure.

The scene of the only occasion on which a visitant from the land of spirits assumed benign shape is not far from this spot. It is historic, too, from the standpoint of the white man, for it occurred during a "dispersal" by black troopers under the command of mounted police. An old black boy tells the story. Before sunrise the whole camp was panic-struck, for it was surrounded by men with rifles. As the defenceless men and helpless women and children woke up, dismayed, to seek safety in flight, they were shot. One man tumbled down here, another there. The awful noise of the firing, and the bleeding

results thereof, the screams of fear and shrieks of pain, caused paralysing confusion. When it seemed impossible for any one to escape, a big man jumped up, and, standing still, called out to the bloodthirsty troopers, "Kill me fella! Kill me fella!" indicating, with his hand his naked chest. Such audacity had its effect. All the troopers began firing at the noble, self-sacrificing hero; but marvellous to say, he did not tumble down, for though the bullets went through him, no blood gushed out. While he was the only target, the other blacks, including the veracious chronicler, ran away, leaving many dead. He afterwards declared that the "big, good fella boy," who had drawn the fire of the troopers, and whom the troopers could not kill, was a stranger to the camp. No one had ever seen him before or since; but that he appeared at a terrible crisis specially to save the whole camp from butchery was, and is, the emphatic belief of the survivors. This incident was related, or rather dramatically acted, in the presence of an aged native of the Malay Peninsula, whose knowledge of the mysterious was (in his own estimation) far more exact than that of the unenlightened blacks. With eyes sparkling and all his senses quivering under the stress of impatience, he listened to the end, and then burst out, "You fool! That good, big fellow boy, he no boy. That fellow, white man call em ghost! Plenty in my country!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### TO PARADISE AND BACK

"He on honey-dew hath fed  
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

**COLERIDGE.**

A gaunt old man with grizzled head, shrunk shanks, and a crooked arm was the most timid of the strange mob of blacks who, under the guidance of some semi-civilised friends, visited the clearing of a settler on one of the rivers flowing into Rockingham, Bay. Shy and suspicious, his friends had difficulty in reassuring him of the peace-loving character of the settler, whose hut stood in the midst of an orange-grove. In a few days, for no disturbing element existed, the nervousness of the old man in the presence of his host ceased, and it was then noticed that those who had accompanied him from the jungle-covered mountains, as well as the friends he had picked up near the home of the white man, paid him the rare compliment of deference. Well they might, for he was a man of importance, though he lacked clothing, and the elements of decency. The old man's friends—perhaps because of his semi-helplessness, due to the twisted limb—performed various friendly offices for him, and never thought of the spice of any dread avowal, for he was far superior to them all, and righteously was he honoured. The lean Old Man had visited that "undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns." There was no doubt of his actual presence in this. There were his young wife and several companions, male and female, ready to corroborate his story; and was not his crippled arm painful but unimpeachable testimony to the reality of his experiences?

In the telling of the history of a too brief sojourn in the paradise of the blacks the old man took but little part, for his English was NIL. The members of the party knew it by rote, and some of them could make themselves understood. Pieced together—for the story came out bit by bit—it ran thus:

A very long time ago, when the Old Man was young and lusty and the "King" of the tribe, an evil-minded "boy" made great rains. All the rivers overflowed their banks, the palm and tea tree swamps became impassable, the hollows between the hills were filled with water. Week after week it rained continuously, the floods gradually hemming in the camp and restricting the wanderings of the men to one long ridge of forest country. Soon all the food obtainable within such narrow limits was eaten. Every one became hungry, for the camp was large and its daily necessities considerable. Patiently they waited for the subsidence of the waters, but more rain came and the camp grew hungrier than ever. Many sat in their shelters and drank water copiously, thereby creating a temporary sensation of satisfaction.

In the midst of the adversity the Old Man remembered having seen a "bees' nest" up a gigantic tree some distance away. He had not climbed the tree offhand because the feat seemed to be impossible. What might have been just possible on a well-filled stomach was worth hazarding now that he was famishing. So, wading and swimming, he gained the little dry knoll in the centre of which stood an enormous bean-tree, and there, a long way up, was the "bees' nest." With a piece of cane from a creeping palm and a stone tomahawk he slowly ascended the tree, for he was weak and his nerves

unstrung. But he joyed when he reached the "bees' nest," for it was large and full of honey and brood comb—a feast in prospect for the whole camp. Then, as he set to work to chop out the comb, he heard, to his astonishment, voices below, and peering down, saw not only a wife who had departed to the land of spirits a year or so before, but his own mother, who had died when he was a youth. Greeting him in glad tones, they told him to come down, and that they would show him a big camp in good dry country where there was abundance of food.

Descending the tree with the cane loop, he saw that his previous wife was well favoured and fat, that his mother, too, was portly, that they had dilly-bags crammed with tokens of material wealth. They were overjoyed to see him, but expressed wonder that he was so weak when so much good food was available. Saying but little, they struck out for the big camp. The Old Man noticed, as they walked, that a track through the thickest part of the jungle opened up—a beaten, straight track, which he, for all his wanderings, had never before seen. The country was dry, too. Scrub hens and scrub turkeys, cassowaries, wallabies, huge carpet snakes, pigeons, fruits and nuts, bees' nests, and decayed trees full of great white grubs were there in plenty.

Silently and swiftly the three passed along the track through a country which, at every step, became more desirable, and at last emerged on an immense pocket where there was a concourse of gunyahs from which the smoke curled up, and in every gunyah was abundance. Some of the young men were throwing sportful boomerangs and spears; large parties were so absorbed in the pleasure of corroboreeing that no notice was taken of the new-comer. The advent of strangers was too common an occurrence to distract them from unconfined joys. Such a scene, so different from the forlorn, starving, water-beleaguered camp over which the sullen despair brooded, mystified and gladdened.

The cup of happiness overflowed when, conducted through merry throngs to a particular spot, the Old Man was greeted by relations and friends for whom he had once duly mourned, plastering his face with ceremonious charcoal and clay, and denying himself needed food. Yet were they not here, alive, and in the enjoyment of every good thing? It was almost beyond comprehension. Was he not to credit the evidences of his own senses? Was not the food they pressed on him most pleasant to the taste? All the privations due to the flood were talked of familiarly. The scene of plenty was so close to the famine-stricken camp that the Old Man found himself wondering why it had not been found before. Now he knew the spot, and would in due time guide his starving friends hither and make one great camp, where all would live in undreamt-of ease, unrealisable superfluity of food.

For three days he dwelt in the good land with content, lionised by his relatives, taking part in the hunts, the feasts, the corroborees, and being urged never to return to the camp of floods and hunger. Here was bliss. Every wish amply gratified, who would willingly depart from so entrancing a place? And with fervent promises on his lips never to go away he was conscious of a sharp pain in his wrist and found himself crumpled up, stiff, sore, hungry, and helpless, at the foot of the big tree.

Reluctantly back in the land of stress and distress, so woefully weak that he could not stand without swaying, while his right hand dangled helplessly, confused sounds of Paradise still rang in his ears, verifying all that had recently befallen.

He gazed around, dismayed to see no trace of his wife or mother; no clean-cut, straight path leading to the land of pure delight. Far up the tree hung the cane loop; beside him lay the stone tomahawk. All present realities were of pain and hunger. Bewildered, slowly and with much difficulty, he made his way to the flooded camp, noticing as he went that water-courses he had been compelled to swim were now fordable—proof of the lapse of time.

Eyes starved to impassiveness stared at the gaunt, crippled creature, complaining mutely, for no food had been brought. Some muttered that he had eaten it all during his unaccounted absence.

Silently the old man bound up his wrist excruciatingly tight with strips of bark, and then in detail told of his glad sojourn in Paradise.

Then the faces of the famishing lit up with joyous expectancy and—impatient, reckless, heedless of floods, forgetful of weakness born of hunger—one and all hastened to the scene whence began the straight path to the enchanting land. But keen as the best trackers might be, not the least sign in proof of the Old Man's experiences could be found.

The impassive wall of jungle which had opened so agreeably to the Old Man offered no obstacles to the enthusiastic searchers for Paradise. Far and wide, among slim palms standing waist deep in sullen brown water; across flooded creeks and rivers; over hills and mountains; up gloomy gorges into which none had ever before dared to venture, elated, they hastened day after day, glorious enterprise investing them with hardihood and courage. Ardently, hopefully, each vying with the other—for had not the Old Man proved beyond inglorious doubt the nearness and perfection of Paradise?—they pushed

the quest far and beyond the limits of their own small province, and in vain, for they were not of the elect, however loyal and eager.

Years have elapsed, but the Old Man and his friends have not lost faith in the existence locally of the Happy Land. Had he not been hither, led by wife and mother, and did he not remain there three days—the only days of unimpeded joy in his long life? No such rich privilege had ever befallen any one else; but without questioning or envy all verify his words and delight to do him honour.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE DEATH BONE

#### (FACT CEMENTED WITH FICTION)

"In accordance with Nature's designs as he was a good artist he was also good. He possessed nothing but his individuality."

ANON.

Wylo was an artist, and, like all true artists, an artist by grace of God.

His family was not in any sense artistic. Of his lineage all had been forgotten, save a few of the many failings of his grandsire. So none could tell whence the talent that burst into blossom with him had sprung. It had not been transmitted. It was spontaneous; it was a gift; and all such gifts—are they not supernatural?

Gaunt old father and withered old mother would tell that Wylo from earliest boyhood could always "make em good fella along tree"; and now that he was a man and there were the emblems of manhood on his broad chest—deep, cut lines and swelling ridges—and he oft wore his hair long and fuzzy, his hand was very free.

Every morning he traced upon the convenient sand studies vigorous though entirely free from the canons of the schools. No authority existed that could tongue-tie his art. Each steamer, each boat which passed was sketched off-hand, and by some little trick, due to his inspiration, character faithful to the original was imparted. Banana-plants in full fruit and slim palms in cluster were oftentimes his models; but portraiture was not Wylo's forte. On the bark of trees, on flat rocks as well as on the shifting sand he expressed himself plentifully and graphically. He could no more exercise restraint when he found a convenient surface and a piece of charcoal or a lump of soft red stone than he could have recited the Book of Job.

His genius was imperative, almost overbearing. He had been commissioned by an imperious authority to sketch—a fever almost amounting to insanity fired his soul. His work was everywhere, for he had miles of forest and jungle country for his studio, and no hampering, sordid cares to distract him. The light of genius in such an obscure world was unrecognised. Being beyond comprehension, it existed as the coldest commonplace. Not one of his fellows was equipped mentally to register the deviation from the frowsy norm of the camp exemplified in him; and if the camp never produced another artist the default would occasion exactly similar unconcern.

Wylo's masterpiece in portraiture—the one revelation of the human form divine which he permitted himself to accomplish in other than transient sand, was a fancy picture of one of his many sweethearts—a lady in a very old hat and nothing more, with a few boomerangs thrown in to fill otherwise waste space on the inner surface of his shield. Wylo, though strenuous in his love of art is ever economic of the materials by which that love finds such apt expression. His scenes are crowded.

As a warrior, and as a strategist, not altogether as an artist—though sympathy must ever be with him in that o'ermastering talent of his—Wylo also displayed those gifts which proclaim the gifted, though he was true to his race in many of its phases of simplicity. His skill, or rather his supreme striving to appease aesthetic thrills, made Wylo superb in the fight. He developed a meek, affected voice, somewhat mincing ways, and a faraway look in his eyes. These distinctive traits, worn with careless hair, were so original, so intensely entertaining and notoriety-provoking in a camp which had never



possessed the copyright of more than one shabby corroboree, that Wylo made many conquests. For each conquest of the heart he had fought, and the more frequent his fights the more expert and daring he became. Thus did love indirectly raise him eventually to the dignified position of king.

Never before had any man of the camp so many fights on his hands. The artistic instinct caused him to fashion weapons true and perfectly balanced, made his hand the steadier and his aim very sure, while his intense earnestness in love imparted terrific speed to his blows when he beat down his rival's shield with his great short-handled wooden sword. He was enthusiastic as a duellist as he was absorbed in art. It came to pass that when Wylo was not tracing his favourite seascape he was either flirting or engaged in the squally pastime of fighting an aggrieved husband or scandalised lover.

Wylo had so many of the fair sex to do his bidding, that he was relieved of the necessity of troubling himself about food. Frequently, as all manly men do (civilised as well as savage), he longed for the passion of the chase; and then he fished or harpooned turtle or hunted wallabies with spear and nulla-nulla, or cut "bees' nests" from hollow trees, when his face would become distorted by stings and his "bingey" distended with choice honey, and he would without patronage bestow upon gratified female friends, old or brood comb.

Wylo was a man and a king among his fellows, tall, white-toothed, generally decorated with a section of slender yellow reed through the septum of his broad-base nose, and with a broad necklace of yellow grass beads round his neck. He wore clothes sometimes, as a concession to the indecent perceptions of the whites (whom for the most part he despised); though he preferred to be otherwise, for he was a fine figure—not a plaster saint by any means, but a hero in his way and well set up, and an artist by Divine Right.

Handsome, then, of build and limb, if not of feature, the ideal of every female of the camp, a successful warrior, a true sportsman, was it any marvel that Wylo suffered gladly that pardonable transgression of genius—vanity? He oft wore nothing but a couple of white cockatoo feathers stuck in his hair. Thus arrayed he was audaciously irresistible, and provoked the enmity of the crowd. As an artist Wylo was an all-round favourite; but as a dandy all but the women—and he was disdainful of the goodwill of the men—despised while they panted with envy and made grossly impolite references to him.

Now, the sarcastic jibes of a black fellow are not translatable, or rather not to be printed beyond the margin of strictly scientific works. Courageously free and personal, they would be beyond comprehension in these chaste pages. Why, therefore, attempt to repeat them? A genius has been described as a deviation from the average of humanity. This definition exactly suited Wylo, for it was discovered when jibes were flashing about that he was positively inspired. They were as sharp as his spears, as stunning as his sword'.

Yan-coo, the wit of the tribe, a stubby, grim old man, who spent most of his time making dilly-bags and modelling grotesque debils-debils in a pliant blending of bees' wax and loam, to the horror of every piccaninny, soon found that Wylo could talk back with such withering effect, such shatteringly gross personalities that he, who with the spiteful ironies of his venomous tongue had kept the camp in awe, was dazed to gloomy silence by Wylo's vivid flashes of wit. His weird models showed a mind corroding with vicious intent. He dared not open his lips while Wylo was about. The quaking piccaninnies cringed with fear as they watched him working up his malignant feelings into the most awful imps—imps which threatened violence to their souls.

Wylo was supreme. He gloried in his dandyism and in his skill as a fighter. His genius basked in the sunshine as he made high reliefs in the sand or charcoaled pictures on the cool, grey rocks hidden in the sound-sopping jungle. The one weak spot in his character was his faith in a sort of wizardry. Contemptuous alike of the open violence or stratagems of his fellows, he had the utmost horror of an implement which Yan-coo, who was medicine-man as well as chartered wit, reserved for use against mortal enemies.

This terrible tool he had never seen. Very few had, or even wanted to, for its effects were as incomprehensible as they were tragic. Never employed in the exercise of private or individual malice, the death bone was an unfathomable and awful mystery. So dire was its influence that if a woman touched it or even looked at it she sickened.

What was this instrument of death?

A human bone scraped and rubbed to a gradually tapering point, to the thick, knobby end of which a string of human hair, plaited, was cemented, the other end of a length of several yards being similarly cemented to the interior of a hollow bone, also human. When the stiletto-shaped bone is directed towards an individual who has incurred the enmity of the medicine-man, his best heart's blood is

attracted. Drawn from the throbbing organ, it travels along the string and into the hollow receptacle. The pointer is then sheathed and sealed with gum blended with human blood, the string being wound about it. Simultaneously with the extraction of the victim's most precious blood by this subtle and secret process, a pebble or chip of shell is lodged in his body with the result of ensuing agony.

Unaware of these very dreadful happenings, the individual so operated upon may not suffer immediately any ill effect. The wizard watches, and if no untoward symptoms are exhibited he takes into his confidence a friend, and this candid friend tells the inflicted one that he must be ill and dying, for the death-bone has been pointed at him and has done its worst. Fear begets immediate sickness, and if the blood of the patient be not restored and the foreign substance extracted from his spasmodic side with elaborate ritual, death is inevitable.

Ridicule is but a slight shaft to employ against any one who may retaliate with so potent a weapon as the death-bone. In the fulness of his vanity and wit, Wylo began to make gratuitous fun of Yan-coo, who fretted and fumed and terrified the piccaninnies with still more hideous debils-debils. I saw one of them. It resembled a span-long plesiosaurus, afflicted with elephantiasis, and a forked, lolling, tongue extruded from a head that swayed ominously right and left. A tipsy, disorderly, vindictive debil-debil it was, that made the boldest piccaninny shriek with dismay. Wylo with a tiny spear of grass knocked the head of the atrocious debil-debil off, and the piccaninnies changed shrieks for smiles.

That charitable feat sealed his fate. It was the beginning of a duel between wizardry and art.

At night Yan-coo, mute with vengeance, left the camp for the secret hollow, in a mass of granite which held the implements and elements of his craft. While Wylo slumbered and slept the malicious sorcerer directed with every atom of fervour he possessed the grisly death-bone towards him from the distance of half a mile. The influence of the death-bone is so completely under the control of the operator that it usually goes straight to the person against whom he in the dead waste of the night breathes his moody and angry soul away. Should the medicine-man, however, be conscious that the potency is inclined to swerve, if he but put his hand to the right or left it must fly in accordance with his will.

Perfectly unconscious of the dastard trick played upon him, Wylo continued for several days to flirt and fight. He had a glorious time, and so, too, had the piccaninnies, for Yan-coo, for reputation's sake, dared not model debils-debils merely to have their horrible heads knocked off with irreverent grass darts. Rather have no debil-debil than one subject to Wylo's profane but splendid marksmanship. So the naked black kiddies danced about Wylo, while Yan-coo fortified himself with the grim knowledge that he had Wylo's heart's blood securely sealed up, and that Wylo had a pebble in his body which would make him squirm sooner or later.

But, strange though it was, nothing happened to the arrogant Wylo. His physical condition was perfect, his spirits boisterous. The skill of the medicine-man, the whole dread influence of the death-bone were at issue, and to give effect to both Yan-coo whispered that he had employed the death bone against Wylo, because Wylo had become too "flash."

The recital of the deed struck horror and dismay into Yan-coo's confidant. He was shocked at the sacrilege, astounded that Wylo had not yet "tumbled down." It was his duty to tell poor Wylo of his awful fate.

Individuals of other nationalities in all ages have been proof, as Wylo was, against unimagined evils.

"There may be in the cup  
A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart,  
And yet partake no venom; for his knowledge  
Is not infected; but if one present  
The abhor'd ingredient, make known  
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides  
With violent hefts."

"His knowledge infected," Wylo collapsed forthwith in a spasm of fright. All the prognostics of the medicine-man were verified. Wylo's hair became lank, his eyes dull, his teeth yellow, his face pinched, his limbs weak. He spat frequently and groaned. He pined daily, for he slept little and his appetite was gone. Knowing that the fatal death-bone had been pointed at him, what was the use of attempting to resist inevitable fate? Rather would he resistlessly meet it. How was it possible to live without his precious blood, now sealed up in the death-bone? And he had a horrible pain in his side where the stone was—just as Yan-coo had said.

All the camp knew what had happened. Yancoo's reputation had been grimly asserted. Every one now

dreaded him anew. Again he was king. Though it was contrary to all precedent to point the death-bone at a member of the tribe, yet had Yan-coo made a law unto himself and his own justification, and the proudest testimonial to his skill was Wylo's deplorable condition.

Wylo became thinner and weaker every day, for Yan-coo, seething, with malignity, stood aloof, declining to interfere. To him Wylo's gibes had been more cruel than the grave, for they had had the grace of originality, and once and for ever he purposed to shake his authority and dreaded power over the heads of the affrighted camp.

The death-bone was slowly but implacably doing its office.

Among Wylo's many sweethearts was one who, in early youth, had been kidnapped from a distant camp. She it was who took the news of Wylo's direful sickness there, and implored the aid of a rival medicine-man. Glad of the chance of exhibiting his knowledge and skill in a case which was notorious and to outsiders absolutely hopeless, he followed the girl.

After making no doubt whatever that Wylo's blood had been abstracted, that an angry stone was lodged in his side, and that death was imminent unless prompt measures were taken, the strange medicine-man chanted long and weirdly. He squeezed and Pommelled Wylo, and made tragic passes with his hands over his body and limbs. Then suddenly he applied his lips to Wylo's sore side, and, after loudly sucking, exhibited between them an angular piece of quartz which he triumphantly declared he had drawn from his patient's body. Everybody, including Wylo, believed him.

Wylo brightened up at once. The two medical men, whose interests were common—for the profession is very close and regardful of its rights and privileges—consulted, communicating by signs and gibberish not understood of the people. Accompanied by a few of the elders of the camp, they went to Yan-coo's surgery, took out the death-bone, and with much ceremony unsealed it.

Blood stained the interior! All could see that it was Wylo's blood. It could be none other, for none but Wylo had been deprived of any. Ostentatiously the medicine-men washed the death-bone clean, restored it to its unholy nook, and returned solemnly to the camp.

After deliberate and impressive silence it was announced by moody Yan-coo that Wylo's heart's blood had been restored, whereupon that hero rose to his feet sound and well though lean.

No word of anger or complaint passed Wylo's lips the while he regained normal strength and gaiety. With frank ardour he resumed his sketchings and flirting with old-time success. He actually modelled the grossest of debils-debils for the piccaninnies and impaled all the vital parts with grass darts, while the piccaninnies broke into open jeers at Yan-coo, for the spell of the debil-debil had been destroyed.

Such outrages upon the craft of the sorcerer could not be tolerated. But Wylo watched Yan-coo, and one night as he strolled out of the camp Wylo followed with that light-footed caution and alertness significant of his artistic perceptions. Wylo carried a great black-palm spear fitted into a wommera with milk-white ovals of shell at the grip.

Yan-coo went straight to his surgery. Once more he prepared the death-bone. Every detail of the unholy rite was performed with determination, for he had abandoned all remorse.

As he pointed the death-bone towards the camp where, as he supposed, Wylo rested, that hero cast his spear. He was strong. He had the sure eye of the artist, the vigorous hate of a black.

When they found Yan-coo next morning he was still kneeling on one knee, for the polished spear had impaled him, and, sticking six inches into the ground before him, kept him from falling. With his chin on his left shoulder and his right hand still retaining the string of the death-bone, he had died as unconscious of the hand of the artist as the artist had been primarily of his wizardry.

White folks heard of the, "murder." Wylo was apprehended and put on trial. The solemn and upright judge could not learn the true facts of the case, since the witnesses were incapable of intelligently stating them. Wylo, who had promptly confessed to the crime in the terms, "Me bin kill 'em that fella one time—finish," but who was denied the right of explaining that Yan-coo had been prosecuting designs against his life quite as effectual as a spear, and that Yan-coo had been "justifiably killed," was sent to gaol for several years.

Constraint was dreadful to him, and the sorest trial which he endured was the suppression of artistic longings; but he made pictures, he tells me, everywhere—"alonga wind, alonga cloud altogether, alonga water, alonga dirt, alonga stone." They were mostly imaginative, but to his mind, in fine frenzy rolling, they were soothing and real. He made pictures out of airy nothing, and gloated over them with his mind's eye. No power other than that which had bestowed the breath of life could subdue the

beneficent mania that exalted his soul.

Wylo, is at the camp, sketching, flirting, and modelling fearsome debils-debils for a new generation of hilarious piccaninnies.

THE END

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