

SIR JOHN, MISS AMY, JOSEPH, AND CHARLES

BY JAMES NORMAN HALL

I

It has long seemed to me a fitting thing that the nomads among men should give some account of their wanderings to the Spartan souls who carry on the world's work. This becomes almost an obligation on the part of those who wander from choice; for they enjoy the privilege only because most of their fellows forego it, that harvests may be gathered, wheels kept turning, and children born and reared in something better than gypsy fashion. Some attempt at a compensation must be made for the great boon of freedom, of foot-looseness. Wayfarers who return disillusioned from their travels should, whenever occasion offers, acknowledge the fact, to the end that those who have remained behind may be the more content with their home-keeping ways. As for the others who return refreshed in body and spirit — well, this too, perhaps, should be as frankly admitted, if for no better reason than that the Spartan souls may have the sterner enjoyment of self-denial. Thus may all itinerants render some small service to Society, and — those who will — take the road light-heartedly again.

I must confess at the outset that, after a long voyage among island solitudes, I find myself anything but disillusioned by the experience. I sailed for months together over unfrequented seas, touching at islands surpassing in beauty any that I had ever before seen or imagined. I traveled on foot over lofty mountain-ranges, and mused

through long afternoons from some high vantage-point, looking out over an empty azure world. I explored once-populous valleys which the jungle has long since claimed again for her own; and, at night, I slept under the stars among the ruins of a forgotten civilization.

I do not know what, if anything, I was seeking among these lost and lonely lands. Assuredly it was not romance; and experience had taught me that a conscious search for adventure is as likely as not to prove unsuccessful. But the matter is of no consequence. Finding it necessary to settle down to something, I decided to settle down to wandering; and now, long afterward, I am still surprised at the wisdom displayed in the choice, both of a vocation and of the rich field where I was to follow it.

One adventure, however, I did consciously seek from the beginning of this year of idleness; and, contrary to probability and to all expectation, it was realized. This may have been due to the fact that the conception of it was accidental, the adventure itself trivial, and that I entered upon it almost against my will. After a brief sojourn in a tropical island port, — a jumping-off place in the South Pacific, — I had taken passage on a trading schooner, and was busy packing my belongings into a sea chest which I had just bought at a Chinaman's shop. While going through my books, trying to decide what ones I would have most need of during the long absence, it oc-

curred to me that I had become foolishly dependent upon books for diversion and companionship. 'What an unfortunate habit it is,' I thought, 'that of forever probing into other men's minds instead of examining the content of one's own! To be sure, it is a comfortable recreation. It gives one a factitious sense of intellectual wealth; but there is something ignoble about it when done to excess. Why not give it up, for a time at least? Why not leave all my books behind?'

I stopped in the midst of my packing, struck by the daring nature of the idea, trying to realize what a bookless year would mean among remote islands where reading offers almost the only intellectual distraction. Should I make the experiment? I thought of a dozen good reasons why I should not, but I was forced to put them aside. They were not good enough. No, if I lacked courage now for this temporary enfranchisement, I should remain a book-slave to the end of my days. I decided to abandon my traveler's library. I would not even take a dictionary or an almanac, not a printed page of any description — not so much as a newspaper wrapped around a pair of boots.

But because the spirit cried out against so complete a renunciation, I altered the plan to this extent: although I would take no books of my own, I would not refuse any which chance might throw in my way. This would give an added zest to the adventure, and it would be interesting to see what sort of literary driftwood had been cast up on these distant islands. Probably I should find nothing. At most, there would be so little that I would be in no danger of overindulgence in reading. So, hastily repacking my box of books, not daring to take a last look at these old friends, I left them where they would be well cared for, and set out for the waterfront. I felt that, as

soon as I had reached it, I should be committed to my experiment. There could then be no question of turning back.

It was just midday, the hour for the siesta, and the avenue bordering the harbor was deserted except for three or four fruit-venders dozing in the shade of their sidewalk booths. The schooner upon which I was to sail lay alongside the wharf. Bunches of green bananas and mountain plantain, baskets of oranges, limes, and mangoes were fastened to the rail along either side, for we were bound for the Low Islands, where none of these fruits are to be had. Native passengers were scattered over the forward deck, with their food-boxes and bedding-rolls piled around them; and in the shelter of a bit of canvas rigged over the main boom, the captain of the vessel, himself a half-caste native, was sleeping beside his Polynesian sailors.

The scene was as picturesque, as bizarre, as my northern, inland-bred fancy could desire; and at another time an hour of leisure would not have sufficed for the enjoyment of it. But now I was eager to be off. The bell in the cathedral tower struck the quarter past, and we were not to sail before two, at the earliest. What should I do meanwhile? I walked up and down the wharf and fell to thinking of my books, and from thinking to longing for one of them, as a man who has just renounced smoking longs for tobacco. It was clear that I must find diversions to take the place of reading, something to tide me over these first weeks of abstinence.

One occurred to me at the moment: I might make a list of all of the people I had ever known with any intimacy. It seemed absurd, but I was in no position then to be discriminating; and so, dragging my sea chest into a shady corner and getting out my notebook, I began jotting down the names of people

associated with very early childhood: Nancy Throckmorton, our old nurse; Mr. Francis, who used to saw our wood in winter; Dr. Holland, who lost a leg in the Civil War; John Keipp, who gave me my first hair-cut; old Mr. Phlaum, who had a little photographic studio on wheels — I soon had an astonishing list. Here was a diversion which would occupy my leisure indefinitely. One name suggested another; and they recalled memories, odors — the smell of Mr. Prouty's harness-shop, where we used to go for whiplashes; of chalk in musty schoolrooms; of rain and muddy streets. Little gusts of boyhood emotion swept across the senses. I saw the shadows of naked branches on the snow in the moonlight, and my mother going down a stairway with a lamp in her hand, and the darkness creeping up the walls behind her.

I was interrupted in the midst of this occupation. Someone touched my arm, and, looking up, I saw the proprietor of the hotel where I had been stopping. 'You forgot this,' he said, holding out a book. 'One of my girls found it in your room when she was tidying up. It was in the clothespress. You see what trouble I take for my guests? Ah, this heat! We must have some rain soon. Well, *au revoir et bon voyage!* You come back and see me some time.'

He went bustling off through a long warehouse and into the clear sunlight beyond, his slippers raising little clouds of dust which hung motionless in the air long after he had gone. Then, timidly, I looked at the book which he had left. Froissart's *Chronicles of England, France, and Spain*. My heart leaped when I read the title, and I shouted mentally, 'It is n't mine!' It was n't. It must have been left in the clothespress by some former occupant of the room. Therefore I might keep it. Since the renouncement of my own books became final at the waterfront, I might in

good faith accept this gift of chance. And what a gift it was! Froissart's *Chronicles!*

It was an 'Everyman' reprint; and, as I held it in my hand, the cover fell open at the familiar Shakespeare quotation opposite the title-page: 'This is fairy gold, boy, and 't will prove so.' Well I knew it! I turned the pages at random, and my eye fell upon the following paragraph: —

When the men-at-arms perceived that the first battalion was beaten and the one under the Duke of Normandy in disorder and beginning to open, they hastened to mount their horses, which they had close at hand. As soon as they were all mounted they gave a shout of 'St. George for Guienne!' and Sir John Chandos said to the Prince, 'Sir, sir, now push forward for the day is ours! God will this day put victory in your hand. Let us make for our adversary, the King of France, for where he is will lie the main stress of the business. . . . I well know that his valour will not let him fly, but he must be well fought with, and you have before said that you will this day show yourself a good knight.' The Prince replied, 'John, get forward. You shall not see me turn my back this day; I will always be among the foremost.' He then said to Sir John Woodland, his banner-bearer, 'Banner! Advance in the name of God and St. George!'

Looking up from the page, I saw the captain of the Kaeo lift his head and look round inquiringly, as if he had been roused from sleep by that ghostly cry made audible across the centuries. And indeed, such is the magic of Froissart, the air of the drowsy little port seemed loud with the shouts of men who have been in their graves these past five hundred years; with the thunder of hoofs and the shock of the meeting. I closed the book and the tumult died away. I heard again the creaking of the schooner's gangplank, and where had been the plains of Maupertuis and the distant towers of Poitiers, lay the empty

lagoon, placid in the shelter of the hills, with the shadow of a cloud moving slowly across it.

II

Thus hopefully began my small adventure, but it would have been too much to expect that the first good fortune would be often repeated. For many a day Sir John Froissart was my only companion; but I did not then wish for another, either in the flesh or between the covers of a book. As the weeks passed I became more and more enamored of the lonely life of the islands. Infrequently I encountered other white men who were enamored of it, too, but to a far greater extent; men who have willingly cut themselves off from their kind, not for a few months, but for years, for all time. Because of a mistaken sense of compassion for their loneliness, perhaps, I find myself often thinking of these exiles. It seems to me that, if I forget them, they will cease to exist. There was an appalling completeness to their isolation which half convinced me that I have been mistaken in believing such a life more desirable than the herded existence most of us know.

And yet there are a few men, singularly endowed, for whom it is, unquestionably, more desirable. I remember very well my meeting with the first of these, for it was then that I made what may be called a second addition to my wanderer's library. I had long since left the Kaeo, and was traveling on a thirty-ton native cutter, which was picking up small lots of produce at islands either too poor or too remote to be visited by the larger vessels. The captain was a Low Islander named Tahari, an Atlantean man, an excellent sailor, but with no knowledge of navigation. He depended entirely upon his compass, so that, if we were carried off our course by winds or currents, we

often cruised about for several days in search of an island, and made land-falls fifty, or even a hundred, miles distant from where we thought we were.

This happened one day in late summer, when we had had an unusually anxious time of it. Even Tahari had lost his confidence, and sat at the wheel scanning the unbroken skyline in gloomy silence. At length, by sheer luck, nothing else, we sighted an atoll which lies on the outermost fringe of the far-flung archipelago known as the Cloud of Islands.

It was a white man who welcomed me when the difficult landing over the reef had been managed. He was about thirty years old, rather slightly built, and dressed native fashion, in a *pareu* and a pandanus hat. His hair, where not protected by his hat, had been burned to a rusty yellow, and the naked part of his body was quite as brown as those of the natives. I did not see him at first, for I was picking my way among the sea urchins through the shallows behind the reef; but, hearing English spoken, I looked up quickly. I shall not soon forget how his face beamed at my reply.

'Jove!' he said, 'what a piece of luck! I thought you might be French, and I have n't talked with an Englishman — I can't remember how long ago it was.'

I told him that I was an American, which seemed to please him none the less. He himself, he said, was English only on his father's side. His mother was a Dane, but he had been born and reared in the south of England. There were several tons of copra to be loaded, and as it was then late in the afternoon I willingly accepted his invitation to spend the night ashore. His house stood apart from the others in the village, and like them was wholly of native construction, containing but one room, which was furnished with a wooden chest, a cot, a table, and one chair. I

looked around the walls for a shelf of books, but there was none.

Our dinner that evening consisted of a tin of vegetable soup and some fish broiled over an open fire. Afterward we went for a stroll along the lagoon beach, and, our talk having turned to books, I said that I was a little surprised to see none in his house. He then told me that he had formerly been a great reader, but had lost all his books on the way to the islands. He had missed them greatly, at first, but now found that he got along very well without them.

'The unfortunate thing,' he said, 'about books, good books, to a man out here, is that they are too stimulating. If I were to begin reading again, I should become restless. I should want to do something, go somewhere.'

'Well,' I replied, 'would that be such a misfortune? Don't you intend ever to leave this place? Does n't the life become monotonous after a time?'

'Not to me. I have enough to think about. I have no desire to leave.'

'But what do you do with your leisure?' I asked. 'I should think you would feel the need of some distraction?'

'Oh, I fish, and — well, if you were not with me to-night, I should be walking as we are now, along this beach. What need has one for books, for distractions, in a place like this?'

'I know,' I said, 'I can understand that a man might be very happy if —'

I did n't finish the sentence, and we were both silent for several minutes. I was trying to imagine what a life of such unrelieved monotony would do to a man in ten years, in twenty. What would this chap be like at the end of his days, if he remained isolated from his own kind? Three years had had no noticeable effect upon him, except, perhaps, that it had given him a pensive cast of countenance and a dreamy, half-reluctant manner of speaking. But I could not see him as an old man.

Neither could I imagine what sort of a boyhood his had been.

He did, however, make one reference to his boyhood, in addition to the earlier one as to where it had been spent. We had returned to his house, and he was telling me of the pleasure he got from the reading of old newspapers left him by some trader. He read everything in them, he said. He liked these broken glimpses of the outside world. News of political events, in particular, interested him. He would conjecture what had led up to them and what might follow, but it was only rarely that he was ever able to learn. Several times he had found his forecasts very accurate. Now and then he came upon a bit of verse copied from some magazine.

'Several months ago,' he said, 'I found something which pleased me very much. I don't know just what it is. It does n't appear to be either prose or poetry; but no matter. It is a description of an autumn day in Venice, but it might have been written of the south of England, where I was born.'

He opened the clothes chest and took from it a scrapbook.

'Oh, yes! Here it is.' He moved the lamp closer, and then, in his soft clear voice, read me the following lines: —

Leaves fall,
Brown leaves,
Yellow leaves streaked with brown.
They fall,
Flutter,
Fall again.
The brown leaves
And the streaked yellow leaves
Loosen on their branches
And drift slowly downward.
One,
One, two, three,
One, two, five.
All Venice is a falling of autumn leaves,
Brown, and yellow streaked with brown.

He looked up inquiringly. 'Is n't that fine? I don't like reading it often, though. It makes me homesick. I see our old place in Kent on a quiet

November morning, with the leaves falling in little sudden clusters as they do after a heavy frost. I told you that I'm happy here, but I'm not — quite. I miss the good English autumn. I know that it's mostly a cold drizzling season, but I remember only the best of it. But what do you call this sort of writing — is it something new?'

The lines had been clipped from a Sydney newspaper, but the author's name was not given. Long afterward, I found them again in a book of Miss Amy Lowell's. I remember very well the circumstances. I was sitting at a table in the reading-room of a great public library. It was just about the dinner-hour, and most of the frequenters of the place had gone. There was one man, a Mexican, or a Cuban perhaps, sitting opposite me, and at a distant table I saw a pair of hands busily sorting some papers within the circle of light made by a green-shaded lamp. I had noticed this before, however, or it may have been afterward. At the moment I was seven thousand miles away, on an atoll in the mid-Pacific. I saw the chap with the sunburned hair, with his scrapbook before him and a lamp at his elbow; and I could hear him saying, —

One, two, three,
One, two, five, —

with the picture in his mind of leaves falling on a windless autumn day in Kent.

III

On leaving the island of the homesick Englishman, Tahari set a course for an atoll one hundred miles to the south-east; but head-winds and variable currents caused him to lose his bearings again, and we went farther astray than ever we had up to that time. After several days of aimless wandering, we sighted a small schooner far to windward. It was an extraordinary piece of luck. Only those who know that lonely

part of the Pacific can realize how unusual such a meeting is. When she was close enough for an examination through binoculars, I saw that she was carrying an immense deck-cargo of lumber, which was stacked around the galley, cut into short lengths, and corded in every foot of available space. When she was within hailing-distance, her captain, a white man with a great bushy beard, shouted, 'Ver you going, — Sout' Amerika?'

'Not if I can help it!' I shouted back. 'I'm coming with you if you 'll take me'; for I had decided that the South Pacific is no ocean to be sailing with a man of Tahari's accomplishments.

The schooner came into the wind, and the situation having been made clear, the white man consented to take me as passenger, and I was carried over in the small boat. Tahari went with me, and was put right as to his position. We had, in fact, been sailing straight for the coast of South America, about four thousand miles distant. Tahari bade me a cordial farewell and went off into the blue with renewed confidence; and although I afterward made many inquiries, and was constantly on the lookout for a thirty-ton cutter painted blue with yellow trimmings, I neither saw nor heard of it again.

My new captain was a Norwegian-German, a man of about sixty, who had spent most of his life in the islands. He was subject to moods of the most gloomy depression, and talked so convincingly of committing suicide, that I thoroughly believed, at first, that he meant to do it. The cause of his depression was his sense of man's insignificance. 'I feel so léetle, leetle, leetle!' he would say, as we sat on deck looking at the stars. 'I vont to chump oferbort. You vait! Von of dese days ven I get my courach!' But within a few hours he would brighten up, and be as genial and care-free as his Paumotuan sailors.

He lived at one of the southernmost atolls of the Low Archipelago, and was on his way home from Pitcairn Island, where he had gone to salvage lumber from a shipwrecked vessel. He gave me an account of the change in the life at Pitcairn due to the building of the Panama Canal. That old-time hiding-place of the *Bounty* mutineers had once been the loneliest of all islands; but now quite frequently steamers bound through the canal to New Zealand and Australia stop there for an hour or two. One came at the time of his visit, and he had carried a load of fruit off to her in his small boat. One of the passengers had given him a bundle of books to take home with him.

'Books?' I said; 'what kind of books?'

'Picture-books. You see for yourself.'

He brought out a small bundle of magazines: a copy of *Vanity Fair*, some *Saturday Evening Posts*, and several motion-picture periodicals.

'I gif dese to my chilern,' he said, 'but dis von is too long to read. Maybe you vant?' and he handed me a copy of Conrad's *Lord Jim*.

Books have, for me, a value beyond that of music or of odors as memorials of time and place, and in a moment I was carried back ten years to a noisy little restaurant on Washington Street, Boston, where I first heard of Conrad, of *Lord Jim*, and to the day spent on a park bench on Boston Common, when I first read it. This first memory has been in no way effaced or supplanted by many subsequent readings; but the latest one I recall with particular relish, because of the combination of events which made it possible. I shall always regard it as one of the excellent minor results of the building of the Panama Canal, more than adequate compensation for weeks of anxiety on a thirty-ton cutter, and the good in an ill wind which drove a three-masted lumber-laden schooner on the rocks at Pitcairn.

IV

When next I had an opportunity to continue my wanderings, I followed a deviating course for two months, almost forgetting my quest for bookish adventure in the interest of changing scenes. For days at a time *Lord Jim* and Froissart's *Chronicles* lay undisturbed in the bottom of my sea chest, while the chest itself, becoming more and more scarred and weather-stained, was carried over beaches of sun-bleached coral in the Low Islands, along slippery valley-trails under the deep shade of the maple trees of the high islands. At length, at the close of summer, it was set down on a verandah that overlooks one of the least frequented ocean-reaches in all the South Pacific. There, in all truth, were

. . . the moonlit solitudes mild
Of the midmost ocean.

I doubt whether, since the dawn of steam navigation, a smudge of smoke has ever stained the purity of the skies above it. Once in five or six months, a small schooner, such as the one in which I was traveling, creeps above the rim of the horizon, bringing a bag of mail to the solitary white resident, another exile, and supplies of tinned food sufficient to relieve a diet of cocoanuts and fish during the period until the next visit. During the rest of the time he is alone of his kind, on an atoll numbering forty-five inhabitants.

I spent a week with him while the schooner was visiting another island seventy-five miles distant. I was reluctant to accept his hospitality for so long a time; but it seemed genuinely offered, and when he told me he had a library I might enjoy browsing through, I could not refuse so excellent an opportunity for carrying on my researches. 'My library,' he called it. I could see that he was proud of it, and he had reason to be. After a brief examination,

it was clear to me that here was no crazy edifice built of odds and ends of literary driftwood, but a fine structure, thoughtfully and solidly erected. It was like a bridge, spanning this island solitude and the outside world; like a splendid aqueduct, along which flowed a stream of living thought.

During the mornings I explored the island with my host, or we fished from a canoe anchored to a mushroom of coral which rose from the bottom of the lagoon about a mile offshore. We slept during the heat, and in the evenings sat with books piled around us, reading and talking until the small hours.

I have never seen any place congenial to the reading of books that could compare with my host's verandah. The nights were cool and fresh; there were no insect annoyances, and one could read hour after hour, without so much as a moth knocking against the shaded lamp. A broad stairway gave directly upon the waters of the outer lagoon, about a half a mile wide at that point. Beyond lay the barrier reef, where the surf, piling up in smooth combers, broke evenly, with a reverberating boom, followed by a long-drawn-out sigh as the sea foamed over the shallows to the beach. Beyond that, in turn, lay the open sea, unbroken by any land for over sixty-five degrees of longitude. Oh! it was the idealization of a book-lover's paradise; and that I should have found there a volume which had been the object of a long and fruitless search — it was another of those fortuitous circumstances which made my so-called bookless experiment so worth while.

The book was the narrative of the voyage of the missionary ship *Duff* to the islands of the South Pacific — a voyage undertaken in the years 1796–97–98, when such travel was a hazardous business. I had long known of its existence, but all my inquiries had been to no purpose. *The Voyage of the Duff?*

No one seemingly had ever heard of it, and yet I knew that, at the time of its publication, in 1799, the list of subscribers had numbered more than fifteen hundred. What had become of all those old copies, with their charts of islands then almost unknown, and their engravings of strange idyllic scenes on the shores of heathen lands? The question as to one of them was answered by my host during the first evening that I spent with him. 'Here,' he said, 'is something you will enjoy'; and he placed the volume in my hands.

Enjoy it? Indeed I did! It is a story to refresh one weary of the extravagant straining after atmosphere of modern books of travel. It is made up largely of excerpts from the diaries of those who were sent on this first great christianizing enterprise of the London Missionary Society — a consecutive story, in minute and fascinating detail, of their wanderings from the time of leaving England; their sojourn in the islands, where mission stations were established; their observations on the life around them; their attempts at christianizing savages; and the book closes with an account of the return of the *Duff*, three years later, empty of her passengers, who had remained in exile to carry on the work for which they believed themselves chosen by a Divine Providence.

Night after night I read on in this obscure *Odyssey*, marveling at the freshness of its interest after all these years, the dignity and beauty of its language, the simple unquestioning minds of its creators and their stores of mountain-moving faith. It was impossible not to smile now and then at their ejaculatory piety. Nothing happened during the entire course of their adventures, but the hand of the Lord was in it. One of them thus chronicles an event which took place on shipboard during the five months' voyage to Tahiti: —

This afternoon we witnessed a remarkable interference of Divine Providence in our favour. The pitch-kettle being placed on the fire by the carpenter whilst caulking the decks, the man who was left in charge of it suffered it to boil over. Immediately it blazed up with surprising fury. He had, however, the presence of mind to lift it off the fire and prevent the dreadful conflagration. Through the goodness of God no harm was done, and the fire put out in an instant. Oh! the wonders of His care who hath said: 'He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye!'

The bounty of nature, the genial climate, and the beauty of the islands gave the missionaries cause for much concern. They were in constant fear lest they should consciously enjoy themselves in this tropical Eden; lest they should forget their duties as mortifiers of the flesh. Shortly after the arrival of the Duff at Tahiti, another of them wrote in his journal:—

Oh Lord! How greatly hast Thou honored me! a poor *worm!* Lord, Thou hast set me in a heathen land, but a land, if I may say so, flowing with milk and honey. Oh! put more grace and gratitude into my poor cold heart, and grant that I may never, like Jeshurun, grow fat and kick.

Alas! two of the ship's company did follow the example of Jeshurun — John Micklewright, the captain's steward, and Samuel Templeton, the cabin boy. Five months at sea, under the close supervision of the missionaries, with 'the songs of Zion rising continually over the deep,' as the record says, was a little too much for them. At the first opportunity, they escaped into the bush; they could neither be captured nor persuaded to return.

But if I yield further to the temptation of quoting, I shall never have finished. It is a pity that there is no cheap reprint of this absorbing tale of heroism and adventure. It is as worthy as Froissart's *Chronicles* of being made accessible to the public at large, although

it might not be a profitable venture.

My host's copy, not having been found in a clothespress by his maid-of-all-work, I forgave him for not assuming it to be mine. My memory of it, and of the week spent in reading it, suffices. As for the man himself, I can still see him striding along the one street of the village, his mind occupied with a round of small duties, and the innumerable concerns of the islanders. I have often wondered, since, what could be the secret of his content. Not mere love of books. He is too rugged for that. In energy, in the healthiness of his outlook, in the conscious enjoyment of the life he had chosen and the keenness of his interest in what is taking place in the world at large, he stands apart from all the white men whom I met during this year of lonely wandering. He seemed master of an environment which is notoriously hostile to men of our race; and yet, somehow, he gave the impression that he mastered it daily, that the fight was never at an end. 'There we are! That's done!' he would say of some trifling task; and one felt that he regarded it as a thing of great significance. His satisfaction in the accomplishment of it seemed grotesquely out of proportion to the task itself. It is long since we said good-bye, but my recollection of him is as clear as tropical sunlight, and as warm as his hospitality during one of the pleasantest weeks I have ever read.

V

After a period of overindulgence, it was in keeping with the nature and intent of my experiment that there should be a long interval of abstinence; and so it happened. Then I made a fourth and last addition to my library, which came so seasonably to the day, that I am reluctant to speak of it, lest it be thought that Chance played too persistently benevolent a part in my

trivial adventures. However, I can but tell of the event as it occurred.

I was at that time a passenger on a three-masted schooner whose captain, one of the most genial and reminiscent of all South Sea skippers, has been trading in the Eastern Pacific since the late seventies. One of the first things I noticed was that he used his dividers for cleaning his pipe, and that he took no observations. The log, beautifully burnished and polished, hung from a hook in his cabin. I saw no sextant, although there was a chronometer ticking in a little cabinet above his bunk.

'I keep it wound up,' he told me later. 'Sort of habit. You get used to doing a thing, and you can't leave off; but for all the use I make of it, I might as well chuck it overboard.'

This was during the early part of a voyage to the Marquesas, and I was a little uneasy, remembering my experience with Tahari.

'But how can you be sure of your position?' I asked.

He looked at me for a moment and then he shouted, 'Tané! Tané! Come aft!'

Tané, a native boy, with one yellow fang protruding beyond his upper lip, came from the galley.

'Draw me a pail of water,' said the captain. Tané drew it and the captain poured it slowly back over the side, examining it critically meanwhile. Then, without a hint of a smile, he said, 'We'll pick up Fakarava at four-thirty.'

We did n't, however. We did n't sight it until twenty minutes to five, and then it was from the masthead. The captain explained that the error was due to the fact that the water had been drawn too close to the vessel's side. 'It's got to be clean,' he added. 'If there's any foreign matter in it, it throws me off my reckoning a couple of miles.'

On the eighteenth of December we

entered the pass of an atoll which was to be our last stop before proceeding to the Marquesas. Here was another white resident, a Scotchman, a man with a drooping moustache and an air of persistent melancholy.

'He has reason to be discouraged,' the captain told me as we were going ashore. 'He has been through three hurricanes, and each time he lost everything he had — house, trade-goods, everything.'

After some talk about the price of copra, the Scotchman was invited to have dinner on board.

'Are you going to have Irish potatoes, Joe?' he asked.

'I'm sorry, Mac. We have n't a spud left. We used up the last of them about a week ago.'

The exile said nothing, but, clasping his hands, he pressed them tightly together in a gesture so eloquent of bitter disappointment that any expression either of regret or sympathy seemed useless.

After a moment of silence, the Scotchman said, 'You have n't any books you want to trade, have you?' Without waiting for a reply, as if to forestall a further disappointment, he added, 'No, I don't suppose you have.'

'You're wrong there, Mac, old man,' said the captain. 'I've a bundle of them all ready for you. Come aboard to *kaikai* anyhow. I've got some tinned peas that will melt in your mouth. You'll forget all about the spuds.'

'You better come and have a look at my books first,' he replied. 'Maybe you won't want to trade.'

We followed him to his store, a tumble-down shed made of bits of corrugated iron, the boards of old packing-cases, and roofed with biscuit-tins hammered out flat. The room was almost bare of trade-goods. There was a half-barrel of flour in one corner, and some unsacked copra in another. A bolt of *pareu* cloth,

faded at the edges, lay on a dusty shelf, among odds and ends of fishing gear; and back of the counter there was a pile of empty nail-kegs. The Scotchman brought out his reading-matter, a copra sack half filled with it. I made no examination of the contents then, except to assure myself that by the word 'books' he meant, as did the captain, magazines—story magazines of the sort which have a 'Camp-Fire Column' among the back pages, where the readers get together, to discuss with the editor the merits of *The Purple Abyss* and *The Lagoon of Passion*.

A week later I was traveling on horseback in Typee, one of the largest as well as the most gloomy and lonely of Marquesan valleys. The schooner had gone on to the next settlement the day before, but I had decided to make the journey overland, for I wanted to see what changes had taken place in the valley since Melville had written of it eighty years ago. I found a settlement of twenty or thirty inhabitants on the sea-coast, but in the depths of the valley there was no one. Melville's old friends have been long in their graves and they have left no descendants. For miles on both sides of the stream, the great stone *paepaes*—the foundations on which they built their houses—are overgrown with brush and trees, but standing four-square still, enduring memorials of a splendid primitive race.

It was a cloudless midsummer day—midsummer for the tropics, but I remembered that it was Christmas day at home. I tried to picture the scene there: the snowy fields, the frosted window-panes, people walking briskly along the streets, blowing out clouds of steam, the wan light of a winter afternoon, the gathering dusk, with lights coming out in houses where families

were gathering for their annual reading of the Christmas Carol.

There was no seasonable reminder of the day in Typee Valley. The tops of the mountains and the high plateaus were in full sunshine, and in the depths of the valley itself the air was mild. My horse picked his way slowly over the stones, through a tunnel of greenish gloom. Swallows, tireless little creatures peculiar to the islands, flew round and round in pools of sunlight and shadow, the flutter of their wings scarcely ruffling the surface of silence. Occasionally it was more deeply disturbed by the bawling of wild cattle far up in the hills; or that most melancholy of birds, the kuku, burst suddenly into its monotonous song: a despairing Oh-oh oh-oh-oh dying away to silence. No, there was not a hint of Christmas in Typee Valley, and I was glad to get back to the schooner where I could at least talk of it to the captain of the Tahitian Maiden. I found him in his cabin sorting, by dates, the books which the Scotchman had given him.

'Well,' he said, 'what do you smell?'

I sniffed the air and then said that I smelled dried copra—as usual.

'What! Do you mean to tell me that you don't smell beef, fresh beef? You've never been a sailor, that's plain. The boys have been hunting this morning, and in about an hour you're going to have some of the finest beefsteak you ever tasted. How 's that for Christmas dinner? And here's another Christmas present for you, one of Mac's books.'

He handed me a volume, originally in paper covers, but these had been torn off. The first page had been well thumbed and the print dimmed with grease and dirt. But it was still legible, and in the first paragraph I learned that Marley was dead. There was no doubt of it, he was as dead as a door-nail.

THE WATERS OF BETHESDA

BY HAROLD TROWBRIDGE PULSIFER

My spirit was a troubled pool
That stirred with every passing wind,
And I was thirsty for the cool
Green depths of a long tranquil mind.

Now let me rest, I cried, and sleep,
While hours that vanish one by one
Marshal the stars across the deep,
And the still beauty of the sun.

Let there be no more rain to fill
My rocky chalice, harsh and brown;
Let me know quietness until
The warm earth-mother drinks me down.

There came a silence everywhere,
And no clouds sailed and no wind stirred.
Sun and stars shone stark and bare —
I had the answer to my word.

All night the stars stabbed through the dark,
All day the sun shot from the sky
Swift, molten arrows to its mark —
The lidless circle of my eye.

In the white torment where it lay,
My troubled spirit learned, poor fool,
The glory of that stormy day
When passing angels stirred the pool.