

FICTION

Louis Becke

Yorke The Adventurer

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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YORKE THE ADVENTURER

By Louis Becke

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Chapter I

In that delightful and exciting book, written by Captain Joshua Slocum, and entitled, "Sailing Alone Round the World," there is a part wherein the adventurous American seaman relates how he protected himself from night attacks by the savages by a simple, but efficient precaution. It was his custom, when he anchored for the night off the snow-clad and inhospitable shores of Tierra del Fuego, to profusely sprinkle his cutter's deck with sharp tacks, and then calmly turn in and sleep the sleep of the just; for even the horny soles of the Fuegian foot is susceptible to the business end of a tack; and, as I read Slocum's story, I smiled, and thought of dear old Yorke and the *Francesco*.

I first met Yorke early in the "seventies." Our vessel had run in under the lee of the South Cape of New Britain to wood and water, and effect some repairs, for in working northward through the Solomon Group, on a special mission to a certain island off the coast of New Guinea, we had met with heavy weather, and had lost our foretopmast. In those days there was not a single white man living on the whole of the south coast of New Britain, from St. George's Channel on the east, to Dampier's Straits on the west stretch of more than three hundred miles, and little was known of the natives beyond the fact of their being treacherous cannibals. In Blanche Bay only, on the northern shore, was there a settlement of a few adventurous English traders—the employees of a rich German company—and these were only acquainted with the natives in their own vicinity. Even the masters of trading vessels avoided the south coast of the great island, not only on account of the dangerous character of its inhabitants, but also because there was not, they thought, anything to tempt them to risk their and their crews' lives for the shore nearly everywhere presented a line of dense unbroken forest, with but scanty groves of coco-palms at long intervals, and even had there been many such groves, no communication could be had with the people. In the wild days of the "seventies" the practice of cutting up and drying the coconut into what is known as "copra" had scarcely made any headway in those parts of New Britain, New Ireland, and the Solomon and New Hebrides Groups which were visited by trading vessels—the nuts were turned into oil by a crude and wasteful process known as "rotting."

The captain of our little vessel was one of the oldest and most experienced trading skippers in the Western Pacific, grim, resolute, and daring, but yet cautious of his men's lives, if not of his own; so when he decided to anchor under the lee of the South Cape, he chose a part of the coast which seemed to be but scantily inhabited. The dense forest which came down to the water's edge concealed from view any village that might have been near us; but the presence of smoke arising from various spots denoted that there were some natives living in the vicinity, though we could not see any canoes.

We brought to about half a mile from the shore. Two boats were at once lowered, manned, and armed, and under the captain's guidance, set out to search for water, which we knew we should have but little difficulty in finding, even on the south coast of New Britain, which is not nearly so well watered as the northern shore of the island. In the captain's boat were six men besides himself; I was in charge of the covering boat, manned by six native seamen and carrying three water-casks all we could stow.

Pulling in together, close to the shore, the captain then went ahead, my boat following at the regulation distance of fifty yards, only four hands rowing in each, leaving four men to keep a look-out for natives.

Presently the skipper turned to me, and pointed shoreward.

"That's the place for us, Drake—between those two spurs—just round this point. There's bound to be water there."

The place which he indicated was about two miles distant to the eastward, and the crews gave way with good will, for the prospect of having a drink of pure water after the brackish and ill-smelling stuff we had been drinking for a fortnight, was very pleasing. Although but a little past nine o'clock in the morning the day was intensely hot, and windless as well, and the perspiration was streaming down the naked chests and backs of our sturdy native sailors. The only sounds that broke the silence were the cries of birds—cockatoos and large green and scarlet parrots, which screamed angrily at us as the boats passed close in to the dense, steamy jungle of the littoral.

Just as the captain's boat rounded the point, we heard a cry of astonishment from his crew, a cry that was echoed by ourselves half a minute later; for there in the centre of a small landlocked bay, was a cutter lying at anchor! She appeared to be of about thirty or forty tons, had an awning spread aft, and presented a very weather-worn appearance; her rudder was gone, and the upper part of her stern badly damaged. There was no one visible on deck, but presently, in answer to the captain's hail, the face of an old, white-haired man, appeared above the companion.

"Come on board," he called out in clear, vigorous tones, and we saw him take up a broom, which was lying on the skylight, and begin to sweep the after-deck vigorously with one hand, the other being in a sling.

"Guess he's a lunatic," said Captain Guest, turning to me with a laugh. But we had no time to indulge in surmises, for in a few minutes we were drawing up alongside; the stranger was standing at the stern, broom in hand, watching us.

"Step on board here, over the stern, please," he said, and then he added quickly, "but are you all wearing boots?"

"No," answered the captain, now quite sure the old man was wrong in his head, "some of my men have no boots."

"Then they had better not come aboard," he said with a quiet, amused smile, as he saw our puzzled faces.

The moment Captain Guest and myself stepped over the rail and shook hands with the stranger, we saw the reason for the broom—the entire deck, except the small space aft which had just been swept, was covered with broken glass!

"Glad to see you, gentlemen. My name is Yorke, and this cutter is the *Francesco*."

"And my name is Guest. I am master of the brigantine *Fray Sentos*, of Sydney, lying just round the point, and this is Mr. Drake, my supercargo."

"Sit down here on the skylight, gentlemen, out of the way of the glass—my cabin is very small."

"Guess it would have to be a pretty big one if you had another two men like yourself to share it," said Guest with a laugh, as he surveyed our new friend's proportions. And indeed he was right, for Yorke was over six feet in height, rather stout, and with a chest like a working bullock. His face and neck were deeply bronzed to a dark tan, and presented a striking and startling yet pleasing contrast to his snowy-white hair, moustache, and eyebrows; his clear, steely blue eyes were in consonance with the broad, square jaw, and the man's character revealed itself in his features—strong, courageous, dominant, and self-reliant.

The moment Captain Guest mentioned that our men were thirsty and would like a drink of water, Yorke became the soul of hospitality, and told them to come on board and help themselves, while for Guest and myself he produced a couple of bottles of excellent Tennant, and took a glass of it himself.

"Now, do you know, gentlemen," he said as he sat down on the cutter's rail, facing us, "this morning I had a dream? I thought I heard some one call out, 'All ready there, for'ard?' and I heard the rattle of a cable through the hawse-pipes. Then I woke and looked at the clock—it was just half-past seven."

"And at half-past seven we let go anchor, a good four miles from here. Surely you could not have heard us at such a distance."

"No, that's a fact. So, when I did hear you hail just now I knew my dream was verified. As a rule, dreams aren't worth a bag of shakings."

"Where are your crew, captain?" I asked.

"Ah, now I've a yarn to tell you. I'm the only man on board—my mate and every man of my crew were massacred about six weeks ago off the north end of New Ireland, and I only escaped by the skin of my teeth. And now you can guess the meaning of all this glass on the deck. There's plenty of niggers all around us here, and that broken glass is a splendid protection for me at night time. Since I lost my men they have made two attempts to cut me off at night time, once at a place just the other side of Cape St. George and once near here. But," and he laughed softly, "they didn't stay on deck more than five seconds, I can assure you. I'll tell you the whole yarn presently. But say, captain—can you help me to a new rudder? I lost mine a week ago, and having a bad hand have not been able to do anything towards making one myself."

"Certainly I will. I'll send my carpenter to you as soon as we get back to the ship; or, better still, we'll tow

you down to the Fray Bentos. But we are in want of water and firewood, and I should like to take some of both back with me."

He thanked Guest warmly, and added that, although the cutter had no rudder, she would steer very well with a sweep; and then he informed us there was good running water within a couple of cables' length of the cutter, also plenty of wood, and offered to take us to the place. We need not, he said, apprehend any attack by the natives, as our party was too large, and the spot where we could fill the casks was in fairly open country, and by stationing a sentry or two on each side of the creek, we could both wood and water with safety.

"There is a village about six miles along the coast from here, and no doubt it was the people from there who boarded me the other night, for I saw a lot of canoes on a little beach there. I think it must be the largest village for many miles hereabout. Now, do you see all those columns of smoke? Some, you will notice, are very thin and bluish, while others are almost black; the thin ones are only from native ovens, the others are signals to the various smaller villages to the eastward by this time every nigger within fifty miles of us knows that your ship is at anchor. I hope you left plenty of men on board?" "Plenty, and ours is a well-armed crew." Just as he was stepping into the captain's boat, I asked him what was the matter with his hand. He replied carelessly that he had "managed to get a bit of a knock," and would be glad if I would look at it when we returned to the cutter, as it was rather painful at times.

The boats were soon under way for the shore, and in a quarter of an hour we entered a narrow but deep creek, not wide enough to permit us using our oars; but this was of no consequence, for each boat carried half a dozen canoe paddles. Within a hundred yards up from the entrance we found the water to be quite fresh, and while some of the men started to fill the casks, the rest, except the sentries, made for a clump of about a dozen coconut-trees growing close beside a magnificent grove of areca-palms. Every nut that was young enough to drink was quickly thrown down, and carried to the boats. Then we set to work to collect firewood, and two or three dry, solid logs were dragged down into the creek, lashed together, and then, with them and the filled water casks in tow, we returned merrily to the *Franceses* hoisted up our water casks, swept up all the glass, shovelled it into a hogshead standing on the deck, hoisted her mainsail, and hove up her anchor, glad of having accomplished our task so easily and so quickly. A light air had sprung up, and the vessel, aided by the boats, made good progress towards our brigantine, despite the logs towing astern.

Our new friend asked me if I would mind coming below with him, as it was past three o'clock, and quite time we had something to eat and drink.

The cabin certainly was small, but was spotlessly clean, and exceedingly well furnished. It contained three bunks, two of which were hidden from view by neat cretonne curtains.

"That was my poor young mate's bunk," he said sadly, "and the other was the boatswain's. Now, will you please pass these up on deck?"

From a locker he took out a dozen or more of ale, two bottles of spirits, and a number of tins of beef, sardines, etc., together with an ample supply of biscuit. These I passed up to Guest, who, at Yorke's request, ordered the boats alongside, so that the crews could get some dinner, and a stiff glass of grog all round. Then we ourselves ate a most hearty meal, rendered the more enjoyable by the deliciously cool beera liquor which, until that day, we had not tasted for quite four or five months. As soon as we had finished, I asked him to let me examine his hand.

"Can you do a bit of cutting?" he asked, as I began to remove the bandages.

"Rather," answered Guest for me, "Drake loves to dig out a bullet, especially doesn't he, Napoleon?"

Napoleon was one of our native crew a short, nuggety little Tongan, who, in an attack made on our boats nearly a year before, had received a bullet in the calf of the leg. I had succeeded in extracting it without unduly mutilating the patient, for I had once acted as amateur assistant to a medical missionary in Samoa, and had seen a good many bullets extracted during a very lively six months' native war.

When I saw the condition of Yorke's hand, I was startled. It was enormously swollen from the tips of the fingers to the wrist, and badly lacerated and bruised all over the back, and presented a very dangerous appearance. The pain he had endured, and was enduring at the moment, must have been something atrocious, and I felt a sudden respect and admiration for a man who could attend to *our* wants before

thinking of himself.

"Good heavens!" said Guest sympathisingly, "how did it happen?"

He told us that ten days previously the cutter had struck on a reef in the night. She bumped heavily three or four times, but would have worked across the reef without serious damage, as there was a good breeze, had not a sea taken her on the bows, thrown her aback, and driven her stern first against the one exposed portion of the reef, tearing away her rudder, and smashing all the upper part of her stern. Yorke, who was half-stunned by the boom swinging over, and striking him on the head as he was rising to his feet after being hurled along the deck, felt that he had received an injury to his hand, which was bleeding profusely. But just then he gave no thought to it, for the next two or three seas fortunately carried the cutter over the reef into deep water and safety. When he came to examine his hand, he found it had been crushed, probably by a piece of the heavy hardwood rail, and several splinters were protruding from the back and wrist. These he had succeeded in extracting, but the pain continued to increase day by day, and the palm of the hand began to swell and gather.

"Perhaps there's a bit of timber in there yet," he remarked to us.

I thought so also, and so did Guest, and after torturing the poor fellow a few minutes, I located the exact spot just below the ball of the thumb.

"Captain Yorke," I said, "I can cut it out, I am sure. But, frankly, the thumb is a dangerous thing for an amateur surgeon to meddle with, and"

"I know," he interrupted quietly, "but I'd rather run the risk of lockjaw than the certainty of blood poisoning, and I know that that is what it will turn to. Last night I made up my mind to cut into the damned thing this morning if that last poultice I put on had no effect. Now go ahead. There's a bottle of carbolic acid below, which will be useful, and my pocket-knife has a razor-edge."

In less than five minutes I set to work, and in a few more, to my intense satisfaction for I felt nervous the thing was done, and I had extracted a piece of wood half an inch long, and as thick as a small quill. Then Guest and I carefully washed the wound over and over again in a solution of carbolic acid, and in half an hour the hand was bound up *pro tem*. Poor Yorke bore the pain without the twitching of an eyelid, and I felt a sincere thankfulness when, two hours later, we saw the change that relief from intense physical suffering had effected in his features.

When we reached the brigantine, I was able to bandage the injured hand in a more shipshape and proper manner, as we had an ample supply of lint and other requirements; and within ten days he could use his hand freely, though it took a much longer time for a thorough recovery. That he was deeply grateful to us he showed us in many quiet ways; and before he had been with us a week, both the captain and myself, and, indeed, every one else on board the *Fray Bentos* had grown to like the man immensely, though at times he would become unaccountably moody and silent, and keep to himself, only speaking in answer to a direct question. But, even then, he never attempted to directly avoid us, and was always civil, even to any of our native crew who might speak to him.

"Guess he thinks a lot about those poor men of his," said Guest to me one day.

That first evening we had a very pleasant supper. Yorke was with us, and during the meal he gave us a detailed account of his voyage, and of the massacre of his little vessel's company.

Chapter II

He had, he told us, bought the *Francesco* at Sourabaya about three years before, and after making several trading voyages between Manila and the Ladrone Islands voyages which did not pay as well as he had anticipated he fell in with the master of a Hobart Town whaler, who strongly advised him to go farther eastwards and southwards, particularly about the Admiralty Group and their vicinity, where a few colonial vessels were doing very well, trading for coconut oil, beche-de-mer, sandalwood, tortoise-shell and pearl-shell. Yorke took his advice and made a very successful voyage to the Admiralties, taking a cargo of pearl-shell to Singapore. This he sold very profitably, and was soon at sea again. On reaching the Admiralty Group, however, he was prevented from trading by the hostility of the natives, though on his previous visit they had been very friendly; and so, fearing that they might cut off the vessel, he decided to leave. He had with him a native of Yap, one of the Caroline Islands a man who had wandered about the North and South Pacific from his boyhood. His name was Rul, and he was not only a good seaman and an expert diver, but spoke fluently nearly a score of Melanesian and Micronesian dialects.

On the evening of the day that the cutter left Callie Harbour, on Admiralty Island, Yorke called his six men together, and told them that he was very undecided what to do. (I found out afterwards that he had a way of taking his crew into his confidence "It pleases them," he said, "and has proved very useful on a number of occasions when their goodwill meant much to me").

After telling them that he did not like to risk their lives by trying to return to Callie Harbour, he asked if they were willing to sail with him to the southwestern coast of New Guinea, where, he had heard, there was a great deal of pearl-shell to be bought from the natives. At the same time he pointed out to them that it would be a risky undertaking; he had no chart of that part of the Western Pacific, and, if they lost the ship, they would stand but little chance of escaping from the cannibal natives.

"Then," he went on, "this fellow Rul said that although he and the other natives on board were quite willing to go anywhere with me, *he* knew of a place only two days' sail away to the eastward where there was not only plenty of black-edge pearl-shell, but hawkbill turtle-shell as well. He had, he said, been cast away there in a whaleship, and remained on the island three months, could speak a little of the language, and gave me the names of several villages and harbours, but did not know the name of the island as a whole.

"I brought up my chart, and in a few seconds I discovered the names he had mentioned. The island was New Hanover, and, with the northerly breeze then blowing, I knew we should be there in twenty-four hours. So I made up my mind to try the place; for Rul was a thoroughly trustworthy fellow, and I knew I could depend on him.

"My mate was a young American named Ted Merriman, a native of New London, Connecticut, a fine sailorman, and a good navigator. My boatswain, too, was one of the right sort; and, as for the rest, although they were all natives, they were good seamen, and I had never had a sulky look from any one of them since they first shipped with me.

"We anchored just off a village which Rul knew, and in a few minutes the people came off to us in crowds and filled the deck. Many of them recognised Rul, and they all showed great friendliness and eagerness to trade; and I, like a cocksure fool, was thrown off my guard."

He ceased speaking, sighed, then lit his pipe and smoked in silence for awhile, and it was evident to us all that, although he was not an emotional man, he was strongly affected by the memory of the tragedy, and reproached himself keenly.

"Everything went well for the two following days," he resumed; "the natives had over ten tons of good black-edge shell, all of which I bought from them, paying for it principally in tobacco. It was worth to me in Singapore about PS65 a ton, and only cost me about PS3 a ton, so you may imagine that I felt very well satisfied. Then, besides the pearl-shell I bought nearly five hundredweight of splendid hawkbill turtle-shell, giving but two or three sticks of tobacco for an entire carapace of thirteen plates weighing between two and three pounds, and, as you know, hawkbill shell is worth eight dollars a pound in Hongkong, and much more in London or Hamburg."

"Captain Yorke," said Guest, with a laugh, "you should not have told us this. Drake here is a very good fellow, but in business matters as a supercargo he'd cut the throat of his best friend."

"Don't believe that, Captain Yorke," I said, "but at the same time I wish you had not told us of this place. You certainly have the prior right of discovery, and ought to have the benefit, so I promise you I will not repeat to our owners anything you now tell us."

Yorke's face changed, and his bright blue eyes looked into ours with such a kindly expression that the fascination he already possessed over me deepened quickly.

"You and Captain Guest are welcome to my knowledge, but I trust you will use it for your own benefit, and not consider your owners. Tell me now, gentlemen, would they consider *you*? Would they give you a handsome bonus for putting, say, five, or six thousand pounds into their pockets?"

"I daresay they would give us each a cheque for fifty pounds," said Guest meditatively.

"Then keep the thing dark," said the big man energetically, "keep it dark. Why should you, Captain Guest, and you, Mr. Drake, enrich your owners by imparting to them this information? I tell you, gentlemen, that all shipowners are alike, at least I never ran across any that showed much consideration for any one else's welfare. Nine out of every ten will work the soul out of their ship-masters and officers, who, when they grow too old to go to sea, are chucked out into the gutter to die of poverty, unless they have laid by a nest-egg for their old age."

"That is true enough," assented Guest, "and our esteemed employers are no better than the general run. So we will look on what you have just told us as private; by and by we will all talk over the matter, and see if we cannot go into the thing together."

Yorke nodded. "I'm with you. I've always played a lone hand hitherto, but I think that I can pull very well with men like you."

Then he resumed his story.

"On the morning of the third day I went ashore with my gun to have a few hours' shooting on a large swamp, situated about three miles inland from the village. One of the natives had told Rul that there were great numbers of wild duck and plover there, and offered to guide me to the place; so, telling Merriman that I would be back in time for dinner, I started with the guide. The gun I had with me was a double-barrelled pin-fire Lefauchaux breech-loader, and just before I left the cutter, I put in a couple of cartridges, intending to have a shot at some cranes which I saw walking about on the beach. Most fortunately for me, they flew away before I could get near enough. Besides the gun, I brought with me a Sharp's rifle, as the guide said that we should most likely see a wild pig or two about the swamp. The rifle I gave to him to carry, but the ten cartridges for it I put in my coat pocket, together with about twenty cartridges for the gun.

"On landing at the village, I was met by the head man, who wanted to know if I would buy a couple of pigs from him. I told him to take them on board to the mate, who would pay him; then, the guide leading, we struck out into the forest. After going about a mile or so, the nigger was joined by half a dozen young bucks, all armed with spears and clubs. I asked the guide, who spoke a little English, what they wanted; he replied that they wished to see me shoot.

"'Very well,' I said, 'go ahead then, all of you.'

"The bucks grinned, but instead of going ahead stepped back to let me pass, and fell in, in single file at the rear, the guide still leading. Now, I didn't like that at all, and I turned round to tell them to go in front of me; I was just in time to save myself from getting a spear through my back as it was, it whizzed through the side of my coat, and in another second the nigger who threw it had a charge of shot through his brains. Then, slewing round, I was just able to drop the guide, who was running off with the rifle. I hit him in the back, and saw him fall, then took cover behind a big tree to load again; but every other nigger had vanished, and then I heard a sound that filled me with dread for those on board the cutter the loud, hoarse bellowing of conch shells.

"I ran over to the guide, who was lying where he had fallen. I don't think he was mortally wounded, for he was quite thirty yards off when I fired. However, I made certain of him by cracking his skull with a long-handled club he carried. Then I loaded the Sharp's rifle, slung it over my shoulder by its sling; and started back for the village at a run, holding my shot gun ready cocked.

"When I reached the village, I could not see a soulevery house was deserted, but from the sea front I could hear diabolical yells and cries. I had to run another hundred yards or more before I came in sight of the cutter, and the moment I did so, I saw that it was all over with poor Merriman and the othersthe vessel was simply swarming with niggers, and surrounded by canoes, into which they were already throwing the plunder!

"I rested a minute or so to get my breath and steady my hand, and then opened fire. The cutter was not two hundred yards away from where I stood, and the very first shot plumped right into the black, surging crowd on deck, and one nigger gave his last jump. I fired three more shots into them before they had time to get into their canoes, or spring overboard to swim ashore. Most of the canoes made off to the south, around a point, but three or four of them came right in towards me, heading for the village. I don't think any of them saw me, for I was lying down among the roots and *debris* of a fallen tree, just above high water mark. They came in, paddling like mad, but not uttering a sound. I waited till the first canoe was within ten yards of me, and then fired both barrels of my gun in quick succession right into them, nearly blowing the chest out of the old chief, who was seated amidships, and wounding all the others. Then I got to work with my rifle again on the other canoes; and, although the moment they saw me, the niggers jumped overboard and dived, I got one for every shot of the last six cartridgeswhenever one got into shallow water and stood up to run, down he went.

"Then, taking both shot gun and rifle by the barrels, I smashed them on a rock, tore off my clothes and boots, and started to swim off to the vessel, looking behind me every now and then to see if the niggers were following. But they had had enough of me, and their empty canoes were drifting about the bay.

"I got alongside, clambered up over the waist, and saw a sight I shall never forgetevery one of my poor shipmates had been ruthlessly slaughtered, and their mutilated bodies, stripped of every bit of clothing, were lying about the deck. A very brief examination showed me that every one of them was deadin fact their heads had been beaten to pulp, and each body was pierced through and through with spear wounds and hacked and chopped about with tomahawks; while the deck was just a puddle of blood, mixed with sticks of tobacco, pieces of print, knives, and all sorts of trade goods.

"The first thing I did was to try and hoist the mainsail so as to get under way, but the black devils had cut away a lot of the running gear, and the halliards had been severed and lay on the deck, ready to be taken on shore with the other loot littered about, though the sail itself had not been damaged. The jib and staysail, also, I could not hoist: they were lying in a heap on the windlass with a dead nigger on top, and, further aft, were another two of the gentry, one dead and one with a smashed thigh bone. I slung the wounded man overboard to the sharks, and then began to consider what was best to do. The niggers, I felt certain, would not tackle the cutter again, when they knew I was safe on board, but I determined to make certain.

"You noticed those two brass three-pounders I carry? Well, the first thing I did was to load them with heavy charges of round bullets, and some nuts and bolts. Then I got up a dozen or so of rifles, and plenty of ammunition, and laid them in readiness on the skylight; for, although the niggers had turned my cabin upside down when looting the ship, there were any amount of small arms and various stores in the little hatch under the cabin table; besides these, I had some more in my own berth in a locker.

"Just as I was taking a long drink at the scuttle butt, I saw some of the niggers creeping back to the village through the trees, and watching what I was doing. I soon let them know.

"The cutter had swung round, and was broadside on to the houses, so taking the gun on the port side over to the starboard, I secured it well, and then trained it with the other on the biggest house in the villagea sort of meeting-house or temple, or some such darned thing. I can tell you, gentlemen, I felt as if I could laugh when I saw quite a score of the black swine go into this house, one after another. I had friction tubes in both guns, and waited for another five minutes; then I fired them one after another. Whether many or any niggers were killed, I do not know; but there was a fearful howling, which did me good to hear, and the front of the house went into splinters under the heavy charges of the guns, and in five seconds the village was deserted again.

"Before I did anything more for my own safety, I got some sailcloth and rugs, and covered the bodies of my shipmatesthe dreadful appearance they presented just unnerved me, and I felt like sitting down and crying. But I had to hustle. I wanted to get under way as quickly as possible before darkness came on, and

it was now noon.

"First of all I rove the mainsail halliards, and then bent on the jib, stopping only now and then to fire a rifle at the village, just to let the natives know I was keeping my eyes skinned. Then I hoisted the mainsail and hove up my anchor without any trouble, for the wind was very light, and got a good cant off shore as soon as I ran up the jib.

"As soon as I was well away from the land, I stood northabout so as so clear Cape Queen Charlotte, the westerly point of New Hanover, and ran on for three or four hours, the vessel steering herself while I sewed up poor Merriman's and the boatswain's bodies as well as I could under the circumstances. I should have done the same for the natives had I had the time, especially for Rul, but I had not. About dusk I brought to, just off the Cape, and dropped them over the side one after another only just realising, ten minutes previously, that I was still stark naked!

"After rounding the north point of New Hanover, I stood away down the coast of New Ireland till I made Gerrit Denys Island, where I anchored for a couple of days, the natives being very friendly, and giving me all the fresh provisions I wanted for a little tobacco and some hoop-iron. There was an old white beachcomber named Billy living with them; he seemed to do pretty well as he liked, and had a deal of influence with them, not allowing any one of them to hang about the vessel after sunset, and each night he slept on board with me. I gave him a case of Hollands for lending me a hand to set up my rigging, which so pleased him that he turned to and got drunk in ten minutes.

"After leaving Gerrit Denys I had a hard struggle to make Cape St. George, on the south end of New Ireland. For eight or ten days I had rainy weather, with heavy squalls from the eastward, and did not feel very well into the bargain, for I had a touch of fever and ague."

I asked him how he managed at night-time as regarded sleep.

He laughed quietly, and assured us that he never lost a night's rest during the whole of the time he was at sea. He would simply "scandalise" his mainsail without reefing it, haul the staysail sheet to windward, and let the cutter head reach till daylight. The *Francesco* he said and I afterwards found out that he was not overrating her qualities was a marvellous little vessel for taking care of herself.

"Well, I jogged along till one Sunday morning, when I made the land between Cape Bougainville and Cape St. George. It had been raining in torrents for two days, and I was feeling a bit done up; so, picking out a quiet little bay with thick forest growing right down to the water's edge, and not a sign of a native or native house, I ran in and let go in fifteen fathoms, but within a stone throw of the shore. And I'll be hanged, gentlemen, if I did not see, ten minutes afterwards, the smoke of half a dozen signal fires rising over the trees from as many different places, and all within three miles of the cutter. However, I was too weak to heave up again, even had I felt inclined. I wanted to cosset myself up, and get a good sweating between thick blankets to drive some of the fever out of me; and, niggers or no niggers, I meant to do so that day. Then I thought of a dodge I mean the broken-glass trick.

"In the hold were half a dozen barrels of empty gin, beer, and whisky bottles. We had put them aside to give to the Admiralty Island people especially the women and children who attached some value to them as water holders. I brought up sixty or seventy dozen, and smashed them up in a clean hogshead. Then I turned the whole lot out in a heap on the main hatch, got a shovel, and covered the entire deck fore and aft, first getting all loose ropes, &c, out of the way, as I did not want to get any glass in my own hands when I next handled the running gear. After that I went below, lit a spirit lamp, and made myself a big bowl of hot soup real hot soup a small tin of soup and bouilli, and a half bottle of Worcester sauce with a spoonful of cayenne pepper and a stiff glass of brandy thrown in.

"It touched me up, I can tell you, but I knew it would do me good as I lay down in my bunk, rolled myself in a heavy blanket, and piled over me every other rug and blanket I could find. In half an hour I was sweating profusely, for not only was the soup remedy working, but the little cabin, having every opening closed, was stiflingly hot. However, I stuck it out for a good two hours, till I felt I could stand it no longer; so I got up, unfastened my cabin door to get some air, and began rubbing myself down with a coarse towel. Heavens! it felt delightful; for although my bones still ached, and I was very shaky on my legs, my head was better, and my spirits began to rise. I put on my pyjamas, went on deck, and had a look round. It was nearly

dark, the rain had cleared off, a young moon was just lifting over the trees, and the little bay was as quiet as the grave except for the cries of a colony of flying foxes which lived in a big *vi* tree just a cable's length away from the cutter.

"I knew that the New Britain and New Ireland natives don't like going out after dark, and that if these people meant mischief to me, they would wait till just before daylight, when they would expect to find everyone on board asleep; so, feeling much better and stronger, I turned in at eight o'clock, and slept till past midnight. I made some coffee, drank it, and laid down again, dozing off every now and then till just before dawn. Then I heard a sudden rush on deck, followed by the most diabolical howls and yells as twenty or thirty niggers jumped overboard with bleeding feet, many of them leaving their clubs lying on the deck. I put my head out of the cabin, and gave them half a dozen revolver shots, but I'm afraid I didn't hit any of the beggars.

"I got away on the same morning, and made a fine run right across St. George's Channel, and along the New Britain coast till I made Cape Roebuck. Once the cutter did a steady nine knots for thirty hours. After running on that reef, I did not drop anchor again till I brought up off a rocky beach a few miles from here; and there the niggers made another try to get me, but the broken glass again proved effectual."

"It's a mighty smart dodge, Captain Yorke," said Guest, as we rose and shook hands with him, for he was going to sleep on board his own vessel.

Chapter III

We lay under the lee of the South Cape or New Britain for nearly a fortnight, during which time we effected all the necessary repairs to our own vessel, and fitted Yorke's cutter with a new rudder. So far he had not told us anything further of his intentions as regarded either the further prosecution of his trading voyage, or its abandonment. At breakfast one morning, Guest told him that he (Yorke) could have a couple of our native hands to help him work the cutter to Manila, or any other port in the China Seas, if he so desired.

He stroked his big, square jaw meditatively.

"That is very kind of you, Captain Guest," he said; "but to tell you the exact truth, I don't know my own mind at this moment. I've a hazy sort of an idea that I'd like to keep the Fray Bentos company for a bit longer. I can outsail you in light winds and I really don't care what I do now. And if you can spare me a couple of hands, I could jog along in company with you indefinitely. But, please understand me I don't want to thrust myself and the *Francesco* into your company if *you* don't want *me*. As a matter of fact, I don't care a straw where I go but I certainly would like to keep in company with you, if you don't object. Perhaps you would not mind telling me where you are bound?"

Guest looked at me interrogatively.

"Well, Captain Yorke," I said, "one confidence begets another; your confidence in us is worth a heap of money to Guest and myself, and, to be perfectly frank and straightforward with you, the captain and myself intended to lay a proposition before you whereby we three might possibly go into this New Hanover venture on our own hook. But Guest and myself are bound to our present employers for another seven months."

Yorke nodded. "That will be all right. I'm ready to go in with you, either at the end of seven months or at any other time which may suit you. You can count on me. I'm not a rich man, nor yet am I a poor man; in fact, there's a thousand pounds' worth of stuff under the *Francesco's* hatches now."

"Well then, Captain Yorke," I said, "as Guest here leaves me to do all the talking, I'll tell you *why* we are so far up to the northward, out of our usual beat. We heard in Samoa that a big ship, named the *Sarawak* had run ashore and been abandoned at Rook Island, in Dampier Straits, between the west end of New Britain and the east coast of New Guinea, and both Guest and myself know her to be one of the largest ships out of Liverpool; she left Sydney for Hongkong about six months ago with a general cargo. And 'there be pickings,' for she is almost a new vessel, and her gear and fittings alone, independent of her cargo, ought to be worth a thousand pounds. All we could learn at Samoa was that she had run up on a ledge of reef on Rook Island, and that the skipper, with three boats' crews, had started off for Thursday Island, in Torres Straits. Now, it is quite likely that, if she has not broken up, there may be a lot of money hanging to it."

"For your owners!" said Yorke, with his slow, amused smile.

"Just so, Captain Yorke. 'For our owners,' as you say. But even our owners, who are rather 'sharp' people, are not a bad lot they'll give Guest and myself a bonus of some sort if we do them good over this wrecked ship."

"And if you don't 'do them good'?" he asked, with the same half-humorous, half-sarcastic smile.

"If we don't, the senior partner in our highly-esteemed, sailor-sweating firm, will tell Guest and myself that we 'made a most reprehensible mistake,' and have put the firm to a considerable loss by doing too much on our own responsibility."

He nodded as I went on "We heard of this wreck from the officers of a French cruiser which called at Samoa while we were there. They sighted her lying high and dry on the reef, sent a boat ashore, and found her abandoned. She was bilged, but not badly, as far as they could see. On the cabin table was nailed a letter, written by the captain, saying that being unable to float the ship again, and fearing that he and his unarmed crew would be attacked by the savages, he was starting off in his boats for Thursday Island, the nearest port. Now, that is a big undertaking, and the chances are that the poor fellows never reached there. However, Guest and I thought so much of the matter that we hustled through our business in Samoa, and sailed the next day direct for Rook Island, instead of doing our usual cruise to the eastward. But we met

with fearful weather coming up through the Solomon Group, lost our foretopmast, and strained badly. And here we are now, tied up by the nose off the South Cape of New Britain instead of being at Rook Island at work on that wreck."

Yorke thought a moment. "Well, gentlemen, let me come in with you just for the fun of the thing. I don't want to get any money out of it, I assure you, and I'll lend you a hand with the wrecking work."

"Agreed," said Guest, extending his hand, "but only on this condition whatever our owners give Drake and myself, we three divide equally."

"As you please, as you please," he said. "Now come aboard my little hooker, and have a look at what is in the hold."

We went on board the *Francesco* with him, and made an examination of her small but valuable cargo, and Guest and I agreed that he had underestimated its worth by quite four hundred or five hundred pounds in fact, the whole cargo would sell in Sydney or San Francisco for about sixteen hundred pounds.

We sailed together that afternoon, the cutter getting under weigh first. We had given Yorke three of our men Napoleon the Tongan, and two other natives and before ten minutes had passed, Guest and everyone else on board the *Fray Bentos* could see that the *Francesco* could sail rings round our old brigantine, even in a stiff breeze, for the cutter drew as much water as we did, and had a big spread of canvas. By nightfall we were running before a lusty south-east breeze, the cutter keeping about half a mile to windward of us, and taking in her gaff topsail, when it became dark, otherwise she would have run ahead of, and lost us before morning. At daylight, when I went on deck, she was within a cable's length, Yorke was steering smoking as usual and no one else was visible on deck.

I hailed him: "Good morning, Captain; where are your men?" "Taking it out in 'bunk, oh,'" he answered with a laugh. "I came on deck about two hours ago, and told them to turn in until four bells."

"You'll ruin them for the *Fray Bentos*, sir," cried our mate with grumbling good-humour. "Why don't you start one of 'em at the galley fire for your coffee!"

"Because I'm coming aboard you for it," was the reply. He hauled in the main-sheet, lashed the tiller, went quietly forward without awakening his native seamen, and put the staysail to windward. Then he came amidships again to the main hatch, picked up the little dingy which was lying there, and, despite his bad hand, slid her over the cutter's rail into the water as if she were a toy, got in, and sculled over to the brigantine, leaving the cutter to take care of herself!

Charley King, the mate of the *Fray Bentos* turned to me in astonishment. He was himself one of the finest built and most powerful men I had ever met, not thirty years of age, and had achieved a great reputation as a long-distance swimmer and good all-round athlete.

"Why, Mr. Drake, that dingy must weigh three hundred pounds, if she weighs an ounce, for she's heavy oak built! And yet with one gammy hand he can put her over the side as if she was made of brown paper."

Yorke sculled alongside, made fast to the main chains, clambered over the bulwarks, and stepped aboard in his usual quiet way, as if nothing out of the common had occurred, and asked the mate what he thought of the *Francesca* as a sailer. King looked at him admiringly for a moment.

"She's a daisy, Captain Yorke.... but you oughtn't to have put your boat over the side by yourself, sir, with that bad hand of yours."

The big man laughed so genuinely, and with such an infectious ring in his voice, that even our Kanaka steward, who was bringing us our coffee, laughed too. The dingy, he said, was very light, and there was no need for him to call one of the men to help him. As we drank our coffee he chatted very freely with us, and drew our attention to the lovely effect caused by the rising sun upon a cluster of three or four small thickly-wooded islets, which lay between the two vessels and the mainland of New Britain, whereupon King, who had no romance in his composition, remarked that for his part he could not see much difference between one sunrise or sunset and another. "One means a lot of wind, and another none at all; one means decent weather and another means rotten weather, or middlin' weather."

"Ah, Mr. King, you look at everything from a sailor's point of view," he said good-naturedly. "Now, there's nothing gives me more pleasure than to watch a sunset and sunrise anywhere in the tropics particularly if

there's land in the foreground or background I never miss a sunrise in the South Seas if I can help it."

Presently we began to talk of the voyage, and I asked him a question which only at that moment occurred to me concerning himself before we met.

"I wonder, Captain Yorke, when your crew were cut off, that it did not occur to you to run down the west coast of New Ireland, between it and New Britain, to Blanche Bay, where there is a German station, and where you could have obtained assistance. It would have been much easier for you instead of that long buffeting about on the east coast."

He made no answer at first, and I saw that his face had changed colour. Then he answered slowly:

"Just so. I knew all about the Germans at Blanche Bay, but I did not want to go there for very good reasons. Will you come aboard and have some breakfast with me? I'll send you back again any time you like; the sea is so smooth, as far as that goes, that I could run the cutter alongside, and let you step off on to your own deck."

Just as we were pushing off from the brigantine, Guest came on deck, glass in hand, to have a look at the cluster of islands, at the same time calling out to Yorke and myself to wait a little. After scanning the islands from the deck, he went aloft for a better view, then descended and came aft again to the rail.

"Good morning, Captain Yorke. I've just been taking a look at those islands over there, and an idea has just come to me. But, first of all, are they marked on your chart? They are on mine, but not even named just dots."

"Neither are they on my big sheet chart and I have no other of this part of the Western Pacific."

"Well then, here's my idea. I see from aloft that there is a good-sized blue water lagoon there, and as likely as not there may be pearl-shell in it. Anyway, it's worth seeing into, and so if Drake and yourself like to take our boat and half a dozen men, you might have a look in there. I can't see any houses, but at the same time, be careful. You can run in with the cutter pretty close, and then go ashore in the boat. You are bound to find a passage into the lagoon somewhere or other. I'll send Tim Rotumah and George" (two of our native crew who were good divers) "with you in the boat; they'll soon let you know if there is any shell in the lagoon. If there is, light a fire, and make a smoke, and I'll anchor the brigantine and come after you."

I was delighted with this, and at once returned on board, while Yorke went off to the cutter to give his crew their instructions. In ten or fifteen minutes the whaleboat was over the side awaiting me, manned by six of our native crew, all of whom were armed with Snider carbines and revolvers. Pushing off from the *Fray Bentos*, we went alongside the *Francesco* to pick up Yorke, who was waiting for the boat. As the wind had now fallen very light, he suggested to me to make a start at once, leaving the cutter in charge of Napoleon, with orders to anchor if it fell calm, and he was on easy soundings.

The morning was deliciously bright, clear, and, for those latitudes at that season of the year, very cool. As the boat skimmed over the placid surface of the ocean, "schools" of bright silvery gar-fish and countless thousands of small flying squid sprang into the air and fell with a simultaneous splash into the water on each side and ahead of us. Then "George," a merry-faced, broad-chested native of Anaa, in the Paumotu Islands, after an inquiring glance at me, broke out into a bastard Samoan-Tokelauan canoe song, with a swinging chorus, altering and improvising as he sang, showing his white teeth, as every now and then he smiled at Yorke and myself when making some humorous play upon the words of the original song, praising the former for his skill and bravery, and his killing of the man-eating savages of New Hanover, his great strength and stature, and his kindly heart "a heart which groweth from his loins upwards to his throat."

Long, long years have passed since that day, but I shall always remember how Yorke turned to me with a smile when at something George had sung, the rest of our crew burst into approving laughter.

"What is he saying about me? of course I can recognise that 'Ioka' means 'Yorke,'" he said.

"It's extremely personal, but highly complimentary to you. Now, wait a bit, till they come to the chorus, and I'll try and translate it. There, he's starting:"

*"Miti Ioka, malie toa, toa malohi
Kapeni Iota, arii vaka!
Tule Ioka, fana tonu!"*

*Mate puaka uri, kai tino.
Maumau lava, nofo noa!
Maumau lava, nofo noa t
Halo! Tama, Halo Foe!!!
"E aue l le tiga ina
Ma kalaga, ma kalaga
O fafine lalolagi
E kau iloay i nofa noa
Kapeni Ioka
Halo! Tama, Halo Foe!!!"*

"which goes," I said, "as far as I can understand, something like this' Mr. Yorke, warrior brave and fighter strong, Captain Yorke, the sailor captain, leader Yorke who fired so truly, slew the black, man-eating pigs of savages! Oh, the pity he is single, oh, the pity he is single! *Pull, men, pull!* The next verse says that did the world of women know that such a fine man as yourself was a bachelor, they would consume themselves with grief."

"I wonder why they should take it for granted that I am a single man," he laughed, as he began to fill his pipe; then he added quietly "I may be a widower for all I know. I was married in Copenhagen thirty years ago, and have never seen my wife since, and trust I never may." Then in a moment he changed the subject, and I took good care not to mention the matter again.

An hour after leaving the brigantine, we found a passage narrow but safe leading into the lagoon, which was a mile or mile and a half in width, and but for the one opening in the reef, completely land locked by four small islands, all low and densely wooded with banyan and other trees, and connected with each other at low tide. Here and there, at intervals, were groves of coco-palms, and a few *vi* trees the wild mango of the Western Pacific, growing close down to the beach, which on the inner side of the lagoon was of bright yellow sand, and presented a very pleasing appearance.

Chapter IV

A very brief trial of the lagoon, at various depths, soon convinced us that it contained no pearl-shell, both George and the Rotumah man coming up empty-handed after each dive, and pronouncing the bottom to be *oge, i.e.*, poverty-stricken as regarded shell. But we made one rather pleasing discovery, which was that the lagoon contained a vast number of green turtle. We could see the creatures, some of them being of great size, swimming about beneath the boat in all directions. It at once occurred to me that I should let Guest know, for we were getting short of provisions on board the *Fray Bentos*, and had been using native foodpork, yams, and taro, to eke out our scanty store. Here, now, was an opportunity of getting a supply of fresh meat which would last us for a couple of months or more; as we could easily stow eighty or a hundred turtle on board, and kill one or two every day as required. We always carried with us a heavy turtle-net, made of coir fibre, which I had bought two years before in the Tokelau Group. But, first of all, I consulted with our native crew as to whether we could dispense with the net by remaining on the island all night and watching for the turtle to come ashore.

They all assured me that we should get none, or at best but few, as it was not the laying season.

"Very well," I said, "go off to the ship, and tell the captain that there is no pearl-shell here, but plenty of turtle. Ask him if he will let you have the turtle-net, so that we can set it across the mouth of the passage as soon as it becomes dark; and tell him we shall come off again by midnight if he does not care about our staying till the morning; but that as we are pretty sure to get a lot of turtle, he had better send the longboat as well."

Yorke, at first, intended to go off again to the *Francesca*, but I told him I was so sure that Guest would come to an anchor when he heard about the turtle, that he (Guest) would be sure to tell Napoleon and the other men on board the cutter to do the same. "In fact," I added, "a supply of turtle will be a God-send to us, and the skipper will not mind, I am sure, if we stay here for a couple of days, under the circumstances."

We pulled ashore to a little sandy beach, and Yorke and myself, taking our rifles, ammunition, and a few biscuits each, got out, the native crew at once starting off again for the ship, pulling as hard as they could, for they were eager to return with the turtle-net and enjoy themselves as only South Sea Islanders and other of Nature's children do when fishing.

About an hour after the boat had gone, we set to work to get some coconuts to drink, both for ourselves and the boat's crew when they returned. Yorke ascended a very tall palm about sixty feet in height like a native, and began throwing down the young nuts. I took a shorter tree near by, and was leisurely twisting off the heavy nuts, when he, who had a good view of the sea, called out to me that it had fallen calm.

"And what I don't like, Drake, is this," he added "there's a dull, greasy look on the water over to the eastward there, and I'd like to be on board the *Francesca* instead of being here. I don't like it, I can tell you, and I'm sorry we did not go off in the boat."

I, in my fatuous, youthful conceit, laughed at his forebodings.

"It's only a New Britain squalla lot of wind for ten minutes, then a power of rain for another twenty, and then it'll be over."

Yorke, however, was too old and experienced a seaman to disregard the signs of coming danger. He quickly descended from his tree, and I followed suit.

"There's something more than a squall coming, my lad. Let us cut through the bush across to the weather side of the island, and try and stop the boat. We can do it if we are quick."

The island was less than a mile in width, even at its broadest portion, which was where we had landed; so, after a hurried drink, we picked up our rifles and started off to try to intercept the boat as she was pulling down the outer and eastern shore. But before we had made two hundred yards, we came to a dead stop, our progress being barred by a dense thicket of thorny and stunted undergrowth. We turned aside and skirted the thicket for a quarter of a mile, then tried again, with the same result it was absolutely impossible to force our way through the obstacle.

By this time the air had become stiflingly hot and oppressive, and the rapidly darkening sky presaged the

coming storm. From every pore in our bodies the perspiration was streaming profusely, and our hands and faces were scratched and bleeding.

"We must go back," said Yorke, "we cannot possibly get to the other side of the island through this damnable scrub. The only thing we can do is to run along the inner beach of the island till we come to its end, wade across the reef, and try to stop the boat before she has gone too far. This is no common squall, I'm afraid it's going to be a hurricane. Come on."

We started off at a run, along the hard sand, but before we had done the first quarter of a mile, I felt that I could go no further, for I was pumped out, could scarcely breathe, and felt a strange, unnatural faintness overcoming me, not an uncommon sensation experienced by many people just before a hurricane or an earthquake.

"You must go on alone," I said, pantingly, to Yorke; "leave me here. I'll be all right, even if I have to stop here a month of Sundays. I can't starve in such a place as this."

Pitching his own and my rifle up on the bank above high water mark, he seized me and lifted me up on his back, telling me to hold on, as he meant to make a big try for the boat. It was no use my protesting; he set off again at a steady run, my weight apparently impeding his progress no more than if he had been carrying a doll instead of ten stone.

At last we gained the end of the island, where there was a break in the verdure, and from which we had a brief view of the sea before it was blotted out by the black wall of the coming hurricane.

"We're done as far as getting on board is concerned," he said, as I slid down his back on to the sand; "but, thank God, the boat is safe. In another ten minutes she would have been too late to have reached either the cutter or brigantine, and have been smothered. Look, Captain Guest is all ready, and so is the cutter!"

I got up on my feet, just in time to see the boat go alongside the brigantine, which was under a close reefed lower topsail and a bit of her mainsail only for Guest knew what was coming, and had prepared to meet it; the cutter, too, was reefed down, and had taken her dingy on deck. At that moment, however, both vessels were becalmed; but scarcely had the whale boat been hoisted up to the starboard davits of the *Fray Bentos* and secured, when the hurricane struck both vessels. I thought at first that our poor old brigantine was going to turn turtle, for she was all but thrown on her beam ends; but righting herself gallantly, she plunged away into the growing darkness, followed by the cutter, and in five minutes both were hidden from view, and Yorke and myself had to throw ourselves flat on our faces to avoid being blown down the beach into the lagoon.

I had once, years before when a boy in Fiji, seen a bad hurricane, and was rather proud of my experience, but I never saw, and never wish to see again, such a truly terrifying and appalling sight as my companion and I now witnessed for within an hour all Nature seemed to have gone stark, raving mad, and I never expected to see the next morning's sun. I do not think it was the fearful force of the wind which so terrified me into a state of helplessness as the diabolical clamour the clashing and tearing and rending asunder of the trees, accompanied by a prolonged howling mingled with a deep droning hum like one sometimes hears when a volcano is in eruption and, in a minor key, the dulled roaring of the surf as the mighty seas swept over the outer reef, and broke over the weather shore with such tremendous force that the island seemed to tremble to its very foundations.

Unable to make himself heard in the pandemonium roaring around us, Yorke turned to me, and gripping me by one hand, and shielding his eyes with the other from the hurtling showers of sand and pebbles which threatened to cut our faces to pieces, he managed to drag me along the beach to a low ledge of coral rocks, under the shelter of which we were protected from the fury of the wind, and, in a measure, safe from flying branches, though all along the beach coco-palms were being torn up by the roots, or their lofty crowns cut off as if they were no stronger than a dahlia or some such weakly plant.

As we crouched on the sand under the ledge of rock, a terrific but welcome downpour of rain fell, and we were able to satisfy our thirst by pressing our mouths to crevices in the rock overhead. But we were not long allowed to remain undisturbed in our shelter, for, although the tide was on the ebb, the enormous influx of water, driven over the reef by the violence of the wind, so swelled the lagoon that we had to abandon our refuge and crawl on our hands and knees up over the bank, and thence into the thorny scrub, where we

were at least safe from falling trees, there being none near us.

"I must try and get our rifles before it is too late," shouted Yorke in my ear. "I know the place, but if I don't get there pretty quick, I shall never be able to recognise it. Stay where you are until I get back, then we'll try and find a better camping place before night comes on if this little tin-pot island isn't blown out of the water over on to New Guinea in the meantime."

By this time I was beginning to get some courage, and to feel ashamed of myself; so, as soon as Yorke had crept out of the scrub, I braced myself up, and taking out my sheath knife, began to cut away the thorny branches, and pull up by the roots some of the scrub around me, so as to make more room. The soil consisted of decomposed shell and vegetable matter, very soft and porous, underneath which were loose coral slabs, and I soon had a space cleared large enough for us both to lie down upon. Then I started to enclose it on three sides by a low wall of the flat coral stones, across which I laid a thick and nearly rain-proof covering of branches and leaves, and when Yorke returned an hour later, I was almost finished, and had begun to make a fire of dead roots and branches.

"That's grand," he said, as he laid down the rifles. "I was wondering if your matches were dry. Mine are spoilt, as I had them loose in my pocket. How is your tobacco?"

"Quite dry, too. Here you are, fill your pipe."

The man's thoughtfulness showed at once. "No, thank you not just yet. I'll improve this newly-erected mansion of ours by getting coconut branches up from the beach. We might as well make our roof as watertight as we can before dark. Then I want something to eat, and there are plenty of coconuts lying about everywhere."

"We won't starve," I said; "there are any amount of robber crabs in this scrub, and to-night we can get as many as we want, if we can make a bright fire."

By dark we had succeeded in carrying up thirty or forty coconut branches, and covering our sleeping place over in a more satisfactory manner, though we were every now and then chilled to the bone by the stinging rain. Our rifles, matches, tobacco, and a few biscuits, we placed in a dry spot, and then built up a small but hot fire of roots under the shelter, and, after eating a meal of coconut and biscuit, we filled our pipes, piled on more roots, and sat by the fire drying our clothes, and listening to the wild uproar of wind and sea, congratulating ourselves upon being in a spot where we were at least safe from the wind, for our camp was at least eight or ten feet below the general level of the island, both on its windward and leeward sides.

All that night the wind blew with terrific violence, and the noise of the surf thrashing upon the coral barriers of the island was something indescribable. At about midnight, just after a lull succeeded by a heavy fall of rain, the wind hauled round two or three points to the southward, and, if possible, blew with still greater violence. The crashing of trees mingling with the demoniacal shriek of the hurricane, was enough to disturb the mind of the bravest; but my companion lay quietly beside the fire, smoking his pipe and talking to me as he would had we been seated at the supper table on board the *Fray Bentos*. Yet that he was deeply anxious about our ship-mates I well knew, when, bidding me good-night, he laid his great frame upon the sand and went to sleep.

Chapter V

By dawn on the following morning, the hurricane had lost its strength and settled down into a hard gale from the north-east. When we crawled out from our shelter, a fearful scene of desolation met our eyes; not more than a hundred coco-palms were left standing on the weather side of the island, and enormous boulders of coral rock, torn off the reef by the violence of the sea, were piled up in wild confusion along the shore, while, at the north end, the surf had made a clean breach over the land, with devastating effect. On the inner beach of the lagoon, the destructive results of the wind and sea had not been so great, although vast numbers of fish were lying dead on the sand, or among the soaked and flattened undergrowth above high water mark. We at once collected a few, lit a fire, roasted them over the coals, and made a good breakfast, finishing up with some young drinking coconuts, hundreds of which were lying about us.

We knew that, until the weather moderated, there was little likelihood of our seeing the brigantine and cutter if we ever saw either again. The ocean for many hundreds of miles around us was full of dangers, for it was unsurveyed, and risky even to a ship in good weather. Many of the islands, shoals and reefs marked on the charts had no existence, but still more were placed in wrong positions, and we both felt that it would be something marvellous if the two vessels escaped disaster. All we could do was to hope for the best, and wait patiently.

As the rain had ceased, and the sun was shining brightly, although the gale was still blowing fiercely, we decided to cross to one of the other islands and make an examination of our surroundings. First of all, however, we examined our stock of ammunition, and found we had thirty-five cartridges between us; the rest of our effects consisted of about a quarter of a pound of plug tobacco, a sheath knife and a pocket knife, a small box of vestas, and the clothes we had on.

With some difficulty we managed to wade through the shallow passage dividing the island on which we had slept from the next, and found the latter to be much better wooded, wider, and three or four feet higher; and I had just observed to Yorke that it would suit us better to live on than the other, when I came to a dead stopright in front of us was a banyan tree, from a low branch of which was suspended a huge cane-work fishing basket!

In a moment we hid ourselves, and remained quiet for a few minutes, scanning the surrounding bush carefully to see if there were any further signs of human occupancy, or the humans themselves. From the appearance of the basket, however, I judged that it had not been used for many weeks at least, and had been hung up to prevent its becoming rotten from lying on the moist, steamy soil.

After satisfying ourselves that there were no natives in our immediate vicinity at least we set out again, proceeding very cautiously, and a short distance further on struck a dearly-defined native path; this we followed, and presently came in sight of half a dozen small thatched huts, under the shelter of two very large trees, from the branches of which were hanging fish baskets similar to that we had just seen. Most of the huts, though damaged by the storm, were substantially built, and evidently had not long been vacated, for in a sort of cleared plot in front were a number of gaily-coloured crotons, which showed signs of having been recently tended; the grass had been pulled up around their roots, &c. In one of the huts we found some smaller fish traps, a number of fish spears, and two large wooden bowls.

"It's a fishing village, belonging to the niggers on the mainland, I think," I said to Yorke. "It is quite a common thing for them, both in New Ireland and New Britain, to have plantations or fishing stations on many of these small islands off the coast, and they come over three or four times a year to plant or fish. Let us go on further."

My surmise was correct, for, quite near the huts, was a large taro plantation, on which great labour and care had been expended. A brief examination of some of the tubers showed us that they were full grown. This was not a pleasant discovery, for we knew that the owners might be expected to put in an appearance at any moment after the gale ceased, in order to dig them up.

"Well, let us get on, and see what else we can discover," said Yorke, shouldering his rifle. "The beggars can't get across from the mainland in such weather as this, so we need not be under any immediate alarm."

By two in the afternoon we had thoroughly examined the whole of the four islands, but found no more houses, though on all of them we came across the inevitable fish-traps, and also a good-sized bamboo fishing raft, lying far up on the beach. This we at once carried off, and were about to hide in a thicket little thinking it would prove such a dangerous acquisition when Yorke suggested a better course. It would be a mistake, he said, to leave the raft so far from our sleeping place, instead of taking it away, when not only should we have it near us in case of a sudden attack by the natives, but we could utilise it for fishing, and that by removing it to the southernmost islet, which was farthest away from the fishing village on the largest island, we could easily conceal it from view.

The natives, he argued, would be bound to search for it on the islet where they had left the thing, and would conclude that it had been washed away in the hurricane, and therefore were hardly likely to come down to the southern islet, the inner beach of which could be seen from nearly every point on the lagoon.

"So," he went on, "you see that if the black gentry do think that their raft might have been carried down to the inner beach of the south islet, they will only need to use their eyes to show them it isn't there. But it will be snug enough on the outer side of the island, where they won't dream of looking for it, and where we can use it whenever we like for we'll shift our camp down there to-day... God knows how long we may have to live here if anything has happened to the *Fray Bentos* and the *Francesca* and so we must run no needless risks."

"Right," I assented, "and see, the wind is falling steadily, and there's not much of a swell inside the lagoon now. Why not let us try and take the raft away with us at once, instead of coming for her in the morning?"

We cut down a couple of young saplings for poles, carried the raft to the water, and launched it. It was big enough to support five or six people, but floated like a feather, and, to our delight, we found that we could pole it along in shallow water with the greatest of ease. By four o'clock we reached the island, and carried our craft up from the inner beach into a clump of trees. This spot, we thought, would make a good camp, as from it we commanded not only a good view of the lagoon, but of the sea to the south and west, and we felt certain that if Guest turned up all right, he would look for us at this end of the atoll even if he made it from the northward, and had to run the coast down.

By supper time we had fixed ourselves up comfortably for the night. The rain now only fell at long intervals, the wind had fallen to a strong, steady breeze, and we made up a fire, and cooked some more fish, of which there were still numbers to be had on the beach merely for the trouble of picking them up. Then we ate our supper, smoked a pipeful of our precious tobacco between us, and discussed our plans for the morrow, Yorke listening to my suggestions as if they were put forward by a man of his own age and experience, instead of by one who was as yet but a young seaman, and a poor navigator.

"I am quite sure," he said in his slow, quiet way, as he passed me the pipe, "that you and I will get along here all right for weeks, months years even, if it has pleased the Almighty to take our shipmates, and we have to live here till we are taken off by some ship, or can build a boat. Your knowledge of ways and means of getting food, and living in such a place as this, is of more value than my seamanship and knowledge of navigation. Come, let us get out to the beach and take a look at the weather."

He placed his hand on my shoulder in such a kindly manner, as his bright blue eyes looked into mine, that, with the impulsiveness of youth, together with my intense admiration for the character of the man himself, I could not help saying:

"Captain Yorke! Please don't think I was boasting of what I could do in the way of getting food for us and all that. You see, I have been in the South Seas ever since I was a kid and by nature I'm half a Kanaka. I've lived among natives so long, and"

He held up his hand, smiling the while: "I'm glad to have such a good comrade as you, Drake. You have the makings of a good sailorman in you, but you're too quick and excitable, and want an old wooden-headed, stolid buffer like me to steady you. Now let us start."

We walked across the narrow strip of land to the weather side, and sat down upon a creeper-covered boulder of coral rock. Before us the ocean still heaved tumultuously, and the long, white-crested breakers thundered heavily on the short, fringing reef; but overhead was a wondrous sky of myriad stars, set in a vault of cloudless blue.

"The gale is blowing itself out," said my companion. "We shall see a fine day in the morning. And, Drake, we shall see the brigantine back in three days."

"I hope so," I said, laughingly, "but I'm afraid we won't. Both the brigantine and cutter must have had to heave to, or else run, and if they have run, they may be two hundred miles away from here by now. And I think that Guest *would* run to the westward for open water, instead of heaving-to among such an infernal lot of reefs and shoals."

"Whatever he may have done, he, and my cutter, too, are safe, and we shall see them back in three days," he reiterated, with such quiet emphasis, and with such a strangely confident, contented look in his eyes, that I also felt convinced the vessels would, as he said, turn up safely.

We sat silent for some minutes, watching the sea, and noting how quickly the wind was falling, when presently my comrade turned to me.

"You asked me why I did not try to make the German head station in Blanche Bay, after my crew were killed," he said. "Well, I'll tell you. I am frightened of no man living, but I happened to hear the name of the manager therea-Captain Sternberg, an ex-captain of the German navy. He and I served together in the same ship and I am a deserter from the German service."

I was astonished. "You!" I exclaimed; "surely you are not a German?"

"Indeed, I am," he replied, "and if I fell into the hands of the German naval authorities, or any German Consul, or other official anywhere, I should have but a short time in this world."

"Why, what could they do?"

"Send me home to be tried and shot."

"Surely they cannot shoot a man for desertion in the German navy."

"There is something beyond desertion in my case I killed an officer. Sternberg knows the whole story, and though as a man and a gentleman he would feel for me, he would have no hesitation in arresting me and sending me home in irons, if he could get me. And he could not fail to recognise me, although eight and twenty years have passed since he last saw me."

"But he is not an Imperial officer now," I remarked.

"Yes, he is. He is Vice-Consul for Germany in the Western Pacific, and, as such, would have authority to apprehend me, and apprehend me he certainly would, though, as I have said, he knows my story, and when we served together, was always a kind and good friend to me, despite the fact that he was an officer and I was not; for I came from as good a family as his own and that goes a long way in both the German army and navy."

I made some sympathetic remark, and then Yorke resumed:

"What I am telling you now and I'll tell you the whole story is no secret, for thousands of people have read of the Brandt extradition case in the United States. Twenty years ago I was arrested in San Francisco at the instance of the German Consul there, but managed to escape after being in custody for six weeks.

"My real name is Brandt. My father was a German, my mother a Danish lady a native of Klampenborg, a small sea-coast town not far from Copenhagen. My father was an officer in the army, and was well-known as an Asiatic traveller and linguist, and I was the only child. At fifteen years of age, much to my delight, I went into the navy, served one commission in the Baltic, and two on the west coast of South America. Then when I was about twenty-one years of age, I was given, through my father's influence, a minor position on the staff of a scientific expedition sent out by the German Geographical Society to Arabia. I came home at the end of a year, and was given three months' leave, at the end of which I was to join a new ship.

"Being pretty liberally supplied with money by my father who was a man of means I determined to spend my leave in London, and there I met the woman who was to prove the ruin of my future. She was the daughter of the woman in whose house I lodged in Chelsea, and was a very handsome, fascinating girl about nineteen. I fell madly in love with her, and she professed to return my feelings, and I, poor young fool, believed in her. Her mother, who was a cunning old harridan, and greedy and avaricious to a degree, gave us every opportunity of being together. As I spent my money most lavishly on the girl, and they both knew my father was well-off, and I was the only son, they had merely to spread their net for me to fall into it.

"Well, I married the girl, both she and her mother promising to keep the matter secret from my parents until after I returned from my next voyage and got a commission. I knew well that I should get into very serious trouble with my superiors if the fact of my marriage became known, but was so infatuated with the girl that I allowed no considerations to influence me.

"A month before my leave expired, I sent my wife over to Bremerhaven, where I had some friends on whose secrecy I could rely. My ship a small gunboat was being fitted out at that port, and my wife seemed delighted that she would see me pretty frequently before I sailed. I was cautious enough not to travel with her from London, for that would have meant almost certain detection, and, as an additional precaution, she went to my friends in Bremerhaven under her maiden name. I was to follow her in a week, by the next steamer.

"That evening, as I was being driven home to my wife's mother's house in Chelsea, the horse bolted. I was thrown out of the cab, and half-an-hour later, I was in a hospital with a broken arm and severe internal injuries. It was six weeks before I was able to leave England to join my ship; but my father had written to the navy office, telling of my accident, and my leave had been extended. During all this time my wife wrote to me weekly, telling me she was very miserable at my not allowing her to return to England to nurse me, but would obey me; for I had written to her and told her not to return, as I did not think it advisable the doctors and nurses at the hospital knew I was in the German navy, and I was then becoming somewhat fearful of the news of my marriage getting to the knowledge of the naval authorities.

"When I reached Bremerhaven, I had still three days of my extended leave to expire, so had no need to report myself; but at once went to my friends' house, where I met my wife, who was overjoyed to see me again. My friends, too, welcomed me warmly, though I somehow fancied there seemed to be some underlying restraint upon them. They were quite a young couple: the husband was a clerk in the customhouse, and he and I had been friends from boyhood.

"In the morning I went to look at my new ship, and was greatly pleased to find that my old officer, Lieutenant Sternberg, had been appointed to her. He saw me at once, came along the deck, and spoke very kindly to me. Whilst he was talking to me, an officer from the port guardship came on board. He was a very handsome man, about thirty, with a deep scar across his forehead, and I noticed that he looked at me very keenly almost rudely and I fancied I saw something like a sneer on his face as he turned away to speak to Sternberg.

"My young friend, the custom house clerk, whose name was Muller, returned every day from his office at six o'clock, when we had supper, and on this occasion I began to tell him of my new ship, and then said casually:

"By the way, who is that conceited-looking fellow from the guardship a man with an ugly scar across his forehead?"

"No one answered, and then to my surprise I saw that Muller was looking inquiringly at my wife, whose face suddenly became scarlet, while Mrs. Muller bent her face over her plate. Then Muller looked at me and said quietly:

"That was Captain Decker. I believe that he has the honour of the friendship of Frau Brandt."

"There was something so stern in his tones that I could not understand; but another look at my wife's face filled me with the blackest misgivings. She had turned a deathly pale, and, faltering something inaudible, rose from the table and went to her room. Then I asked Muller what it meant.

"Ask your wife," he said sadly; "you are my dear friend, and she is my guest but her conduct has not been satisfactory."

"I now insisted upon him telling me more, and soon learnt the whole miserable story. My wife had been in the habit of meeting Captain Decker clandestinely ever since she had been in Bremerhaven, although she had denied it when Mrs. Muller had indignantly threatened to write and tell me if she did not at once cease the intimacy. This she had sworn to do, but, Muller said, she had, he feared, violated her promise frequently, though he could not absolutely prove it.

"I went direct to my wife. Instead of a shrinking, trembling woman, I found a defiant devil a shameless creature who coolly admitted her guilt, told me that she had never cared for me, and that she had only

married me to escape from the monotony of her London life with her mother if she was her mother, she added with a mocking laugh.

"Thank God, I didn't hurt her! The revelation was a heavy one, but I braced myself up, and the rage and contempt that filled me were mingled with some sort of pity. I did not even reproach her. I had in my pockets about thirty pounds in English gold. I put down twenty on the table.

"There are twenty pounds,' I said 'take it and go. I will send you another two hundred pounds as soon as I can communicate with my father on one condition.'

"What is it?' she said sullenly.

"That you'll never try to see me, or harass me again. If you do, by God! I'll kill you.'

"I promise you that much," she replied. In half an hour she had left the house, and I never saw or heard of her again.

"That evening I made special preparations. First of all I wrote to my poor father, and told him everything, and bade Muller and his wife goodbye, telling them I was going on board my ship. They, pitying me deeply, bade me farewell with tears.

"But I had no such intention. I wanted to settle scores with the man who had wronged me. At a marine store dealer's that night I bought two common cutlasses, and waited for my chance. I had learnt that Decker went to the service club on certain evenings, and stayed very late.

"My time came the following night. I saw my man come out of the club, and followed him closely till he entered a quiet street. Then I called him by name. He turned and faced me and asked me angrily what I wanted.

"I am Theodor Brandt,' I said, and handed him one of the two cutlasses I was carrying under my overcoat.

"The man was no coward, and fought well, but in less than a minute I ran him clean through the body. He fell in the muddy street, and by the time I had dragged him away into the shadow of a high wooden fence enclosing a timber yard, was dead. Half an hour later I was on board a fishing-smack, bound for Wangeroog, one of the Frisian Islands, off the coast. At that place I remained in safety for a month, then got away to Amsterdam, and from there to Java. Then for the next eight-and-twenty years, down to this very moment, I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth. Six years after I escaped I joined an American man-of-war the *Iroquois* at Canton, and when we were paid off in the States I took out my naturalisation papers. This served me well, when, two years afterwards, I was recognised at San Francisco by some German bluejackets as 'Brandt, the murderer of Captain Decker,' and arrested. Fortunately, I had money, and while the German Consul was trying hard to get me handed over to the German naval authorities on the Pacific Coast, my lawyers managed to get me out on bail. I got away down to the Hawaiian Islands in a lumber ship, and well, since then I've been knocking around anywhere and everywhere.... Come, let us turn in."

Chapter VI

At dawn the wind had died away to a light breeze, and the sun rose to shine upon an ocean of unspiced blue. To the eastward, the slopes of New Britain were hidden from our view by a thick mist, only the tops of some high mountain peaks far inland showing above, and there seemed to be every appearance of the fine weather lasting. This gave us much satisfaction, and after a bathe in a rocky pool on the reef, we ate our breakfast of fish and coconut with good spirits, then filling our pipes, went down to the inner beach to bask in the glorious sunshine.

"If this sort of weather keeps up," I remarked to Yorke, "I'm afraid your prediction about our seeing Guest and the cutter in another two days won't be verified it'll fall calm before noon to-day, and may keep so for a week. I've known a calm to last for a solid ten days on the north side of New Britain."

"Perhaps so," he replied; "but then the current about here sets strongly to the eastward, and somehow I feel certain that, wind or no wind, we'll see the ships."

"Well, if we do, you ought to give up sailing, Captain Yorke, and go into business as a prophet. I for one would always come to you for a tip. But, joking apart, let us imagine that Guest or the cutter did not run far to the eastward, but hove-to, and as soon as the hurricane had blown itself out, headed back for us; in such a case, both vessels may be within half a day's sail of us at this very moment."

"That is quite possible it is also possible they may be within twenty miles of us, becalmed. It would not surprise me if Guest actually drifts in sight of these islands, and comes to look for us in his boat."

"Now that brings me to the kernel of my imagination. I think it very likely he may have no boat to send, and"

He gave me a mighty thump on the back.

"Good boy! I know what you're thinking of the raft?"

"Exactly, Captain. So don't you think it would be as well for us to turn to at once, and make a couple of good paddles? though in an emergency the butt ends of dry coconut branches do very well for paddles."

Then I went on to say that it was quite likely that Guest had lost both his boats, and the cutter her dingy, before there was time to have them properly secured; and that the brigantine had lost the whaler, which had brought us ashore, I was sure of, for she had, as I have mentioned, been nearly thrown over on her beam ends when struck by the first blast, and the boat must certainly either have been hopelessly stove when she was forced below, or torn away from the davits by the weight of water in her when the ship righted herself.

We set to at once with a good will Yorke overhauling the cane fastenings with which the great bamboos were lashed together, whilst I went along the beach in search of some young *futu* trees, the wood of which is soft when green, but dries hard, and could be easily worked, even by such a tool as a sheath knife.

A quarter of a mile from our camp I found just what I wanted three or four young *futu* saplings lying on the ground, torn up by the roots. Taking two of the best, I stripped off the branches, and returned to my companion, who was still at work on the raft, relashing its timbers wherever needed.

In a couple of hours I had made quite a decent pair of paddles, each about four feet in length, and with four inches of blade in the widest part. Then Yorke, having finished with the raft, went with me along the beach, and collected some old coconuts for food, and some young ones to drink, for, as my comrade observed, one never knew what might happen, and it would be as well to have some provisions all ready to hand in case of emergency. There were still thousands of dead fish to be seen everywhere lying on the sand, cast up among the *debris* above high-water mark, but these were now turning putrid, and of no use.

We had noticed a huge banyan tree not far distant from our sleeping place, which was the roosting and breeding place of a vast number of whale birds, so Yorke proposed that we should go there and see if we could kill some by hurling sticks at them. We had often seen this done by the natives of the western Caroline Islands, for the birds are very stupid, and allow themselves, when not on the wing, to be approached quite closely. We cut ourselves each a half-dozen of short, heavy throwing-sticks of green wood, and set out for the rookery, and within an hour had killed thirty or forty of the poor birds, some of which we at once picked,

cleaned, and roasted. We had no lack of salt, for every rock and shrub above high-water mark on the weather side of the island was covered with a thin incrustation of it, caused by the rapid evaporation of the spray under a torrid sun. The remainder of the birds we cooked later in the day, intending them as a standby.

In the afternoon we again bathed, this time in the lagoon, and Yorke, who was one of the strongest and swiftest swimmers, for an European, that I had ever seen, succeeded in capturing a turtle which was lying asleep on the surface of the water, and brought it ashore; but it proved to be so old and poor that we let it go again in disgust.

Towards the close of the day we again crossed the islet to have a better look at the New Britain shore, the heavy mist which had hung over it most of the day having now vanished. That the native owners of the plantations would put in an appearance before many days had passed I was certain, for they would be anxious to see what damage had been done by the hurricane, and no doubt dig up some of the taro, which, as I have said, was fully grown.

The moment we emerged from the scrub out upon the eastern shore, we obtained a splendid view of the opposite coast of the great island, though the actual shore was not visible on account of the extreme lowness of the belt of littoral, which was many miles in width; but by climbing a tree we could just discern the long, dark line of palms, and here and there a narrow strip of white, denoting either surf or a sandy beach.

"Why," I said to Yorke, "that land cannot be more than five miles distant to its nearest point, and if there are niggers living there we should see their fires to-night, and"

The next moment I uttered a loud hurrah! and nearly fell off the tree in my excitement, for away on the northern horizon was a sail, shining snowy-white in the rays of the sinking sun!

Yorke echoed my cheer. "A day sooner than I prophesied, Drake! Wish we had a glass, so that we could make out which it is. I am rather inclined to think it is the *Fray Bentos* it looks too big for the cutter. Anyway, whichever it is, she's becalmed; but even if there is not a breath of wind during the night, she'll be closer in in the morning, as the current is bound to set her along this way."

We descended from the tree jubilantly, and I suggested that we should make a big blaze on the eastern shore, so as to let the ship know we saw her, but the more cautious Yorke said it would be rather risky. Natives, he said, might be quite near at that moment, a party of canoes could have easily crossed over during the day, and we should be none the wiser unless we happened to see the reflections of their fires, after they had arrived, on the lagoon waters. So, after waiting another ten minutes, when the sun set, we returned to camp.

"Let us kill the fatted calf and divide it between us," said my companion, taking our plug of tobacco and cutting it in halves; "I'm going to smoke all night, or at any rate until I fall asleep. Did you see how the sun set? Well, that thick, yellow haze means a calm to-morrow, to a dead certainty, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if we see Guest pulling into the lagoon at daylight, that is, if he has a boat left."

I do not think either of us slept for more than a quarter of an hour that night. That Yorke could have done so, I do not doubt, but I would persist in talking, getting up, walking about, and smoking, and he, good-naturedly, kept awake on my account. The night was wondrously calm and beautiful, so calm and quiet that there was not the slightest surf on the outer reef, and the only sound that broke the silence would be the croak of some night-fishing bird, as it rose, prey in bill, from the slumbering lagoon.

As soon as ever we could see our way through to the other side of the island, we were afoot, unheeding the drenching we got from the dew-soaked trees whenever we touched a branch. Within five minutes after we had emerged out into the open the sun rose, and a cheer broke from us when we saw both the cutter and the brigantine lying becalmed about four miles away, between the islet and the mainland of New Britain, and almost abreast of where we stood.

"They have both lost all the boats, I am almost sure," said Yorke, "or we should see one coming ashore; unless, indeed, a boat is already pulling down the lagoon on the other side. Let us wait an hour. That will decide us what to do; if we see no boat between now and then, we can be assured that Guest has none to send, and that he is waiting for a breeze, so that he can run in close to the reef, and try to get within hail of us. I daresay that he has a raft of some sort already made, and is trying to get closer to the land to send it

ashore for us. So we'll give him a pleasant surprise."

We waited impatiently till the hour had passed, but could see no sign of a boat putting off from, or on the way from the brigantine, and were then certain that she had none to send, as if it had left the vessel, even at daylight, it would have entered the lagoon and been with us by that time.

Whilst we were waiting we had piled together on the shore a great heap of dried coconut branches, on top of which we threw masses of a thick, green, saline creeper. This heap we lit as a signal, and a pillar of dense smoke rose high in the windless atmosphere. It was answered by Guest in a few minutes not by a gun, as we expected, but by a similar signal of smoke, caused by a mass of cotton waste being soaked in coal tar and ignited.

"He's answering us," exclaimed Yorke. "Now, let's get the raft launched and make a start."

We tore back through the scrub to our camp, I panting with excitement, Yorke as cool as ever. Carrying the raft down to the water we quickly put on board the bundles of young coconuts, not deeming it worth while to bother with the old ones and the cooked birds, as we quite expected to be alongside the *Fray Bentos* within three hours at least, the sea being as calm as a mill-pond, and the raft very light.

"Go easy, my lad, go easy," said Yorke with a smile, as he saw the state of flurry I was in. "We've got two or three hours paddling to do, so don't knock yourself up needlessly. Now, what about our rifles?"

I had actually forgotten them, but at once ran back for them (the cartridges we always kept in our pockets), and picking one up in each hand, tore down the bank again, caught my left foot in a vine, and pitched upon my nose on the top of the broken coral and pebbles covering the beach with such violence that had it not been for the muzzle of the rifle I was carrying in my right hand plunging into the loose stones, and bringing me up sharply, I might have broken my jaw against a big boulder, which just caught me on the chin.

Pretending I was not hurt, though my chin was skinned, and my shoulder was strained, I picked myself up, handed the rifles to Yorke, and said I was ready.

"Take a drink first," he said in his authoritative, yet sympathetic way, as he opened a young coconut. "Then fill your pipe and rest awhile. We're in no hurry for ten minutes. Poor chap, you did do a flyer. Talk about the Gadarene swine! Why you could give them points in running down steep places!"

I certainly had given myself a tremendous shaking, for I felt quite dizzy, but after a few draws at my pipe, said I was fit to paddle the raft to Cape Horn.

We pushed off, then poled along shore till we came to the passage, which was as smooth as glass. Here, on account of the deep water, we had to take to our paddles, and were soon out in the open sea, heading for the vessels. The sun was intensely hot, but we took no heed of it, and congratulated ourselves upon having such a calm sea, instead of having to paddle against a swell, which would have greatly impeded our progress.

For the first mile or so we went along in great style then, to our consternation, we suddenly ran right into a heavy tide rip, and away we went at the rate of three or four knots an hour to the south-east, and towards the New Britain shore. The belt or tide-rip seemed to be about a mile in width, and although we paddled furiously in the endeavour to get out of the whirling, seething stream, it was in vain the raft spun round and round with such rapidity that we lost control over, and had to let her go; for not only were we unable to make any headway, but the manner in which we were spinning round would not allow us to keep our feet, and began to make us sea-sick. After half an hour or more of this, we at last saw a chance of getting out of the rip into a side eddy; and, putting forth all our strength, we just succeeded in doing so, only to be menaced by a fresh and more alarming danger.

Yorke, dashing the pouring perspiration from his brow with his hand, had just stood up to get a look at the brigantine and cutter, when he uttered an oath.

"By God, we're in for it now! Look, here's four canoes, filled with niggers, heading dead on for us. The beggars see us, too!"

I stood up beside him, and saw, about a quarter of a mile away, four canoes, each of which was carrying six or eight natives, coming towards us at a furious rate. They were, like all New Britain canoes, very low down in the water, which, together with our own troubles when we were in the tide rip, had prevented our

seeing them long before.

"Lucky we have not wasted any of our cartridges" said Yorke grimly; "we'll give them all the fight they want. But let them get closer, while we head back for the ships. We *must* get out of this current we can lick the niggers easy enough; but if we get into that tide-rip again, we'll be carried out of sight of the brigantine by midday."

Plunging our paddles into the water, we sent our bamboo craft along till we were in absolute safety as far as the tide-rip was concerned. Then Yorke laid down his paddle.

"We're all right now, Drake; and now we'll give these man-chawing beggars a bit of a surprise. They mean to knock us on the head in another ten minutes, and take our carcasses ashore for to-night's dinner. You are the younger man, and can shoot better than I, so I'll be polite and give you first show. Sight for five hundred yards for a trial shot, at the leading canoe. But wait a minute don't stand up."

He quickly piled up the young coconuts in a firm heap, and then stood over me, his own rifle in hand, whilst I knelt on the bamboos and placed my rifle on the top of the heap of coconuts.

I am now, at this time of life, ashamed of the savage instinct that in those days filled me with a certain joy in destroying human life, unthinkingly, and without compunction. But I had been brought up in a rough school, among men who thought it not only justifiable, but correct and proper to shoot a man black, or white, or brown, or yellow who had done them any wrong. It had been my lot, in the Solomon Islands, to witness one of the most hideous and appalling massacres of a ship's crew that was ever perpetrated by natives a massacre that had filled my youthful mind with the most intense and unreasoning hatred of all "niggers," as we called the natives of Melanesia. The memory of that awful scene had burned itself upon my brain, for the captain and mate of the vessel were dear friends of mine, and they and their men had been cruelly slaughtered, not for any wrong they had done for they were good, straight men but simply because their blind confidence in the savage natives invited their destruction.

I steadied my rifle upon the top of the heap of coconuts, and waited a second or two till every man in the first canoe was in line. Then I pulled the trigger, and was thrown back bleeding and unconscious, for the rifle burst just in front of the breech block, which blew out and struck me on the top of my head, nearly fracturing my skull.

When I came to again Yorke's face was bending over me.

"We're all right, Drake. The brigantine is within a mile of us, coming up with a light air, and we'll be aboard in half an hour. How do you feel, my son?"

"Rockotty. Did the rifle burst?"

"Burst? It burst like a cannon, all but killed you, and a splinter hurt me in the eye. Drake, my boy, the next time you do the Gadarene swine trick with a cheap German Snider in your hand, see that the barrel is clear before you fire it. When you fell that time, your rifle barrel must have been pretty badly choked with sand and coral pebbles... Now lie still, and don't worry like an old maid who has lost her cat. You can do nothing, and will only be a damned nuisance if you *do* try to do anything. The brigantine will be here presently, and you'll get your head attended to, and have 'pretty-pretty' plasters stuck on your nose and other parts of your facial beauties."

"Where are the niggers?" I asked.

"Gone, gone, my dear boy. Vanished, but not vanished in time enough for five or six of them. I have used every one of our cartridges on the four canoes, and have had the supreme satisfaction of knowing that I have not used them in vain. Now stop talking, and let me attend to the ship the bamboo ship... There, put your head on my coat; and don't talk."

When the *Fray Bentos* sailed up alongside the raft I was lifted on board, and placed in my berth, and long days passed ere I saw Yorke again.

When I did see him the brigantine was lying at anchor at Rook Island, and Guest was in my cabin telling me the story of the hurricane of how he had lost the two boats within an hour one being carried away when the brigantine was all but thrown over on her beam ends, and the other the longboats swept away with

everything else on deckguns, deck-houses, bulwarks and all.

"How we escaped smashing into some reef or another I don't know," said Guest; "but the strangest thing about it all is that Yorke's cutter, manned by native seamen, managed to stick so close to the *Fray Bentos*; for when I, running before the hurricane, with my decks swept with tremendous seas, suddenly ran into smooth water, brought to in fifteen fathoms, and dropped anchor, there was the *Francesca* cheek by jowl, alongside of me."

"Kanaka sailors' eyesight," I said. "Napoleon never lost sight of the brigantine for a moment! And, talking about eyesight, how is Yorke's eye?"

"Bad, bad, my boy. It is destroyed entirely, and he is now on board here, in my cabin. He has been asking for you. Do you feel strong enough to get up and see him?"

I rose at once, and went into Guest's cabin. Yorke was lying in the skipper's bunk, and as I entered he extended both hands to me, and smiled cheerfully, though his left eye was covered with a bandage, and his brave, square-set face was white and drawn.

"How are you, Drake, my boy? We had a narrow squeak, didn't we, from the niggers? And here is Captain Guest worrying and tormenting himself that he could not fire a gun to scare them off."

I held his big, right hand between my own, and pressed it gently, for there was something in his one remaining eye that told me the end of all was near.

"Goodbye, dear lad.... Goodbye, Captain Guest. *I* know what is the matter with meerysipelas and erysipelas to a big, fat man like me means death... and if you would put a bullet through my head now you would do me a good turn... But here, Guest, and you, Drake... your hands. I'll be dead by to-morrow morning, and want to say goodbye, and wish good luck to you both, before I begin babbling silly twaddle about things that are of no account now... of no account now... not worth speaking about now. But the South Seas are a rotten sort of a place, anyway."