ALLEN GRANT

THE GREAT TABOO

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The Great Taboo:

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PREFACE

I desire to express my profound indebtedness, for the central mythological idea embodied in this tale, to Mr. J.G. Frazer's admirable and epoch-making work, "The Golden Bough," whose main contention I have endeavored incidentally to popularize in my present story. I wish also to express my obligations in other ways to Mr. Andrew Lang's "Myth, Ritual, and Religion," Mr. H.O. Forbes's "Naturalist's Wanderings," and Mr. Julian Thomas's "Cannibals and Convicts." If I have omitted to mention any other author to whom I may have owed incidental hints, it will be some consolation to me to reflect that I shall at least have afforded an opportunity for legitimate sport to the amateurs of the new and popular British pastime of badger-baiting or plagiary-hunting. It may also save critics some moments' search if I say at once that, after careful consideration, I have been unable to discover any moral whatsoever in this humble narrative. I venture to believe that in so enlightened an age the majority of my readers will never miss it.

G.A.

THE NOOK, DORKING, October, 1890.

CHAPTER I.
IN MID PACIFIC

"Man overboard!"

It rang in Felix Thurstan's ears like the sound of a bell. He gazed about him in dismay, wondering what had happened.

The first intimation he received of the accident was that sudden sharp cry from the bo'sun's mate. Almost before he had fully taken it in, in all its meaning, another voice, farther aft, took up the cry once more in an altered form: "A lady! a lady! Somebody overboard! Great heavens, it is *her*! It's Miss Ellis! Miss Ellis!"

Next instant Felix found himself, he knew not how, struggling in a wild grapple with the dark, black water. A woman was clinging to him—clinging for dear life. But he couldn't have told you himself that minute how it all took place. He was too stunned and dazzled.

He looked around him on the seething sea in a sudden awakening, as it were, to life and consciousness. All about, the great water stretched dark and tumultuous. White breakers surged over him. Far ahead the steamer's lights gleamed red and green in long lines upon the ocean. At first they ran fast; then they slackened somewhat. She was surely slowing now; they must be reversing engines and trying to stop her. They would put out

a boat. But what hope, what chance of rescue by night, in such a wild waste of waves as that? And Muriel Ellis was clinging to him for dear life all the while, with the despairing clutch of a half-drowned woman!

The people on the Australasian, for their part, knew better what had occurred. There was bustle and confusion enough on deck and on the captain's bridge, to be sure: "Man overboard!"—three sharp rings at the engine bell:—"Stop her short!—reverse engines!—lower the gig!—look sharp, there, all of you!" Passengers hurried up breathless at the first alarm to know what was the matter. Sailors loosened and lowered the boat from the davits with extraordinary quickness. Officers stood by, giving orders in monosyllables with practised calm. All was hurry and turmoil, yet with a marvellous sense of order and prompt obedience as well. But, at any rate, the people on deck hadn't the swift swirl of the boisterous water, the hampering wet clothes, the pervading consciousness of personal danger, to make their brains reel, like Felix Thurstan's. They could ask one another with comparative composure what had happened on board; they could listen without terror to the story of the accident.

It was the thirteenth day out from Sydney, and the Australasian was rapidly nearing the equator. Toward evening the wind had freshened, and the sea was running high against her weather side. But it was a fine starlit night, though the moon had not yet risen; and as the brief tropical twilight faded away by quick degrees in the west, the fringe of cocoanut palms on

the reef that bounded the little island of Boupari showed out for a minute or two in dark relief, some miles to leeward, against the pale pink horizon. In spite of the heavy sea, many passengers lingered late on deck that night to see the last of that coral-girt shore, which was to be their final glimpse of land till they reached Honolulu, *en route* for San Francisco.

Bit by bit, however, the cocoanut palms, silhouetted with their graceful waving arms for a few brief minutes in black against the glowing background, merged slowly into the sky or sank below the horizon. All grew dark. One by one, as the trees disappeared, the passengers dropped off for whist in the saloon, or retired to the uneasy solitude of their own state-rooms. At last only two or three men were left smoking and chatting near the top of the companion ladder; while at the stern of the ship Muriel Ellis looked over toward the retreating island, and talked with a certain timid maidenly frankness to Felix Thurstan.

There's nowhere on earth for getting really to know people in a very short time like the deck of a great Atlantic or Pacific liner. You're thrown together so much, and all day long, that you see more of your fellow-passengers' inner life and nature in a few brief weeks than you would ever be likely to see in a long twelvemonth of ordinary town or country acquaintanceship. And Muriel Ellis had seen a great deal in those thirteen days of Felix Thurstan; enough to make sure in her own heart that she really liked him—well—so much that she looked up with a pretty blush of self-consciousness every time he approached

and lifted his hat to her. Muriel was an English rector's daughter, from a country village in Somersetshire; and she was now on her way back from a long year's visit, to recruit her health, to an aunt in Paramatta. She was travelling under the escort of an amiable old chaperon whom the aunt in question had picked up for her before leaving Sydney; but, as the amiable old chaperon, being but an indifferent sailor, spent most of her time in her own berth, closely attended by the obliging stewardess, Muriel had found her chaperonage interfere very little with opportunities of talk with that nice Mr. Thurstan. And now, as the last glow of sunset died out in the western sky, and the last palm-tree faded away against the colder green darkness of the tropical night, Muriel was leaning over the bulwarks in confidential mood, and watching the big waves advance or recede, and talking the sort of talk that such an hour seems to favor with the handsome young civil servant who stood on guard, as it were, beside her. For Felix Thurstan held a government appointment at Levuka, in Fiji, and was now on his way home, on leave of absence after six years' service in that new-made colony.

"How delightful it would be to live on an island like that!" Muriel murmured, half to herself, as she gazed out wistfully in the direction of the disappearing coral reef. "With those beautiful palms waving always over one's head, and that delicious evening air blowing cool through their branches! It looks such a Paradise!"

Felix smiled and glanced down at her, as he steadied himself

with one hand against the bulwark, while the ship rolled over into the trough of the sea heavily. "Well, I don't know about that, Miss Ellis," he answered with a doubtful air, eying her close as he spoke with eyes of evident admiration. "One might be happy anywhere, of course—in suitable society; but if you'd lived as long among cocoanuts in Fiji as I have, I dare say the poetry of these calm palm-grove islands would be a little less real to you. Remember, though they look so beautiful and dreamy against the sky like that, at sunset especially (that was a heavy one, that time; I'm really afraid we must go down to the cabin soon; she'll be shipping seas before long if we stop on deck much later—and yet, it's so delightful stopping up here till the dusk comes on, isn't it?)—well, remember, I was saying, though they look so beautiful and dreamy and poetical—'Summer isles of Eden lying in dark purple spheres of sea,' and all that sort of thing—these islands are inhabited by the fiercest and most bloodthirsty cannibals known to travellers."

"Cannibals!" Muriel repeated, looking up at him in surprise. "You don't mean to say that islands like these, standing right in the very track of European steamers, are still heathen and cannibal?"

"Oh, dear, yes," Felix replied, holding his hand out as he spoke to catch his companion's arm gently, and steady her against the wave that was just going to strike the stern: "Excuse me; just so; the sea's rising fast, isn't it?—Oh, dear, yes; of course they are; they're all heathen and cannibals. You couldn't imagine to

yourself the horrible bloodthirsty rites that may this very minute be taking place upon that idyllic-looking island, under the soft waving branches of those whispering palm-trees. Why, I knew a man in the Marquesas myself—a hideous old native, as ugly as you can fancy him—who was supposed to be a god, an incarnate god, and was worshipped accordingly with profound devotion by all the other islanders. You can't picture to yourself how awful their worship was. I daren't even repeat it to you; it was too, too horrible. He lived in a hut by himself among the deepest forest, and human victims used to be brought—well, there, it's too loathsome! Why, see; there's a great light on the island now; a big bonfire or something; don't you make it out? You can tell it by the red glare in the sky overhead." He paused a moment; then he added more slowly, "I shouldn't be surprised if at this very moment, while we're standing here in such perfect security on the deck of a Christian English vessel, some unspeakable and unthinkable heathen orgy mayn't be going on over there beside that sacrificial fire; and if some poor trembling native girl isn't being led just now, with blows and curses and awful savage ceremonies, her hands bound behind her back—Oh, look out, Miss Ellis!"

He was only just in time to utter the warning words. He was only just in time to put one hand on each side of her slender waist, and hold her tight so, when the big wave which he saw coming struck full tilt against the vessel's flank, and broke in one white drenching sheet of foam against her stern and quarter-deck.

The suddenness of the assault took Felix's breath away. For the first few seconds he was only aware that a heavy sea had been shipped, and had wet him through and through with its unexpected deluge. A moment later, he was dimly conscious that his companion had slipped from his grasp, and was nowhere visible. The violence of the shock, and the slimy nature of the sea water, had made him relax his hold without knowing it, in the tumult of the moment, and had at the same time caused Muriel to glide imperceptibly through his fingers, as he had often known an ill-caught cricket-ball do in his school-days. Then he saw he was on his hands and knees on the deck. The wave had knocked him down, and dashed him against the bulwark on the leeward side. As he picked himself up, wet, bruised, and shaken, he looked about for Muriel. A terrible dread seized upon his soul at once. Impossible! Impossible! she couldn't have been washed overboard!

And even as he gazed about, and held his bruised elbow in his hand, and wondered to himself what it could all mean, that sudden loud cry arose beside him from the quarter-deck, "Man overboard! Man overboard!" followed a moment later by the answering cry, from the men who were smoking under the lee of the companion, "A lady! a lady! It's Miss Ellis! Miss Ellis!"

He didn't take it all in. He didn't reflect. He didn't even know he was actually doing it. But he did it, all the same, with the simple, straightforward, instinctive sense of duty which makes civilized man act aright, all unconsciously, in any moment of

supreme danger and difficulty. Leaping on to the taffrail without one instant's delay, and steadying himself for an indivisible fraction of time with his hand on the rope ladder, he peered out into the darkness with keen eyes for a glimpse of Muriel Ellis's head above the fierce black water; and espying it for one second, as she came up on a white crest, he plunged in before the vessel had time to roll back to windward, and struck boldly out in the direction where he saw that helpless object dashed about like a cork on the surface of the ocean.

Only those who have known such accidents at sea can possibly picture to themselves the instantaneous haste with which all that followed took place upon that bustling quarter-deck. Almost at the first cry of "Man overboard!" the captain's bell rang sharp and quick, as if by magic, with three peremptory little calls in the engine-room below. The Australasian was going at full speed, but in a marvellously short time, as it seemed to all on board, the great ship had slowed down to a perfect standstill, and then had reversed her engines, so that she lay, just nose to the wind, awaiting further orders. In the meantime, almost as soon as the words were out of the bo'sun's lips, a sailor amidships had rushed to the safety belts hung up by the companion ladder, and had flung half a dozen of them, one after another, with hasty but well-aimed throws, far, far astern, in the direction where Felix had disappeared into the black water. The belts were painted white, and they showed for a few seconds, as they fell, like bright specks on the surface of the darkling sea; then they sunk slowly behind

as the big ship, still not quite stopped, ploughed her way ahead with gigantic force into the great abyss of darkness in front of her.

It seemed but a minute, too, to the watchers on board, before a party of sailors, summoned by the whistle with that marvellous readiness to meet any emergency which long experience of sudden danger has rendered habitual among seafaring men, had lowered the boat, and taken their seats on the thwarts, and seized their oars, and were getting under way on their hopeless quest of search, through the dim black night, for those two belated souls alone in the midst of the angry Pacific.

It seemed but a minute or two, I say, to the watchers on board; but oh, what an eternity of time to Felix Thurstan, struggling there with his live burden in the seething water!

He had dashed into the ocean, which was dark, but warm with tropical heat, and had succeeded, in spite of the heavy seas then running, in reaching Muriel, who clung to him now with all the fierce clinging of despair, and impeded his movement through that swirling water. More than that, he saw the white life-belts that the sailors flung toward him; they were well and aptly flung, in the inspiration of the moment, to allow for the sea itself carrying them on the crest of its waves toward the two drowning creatures. Felix saw them distinctly, and making a great lunge as they passed, in spite of Muriel's struggles, which sadly hampered his movements, he managed to clutch at no less than three before the great billow, rolling on, carried them off on its top forever

away from him. Two of these he slipped hastily over Muriel's shoulders; the other he put, as best he might, round his own waist; and then, for the first time, still clinging close to his companion's arm, and buffeted about wildly by that running sea, he was able to look about him in alarm for a moment, and realize more or less what had actually happened.

By this time the Australasian was a quarter of a mile away in front of them, and her lights were beginning to become stationary as she slowly slowed and reversed engines. Then, from the summit of a great wave, Felix was dimly aware of a boat being lowered—for he saw a separate light gleaming across the sea—a search was being made in the black night, alas, how hopelessly! The light hovered about for many, many minutes, revealed to him now here, now there, searching in vain to find him, as wave after wave raised him time and again on its irresistible summit. The men in the boat were doing their best, no doubt; but what chance of finding any one on a dark night like that, in an angry sea, and with no clue to guide them toward the two struggling castaways? Current and wind had things all their own way. As a matter of fact, the light never came near the castaways at all; and after half an hour's ineffectual search, which seemed to Felix a whole long lifetime, it returned slowly toward the steamer from which it came—and left those two alone on the dark Pacific.

"There wasn't a chance of picking 'em up," the captain said, with philosophic calm, as the men clambered on board again, and the Australasian got under way once more for the port

of Honolulu. "I knew there wasn't a chance; but in common humanity one was bound to make some show of trying to save 'em. He was a brave fellow to go after her, though it was no good of course. He couldn't even find her, at night, and with such a sea as that running."

And even as he spoke, Felix Thurstan, rising once more on the crest of a much smaller billow—for somehow the waves were getting incredibly smaller as he drifted on to leeward—felt his heart sink within him as he observed to his dismay that the Australasian must be steaming ahead once more, by the movement of her lights, and that they two were indeed abandoned to their fate on the open surface of that vast and trackless ocean.

CHAPTER II.
THE TEMPLE OF THE DEITY

While these things were happening on the sea close by, a very different scene indeed was being enacted meanwhile, beneath those waving palms, on the island of Boupari. It was strange, to be sure, as Felix Thurstan had said, that such unspeakable heathen orgies should be taking place within sight of a passing Christian English steamer. But if only he had known or reflected to what sort of land he was trying now to struggle ashore with Muriel, he might well have doubted whether it were not better to let her perish where she was, in the pure clear ocean, rather than to submit an English girl to the possibility of undergoing such horrible heathen rites and ceremonies.

For on the island of Boupari it was high feast with the worshippers of their god that night. The sun had turned on the Tropic of Capricorn at noon, and was making his way northward, toward the equator once more; and his votaries, as was their wont, had all come forth to do him honor in due season, and to pay their respects, in the inmost and sacredest grove on the island, to his incarnate representative, the living spirit of trees and fruits and vegetation, the very high god, the divine Tu-Kila-Kila!

Early in the evening, as soon as the sun's rim had disappeared beneath the ocean, a strange noise boomed forth from the central

shrine of Boupari. Those who heard it clapped their hands to their ears and ran hastily forward. It was a noise like distant rumbling thunder, or the whir of some great English mill or factory; and at its sound every woman on the island threw herself on the ground prostrate, with her face in the dust, and waited there reverently till the audible voice of the god had once more subsided. For no woman knew how that sound was produced. Only the grown men, initiated into the mysteries of the shrine when they came of age at the tattooing ceremony, were aware that the strange, buzzing, whirring noise was nothing more or less than the cry of the bull-roarer.

A bull-roarer, as many English schoolboys know, is merely a piece of oblong wood, pointed at either end, and fastened by a leather thong at one corner. But when whirled round the head by practised priestly hands, it produces a low rumbling noise like the wheels of a distant carriage, growing gradually louder and clearer, from moment to moment, till at last it waxes itself into a frightful din, or bursts into perfect peals of imitation thunder. Then it decreases again once more, as gradually as it rose, becoming fainter and ever fainter, like thunder as it recedes, till the horrible bellowing, as of supernatural bulls, dies away in the end, by slow degrees, into low and soft and imperceptible murmurs.

But when the savage hears the distant humming of the bull-roarer, at whatever distance, he knows that the mysteries of his god are in full swing, and he hurries forward in haste, leaving his

work or his pleasure, and running, naked as he stands, to take his share in the worship, lest the anger of heaven should burst forth in devouring flames to consume him. But the women, knowing themselves unworthy to face the dread presence of the high god in his wrath, rush wildly from the spot, and, flinging themselves down at full length, with their mouths to the dust, wait patiently till the voice of their deity is no longer audible.

And as the bull-roarer on Boupari rang out with wild echoes from the coral caverns in the central grove that evening, Tu-Kila-Kila, their god, rose slowly from his place, and stood out from his hut, a deity revealed, before his reverential worshippers.

As he rose, a hushed whisper ran wave-like through the dense throng of dusky forms that bent low, like corn beneath the wind, before him, "Tu-Kila-Kila rises! He rises to speak! Hush! for the voice of the mighty man-god!"

The god, looking around him superciliously with a cynical air of contempt, stood forward with a firm and elastic step before his silent worshippers. He was a stalwart savage, in the very prime of life, tall, lithe, and active. His figure was that of a man well used to command; but his face, though handsome, was visibly marked by every external sign of cruelty, lust, and extreme bloodthirstiness. One might have said, merely to look at him, he was a being debased by all forms of brutal and hateful self-indulgence. A baleful light burned in his keen gray eyes. His lips were thick, full, purple, and wistful.

"My people may look upon me," he said, in a strangely affable

voice, standing forward and smiling with a curious half-cruel, half-compassionate smile upon his awe-struck followers. "On every day of the sun's course but this, none save the ministers dedicated to the service of Tu-Kila-Kila dare gaze unhurt upon his sacred person. If any other did, the light from his holy eyes would wither them up, and the glow of his glorious countenance would scorch them to ashes." He raised his two hands, palm outward, in front of him. "So all the year round," he went on, "Tu-Kila-Kila, who loves his people, and sends them the earlier and the later rain in the wet season, and makes their yams and their taro grow, and causes his sun to shine upon them freely—all the year round Tu-Kila-Kila, your god, sits shut up in his own house among the skeletons of those whom he has killed and eaten, or walks in his walled paddock, where his bread-fruit ripens and his plantains spring—himself, and the ministers that his tribesmen have given him."

At the sound of their mystic deity's voice the savages, bending lower still till their foreheads touched the ground, repeated in chorus, to the clapping of hands, like some solemn litany: "Tu-Kila-Kila speaks true. Our lord is merciful. He sends down his showers upon our crops and fields. He causes his sun to shine brightly over us. He makes our pigs and our slaves bring forth their increase. Tu-Kila-Kila is good. His people praise him."

The god took another step forward, the divine mantle of red feathers glowing in the sunset on his dusky shoulders, and smiled once more that hateful gracious smile of his. He was standing

near the open door of his wattled hut, overshadowed by the huge spreading arms of a gigantic banyan-tree. Through the open door of the hut it was possible to catch just a passing glimpse of an awful sight within. On the beams of the house, and on the boughs of the trees behind it, human skeletons, half covered with dry flesh, hung in ghastly array, their skulls turned downward. They were the skeletons of the victims Tu-Kila-Kila, their prince, had slain and eaten; they were the trophies of the cannibal man-god's hateful prowess.

Tu-Kila-Kila raised his right hand erect and spoke again. "I am a great god," he said, slowly. "I am very powerful. I make the sun to shine, and the yams to grow. I am the spirit of plants. Without me there would be nothing for you all to eat or drink in Boupari. If I were to grow old and die, the sun would fade away in the heavens overhead; the bread-fruit trees would wither and cease to bear on earth; all fruits would come to an end and die at once; all rivers would stop forthwith from running."

His worshippers bowed down in acquiescence with awestruck faces. "It is true," they answered, in the same slow sing-song of assent as before. "Tu-Kila-Kila is the greatest of gods. We owe to him everything. We hang upon his favor."

Tu-Kila-Kila started back, laughed, and showed his pearly white teeth. They were beautiful and regular, like the teeth of a tiger, a strong young tiger. "But I need more sacrifices than all the other gods," he went on, melodiously, like one who plays with consummate skill upon some difficult instrument. "I am greedy;

I am thirsty; I am a hungry god. You must not stint me. I claim more human victims than all the other gods beside. If you want your crops to grow, and your rivers to run, the fields to yield you game, and the sea fish—this is what I ask: give me victims, victims! That is our compact. Tu-Kila-Kila calls you."

The men bowed down once more and repeated humbly, "You shall have victims as you will, great god; only give us yam and taro and bread-fruit, and cause not your bright light, the sun, to grow dark in heaven over us."

"Cut yourselves," Tu-Kila-Kila cried, in a peremptory voice, clapping his hands thrice. "I am thirsting for blood. I want your free-will offering."

As he spoke, every man, as by a set ritual, took from a little skin wallet at his side a sharp flake of coral-stone, and, drawing it deliberately across his breast in a deep red gash, caused the blood to flow out freely over his chest and long grass waistband. Then, having done so, they never strove for a moment to stanch the wound, but let the red drops fall as they would on to the dust at their feet, without seeming even to be conscious at all of the fact that they were flowing.

Tu-Kila-Kila smiled once more, a ghastly self-satisfied smile of unquestioned power. "It is well," he went on. "My people love me. They know my strength, how I can wither them up. They give me their blood to drink freely. So I will be merciful to them. I will make my sun shine and my rain drop from heaven. And instead of taking *all*, I will choose one victim." He paused, and

glanced along their line significantly.

"Choose, Tu-Kila-Kila," the men answered, without a moment's hesitation. "We are all your meat. Choose which one you will take of us."

Tu-Kila-Kila walked with a leisurely tread down the lines and surveyed the men critically. They were all drawn up in rows, one behind the other, according to tribes and families; and the god walked along each row, examining them with a curious and interested eye, as a farmer examines sheep fit for the market. Now and then, he felt a leg or an arm with his finger and thumb, and hesitated a second. It was an important matter, this choosing a victim. As he passed, a close observer might have noted that each man trembled visibly while the god's eye was upon him, and looked after him askance with a terrified sidelong gaze as he passed on to his neighbor. But not one savage gave any overt sign or token of his terror or his reluctance. On the contrary, as Tu-Kila-Kila passed along the line with lazy, cruel deliberateness, the men kept chanting aloud without one tremor in their voices, "We are all your meat. Choose which one you will take of us."

On a sudden, Tu-Kila-Kila turned sharply round, and, darting a rapid glance toward a row he had already passed several minutes before, he exclaimed, with an air of unexpected inspiration, "Tu-Kila-Kila has chosen. He takes Maloa."

The man upon whose shoulder the god laid his heavy hand as he spoke stood forth from the crowd without a moment's hesitation. If anger or fear was in his heart at all, it could not

be detected in his voice or his features. He bowed his head with seeming satisfaction, and answered humbly, "What Tu-Kila-Kila says must need be done. This is a great honor. He is a mighty god. We poor men must obey him. We are proud to be taken up and made one with divinity."

Tu-Kila-Kila raised in his hand a large stone axe of some polished green material, closely resembling jade, which lay on a block by the door, and tried its edge with his finger, in an abstracted manner. "Bind him!" he said, quietly, turning round to his votaries. And the men, each glad to have escaped his own fate, bound their comrade willingly with green ropes of plantain fibre.

"Crown him with flowers!" Tu-Kila-Kila said; and a female attendant, absolved from the terror of the bull-roarer by the god's command, brought forward a great garland of crimson hibiscus, which she flung around the victim's neck and shoulders.

"Lay his head on the sacred stone block of our fathers," Tu-Kila-Kila went on, in an easy tone of command, waving his hand gracefully. And the men, moving forward, laid their comrade, face downward, on a huge flat block of polished greenstone, which lay like an altar in front of the hut with the mouldering skeletons.

"It is well," Tu-Kila-Kila murmured once more, half aloud. "You have given me the free-will offering. Now for the trespass! Where is the woman who dared to approach too near the temple-home of the divine Tu-Kila-Kila? Bring the criminal forward!"

The men divided, and made a lane down their middle. Then one of them, a minister of the man-god's shrine, led up by the hand, all trembling and shrinking with supernatural terror in every muscle, a well-formed young girl of eighteen or twenty. Her naked bronze limbs were shapely and lissome; but her eyes were swollen and red with tears, and her face strongly distorted with awe for the man-god. When she stood at last before Tu-Kila-Kila's dreaded face, she flung herself on the ground in an agony of fear.

"Oh, mercy, great God!" she cried, in a feeble voice. "I have sinned, I have sinned. Mercy, mercy!"

Tu-Kila-Kila smiled as before, a smile of imperial pride. No ray of pity gleamed from those steel-gray eyes. "Does Tu-Kila-Kila show mercy?" he asked, in a mocking voice. "Does he pardon his suppliants? Does he forgive trespasses? Is he not a god, and must not his wrath be appeased? She, being a woman, and not a wife sealed to Tu-Kila-Kila, has dared to look from afar upon his sacred home. She has spied the mysteries. Therefore she must die. My people, bind her."

In a second, without more ado, while the poor trembling girl writhed and groaned in her agony before their eyes, that mob of wild savages, let loose to torture and slay, fell upon her with hideous shouts, and bound her, as they had bound their comrade before, with coarse native ropes of twisted plantain fibre.

"Lay her head on the stone," Tu-Kila-Kila said, grimly. And his votaries obeyed him.

"Now light the sacred fire to make our feast, before I slay the victims," the god said, in a gloating voice, running his finger again along the edge of his huge hatchet.

As he spoke, two men, holding in their hands hollow bamboos with coals of fire concealed within, which they kept aglow meanwhile by waving them up and down rapidly in the air, laid these primitive matches to the base of a great pyramidal pile of wood and palm-leaves, ready prepared beforehand in the yard of the temple. In a second, the dry fuel, catching the sparks instantly, blazed up to heaven with a wild outburst of flame. Great red tongues of fire licked up the mouldering mass of leaves and twigs, and caught at once at the trunks of palm and li wood within. A huge conflagration reddened the sky at once like lightning. The effect was magical. The glow transfigured the whole island for miles. It was, in fact, the blaze that Felix Thurstan had noted and remarked upon as he stood that evening on the silent deck of the Australasian.

Tu-Kila-Kila gazed at it with horrid childish glee. "A fine fire!" he said, gayly. "A fire worthy of a god. It will serve me well. Tu-Kila-Kila will have a good oven to roast his meal in."

Then he turned toward the sea, and held up his hand once more for silence. As he did so, an answering light upon its surface attracted his eye for a moment's space. It was a bright red light, mixed with white and green ones; in point of fact, the Australasian was passing. Tu-Kila-Kila pointed toward it solemnly with his plump, brown fore-finger. "See," he said,

drawing himself up and looking preternaturally wise; "your god is great. I am sending some of this fire across the sea to where my sun has set, to aid and reinforce it. That is to keep up the fire of the sun, lest ever at any time it should fade and fail you. While Tu-Kila-Kila lives the sun will burn bright. If Tu-Kila-Kila were to die it would be night forever."

His votaries, following their god's fore-finger as it pointed, all turned to look in the direction he indicated with blank surprise and astonishment. Such a sight had never met their eyes before, for the Australasian was the very first steamer to take the eastward route, through the dangerous and tortuous Boupari Channel. So their awe and surprise at the unwonted sight knew no bounds. Fire on the ocean! Miraculous light on the waves! Their god must, indeed, be a mighty deity if he could send flames like that careering over the sea! Surely the sun was safe in the hands of a potentate who could thus visibly reinforce it with red light, and white! In their astonishment and awe, they stood with their long hair falling down over their foreheads, and their hands held up to their eyes that they might gaze the farther across the dim, dark ocean. The borrowed light of their bonfire was moving, slowly moving over the watery sea. Fire and water were mixing and mingling on friendly terms. Impossible! Incredible! Marvellous! Miraculous! They prostrated themselves in their terror at Tu-Kila-Kila's feet. "Oh, great god," they cried, in awe-struck tones, "your power is too vast! Spare us, spare us, spare us!"

As for Tu-Kila-Kila himself, he was not astonished at all.

Strange as it sounds to us, he really believed in his heart what he said. Profoundly convinced of his own godhead, and abjectly superstitious as any of his own votaries, he absolutely accepted as a fact his own suggestion, that the light he saw was the reflection of that his men had kindled. The interpretation he had put upon it seemed to him a perfectly natural and just one. His worshippers, indeed, mere men that they were, might be terrified at the sight; but why should he, a god, take any special notice of it?

He accepted his own superiority as implicitly as our European nobles and rulers accept theirs. He had no doubts himself, and he considered those who had little better than criminals.

By and by, a smaller light detached itself by slow degrees from the greater ones. The others stood still, and halted in mid-ocean. The lesser light made as if it would come in the direction of Boupari. In point of fact, the gig had put out in search of Felix and Muriel.

Tu-Kila-Kila interpreted the facts at once, however, in his own way. "See," he said, pointing with his plump forefinger once more, and encouraging with his words his terrified followers, "I am sending back a light again from the sun to my island. I am doing my work well. I am taking care of my people. Fear not for your future. In the light is yet another victim. A man and a woman will come to Boupari from the sun, to make up for the man and woman whom we eat in our feast to-night. Give me plenty of victims, and you will have plenty of yam. Make haste, then; kill, eat; let us feast Tu-Kila-Kila! To-morrow the man and

woman I have sent from the sun will come ashore on the reef, and reach Boupari."

At the words, he stepped forward and raised that heavy tomahawk. With one blow each he brained the two bound and defenceless victims on the altar-stone of his fathers. The rest, a European hand shrinks from revealing. The orgy was too horrible even for description.

And that was the land toward which, that moment, Felix Thurstan was struggling, with all his might, to carry Muriel Ellis, from the myriad clasping arms of a comparatively gentle and merciful ocean!

CHAPTER III.
LAND; BUT WHAT LAND?

As the last glimmering lights of the Australasian died away to seaward, Felix Thurstan knew in his despair there was nothing for it now but to strike out boldly, if he could, for the shore of the island.

By this time the breakers had subsided greatly. Not, indeed, that the sea itself was really going down. On the contrary, a brisk wind was rising sharper from the east, and the waves on the open Pacific were growing each moment higher and loppier. But the huge mountain of water that washed Muriel Ellis overboard was not a regular ordinary wave; it was that far more powerful and dangerous mass, a shoal-water breaker. The Australasian had passed at that instant over a submerged coral-bar, quite deep enough, indeed, to let her cross its top without the slightest danger of grazing, but still raised so high toward the surface as to produce a considerable constant ground-swell, which broke in windy weather into huge sheets of surf, like the one that had just struck and washed over the Australasian, carrying Muriel with it. The very same cause that produced the breakers, however, bore Felix on their summit rapidly landward; and once he had got well beyond the region of the bar that begot them, he found himself soon, to his intense relief, in comparatively calm shoal water.

Muriel Ellis, for her part, was faint with terror and with the buffeting of the waves; but she still floated by his side, upheld by the life-belts. He had been able, by immense efforts, to keep unseparated from her amid the rending surf of the breakers. Now that they found themselves in easier waters for a while, Felix began to strike out vigorously through the darkness for the shore. Holding up his companion with one hand, and swimming with all his might in the direction where a vague white line of surf, lit up by the red glare-of some fire far inland, made him suspect the nearest land to lie, he almost thought he had succeeded at last, after a long hour of struggle, in feeling his feet, after all, on a firm coral bottom.

At the very moment he did so, and touched the ground underneath, another great wave, curling resistlessly behind him, caught him up on its crest, whirled him heavenward like a cork, and then dashed him down once more, a passive burden, on some soft and yielding substance, which he conjectured at once to be a beach of finely powdered coral fragments. As he touched this beach for an instant, the undertow of that vast dashing breaker sucked him back with its ebb again, a helpless, breathless creature; and then the succeeding wave rolled him over like a ball, upon the beach as before, in quick succession. Four times the back-current sucked him under with its wild pull in the self-same way, and four times the return wave flung him up upon the beach again like a fragment of sea-weed. With frantic efforts Felix tried at first to cling still to Muriel—to save her from the

irresistible force of that roaring surf—to snatch her from the open jaws of death by sheer struggling dint of thews and muscle. He might as well have tried to stem Niagara. The great waves, curling irresistibly in huge curves landward, caught either of them up by turns on their arched summits, and twisted them about remorselessly, raising them now aloft on their foaming crest, beating them back now prone in their hollow trough, and flinging them fiercely at last with pitiless energy against the soft beach of coral. If the beach had been hard, they must infallibly have been ground to powder or beaten to jelly by the colossal force of those gigantic blows. Fortunately it was yielding, smooth, and clay-like, and received them almost as a layer of moist plaster of Paris might have done, or they would have stood no chance at all for their lives in that desperate battle with the blind and frantic forces of unrelenting nature.

No man who has not himself seen the surf break on one of these far-southern coral shores can form any idea in his own mind of the terror and horror of the situation. The water, as it reaches the beach, rears itself aloft for a second into a huge upright wall, which, advancing slowly, curls over at last in a hollow circle, and pounds down upon the sand or reef with all the crushing force of some enormous sledge-hammer. But after the fourth assault, Felix felt himself flung up high and dry by the wave, as one may sometimes see a bit of light reed or pith flung up some distance ahead by an advancing tide on the beach in England. In an instant he steadied himself and staggered to his feet. Torn and bruised

as he was by the pummelling of the billows, he looked eagerly into the water in search of his companion. The next wave flung up Muriel, as the last had flung himself. He bent over her with a panting heart as she lay there, insensible, on the long white shore. Alive or dead? that was now the question.

Raising her hastily in his arms, with her clothes all clinging wet and close about her, Felix carried her over the narrow strip of tidal beach, above high-water level, and laid her gently down on a soft green bank of short tropical herbage, close to the edge of the coral. Then he bent over her once more, and listened eagerly at her heart. It still beat with faint pulses—beat—beat—beat. Felix throbbed with joy. She was alive! alive! He was not quite alone, then, on that unknown island!

And strange as it seemed, it was only a little more than two short hours since they had stood and looked out across the open sea over the bulwarks of the Australasian together!

But Felix had no time to moralize just then. The moment was clearly one for action. Fortunately, he happened to carry three useful things in his pocket when he jumped overboard after Muriel. The first was a pocket-knife; the second was a flask with a little whiskey in it; and the third, perhaps the most important of all, a small metal box of wax vesta matches. Pouring a little whiskey into the cup of the flask, he held it eagerly to Muriel's lips. The fainting girl swallowed it automatically. Then Felix, stooping down, tried the matches against the box. They were unfortunately wet, but half an hour's exposure, he knew, on sun-

warmed stones, in that hot, tropical air, would soon restore them again. So he opened the box and laid them carefully out on a flat white slab of coral. After that, he had time to consider exactly where they were, and what their chances in life, if any, might now amount to.

Pitch dark as it was, he had no difficulty in deciding at once by the general look of things that they had reached a fringing reef, such as he was already familiar with in the Marquesas and elsewhere. The reef was no doubt circular, and it enclosed within itself a second or central island, divided from it by a shallow lagoon of calm, still water. He walked some yards inland. From where he now stood, on the summit of the ridge, he could look either way, and by the faint reflected light of the stars, or the glare of the great pyre that burned on the central island, he could see down on one side to the ocean, with its fierce white pounding surf, and on the other to the lagoon, reflecting the stars overhead, and motionless as a mill-pond. Between them lay the low raised ridge of coral, covered with tall stems of cocoanut palms, and interspersed here and there, as far as his eye could judge, with little rectangular clumps of plantain and taro.

But what alarmed Felix most was the fire that blazed so brightly to heaven on the central island; for he knew too well that meant—there were *men* on the place; the land was inhabited.

The cocoanuts and taro told the same doubtful tale. From the way they grew, even in that dim starlight, Felix recognized at once they had all been planted.

Still, he didn't hesitate to do what he thought best for Muriel's relief for all that. Collecting a few sticks and fragments of palm-branches from the jungle about, he piled them into a heap, and waited patiently for his matches to dry. As soon as they were ready—and the warmth of the stone made them quickly inflammable—he struck a match on the box, and proceeded to light his fire by Muriel's side. As her clothes grew warmer, the poor girl opened her eyes at last, and, gazing around her, exclaimed, in blank terror, "Oh, Mr. Thurstan, where are we? What does all this mean? Where have we got to? On a desert island?"

"No, *not* on a desert island," Felix answered, shortly; "I'm afraid it's a great deal worse than that. To tell you the truth, I'm afraid it's inhabited."

At that moment, by the hot embers of the great sacrificial pyre on the central hill, two of the savage temple-attendants, calling their god's attention to a sudden blaze of flame upon the fringing reef, pointed with their dark forefingers and called out in surprise, "See, see, a fire on the barrier! A fire! A fire! What can it mean? There are no men of our people over there to-night. Have war-canoes arrived? Has some enemy landed?"

Tu-Kila-Kila leaned back, drained his cocoanut cup of intoxicating kava, and surveyed the unwonted apparition on the reef long and carefully. "It is nothing," he said at last, in his most deliberate manner, stroking his cheeks and chin contentedly with that plump round hand of his. "It is only the victims; the

new victims I promised you. Korong! Korong! They have come ashore with their light from my home in the sun. They have brought fire afresh—holy fire to Boupari."

Three or four of the savages leaped up in fierce joy, and bowed before him as he spoke, with eager faces. "Oh, Tu-Kila-Kila!" the eldest among them said, making a profound reverence, "shall we swim across to the reef and fetch them home to your house? Shall we take over our canoes and bring back your victims!"

The god motioned them back with one outstretched palm. His eyes were flushed and his look lazy. "Not to-night, my people," he said; readjusting the garland of flowers round his neck, and giving a careless glance at the well-picked bones that a few hours before had been two trembling fellow creatures. "Tu-Kila-Kila has feasted his fill for this evening. Your god is full; his heart is happy. I have eaten human flesh; I have drunk of the juice of the kava. Am I not a great deity? Can I not do as I will? I frown, and the heavens thunder; I gnash my teeth, and the earth trembles. What is it to me if fresh victims come, or if they come not? Can I not make with a nod as many as I will of them?" He took up two fresh finger-bones, clean gnawed of their flesh, and knocked them together in a wild tune, carelessly. "If Tu-Kila-Kila chooses," he went on, tapping his chest with conscious pride, "he can knock these bones together—so—and bid them live again. Is it not I who cause women and beasts to bring forth their young? Is it not I who give the turtles their increase? And is it not a small thing to me, therefore, whether the sea tosses up

my victims from my home in the sun, or whether it does not? Let us leave them alone on the reef for to-night; to-morrow we will send over our canoes to fetch them."

It was all pure brag, all pure guesswork; and yet, Tu-Kila-Kila himself profoundly believed it.

As he spoke, the light from Felix's fire blazed out against the dark sky, stronger and clearer still; and through that cloudless tropical air the figure of a man, standing for one moment between the flames and the lagoon, became distinctly visible to the keen and practised eyes of the savages. "I see them? I see them; I see the victims!" the foremost worshipper exclaimed, rushing forward a little at the sight, and beside himself with superstitious awe and surprise at Tu-Kila-Kila's presence. "Surely our god is great! He knows all things! He brings us meat from the setting sun, in ships of fire, in blazing canoes, across the golden road of the sun-bathed ocean!"

As for Tu-Kila-Kila himself, leaning on his elbow at ease, he gazed across at the unexpected sight with very languid interest. He was a god, and he liked to see things conducted with proper decorum. This crowing and crying over a couple of spirits—mere ordinary spirits come ashore from the sun in a fiery boat—struck his godship as little short of childish. "Let them be," he answered, petulantly, crushing a blossom in his hand. "Let no man disturb them. They shall rest where they are till to-morrow morning. We have eaten; we have drunk; our soul is happy. The kava within us has made us like a god indeed. I shall give my ministers charge

that no harm happen to them."

He drew a whistle from his side and whistled once. There was a moment's pause. Then Tu-Kila-Kila spoke in a loud voice again. "The King of Fire!" he exclaimed, in tones of princely authority.

From within the hut there came forth slowly a second stalwart savage, big built and burly as the great god himself, clad in a long robe or cloak of yellow feathers, which shone bright with a strange metallic gleam in the ruddy light of the huge pile of li-wood.

"The King of Fire is here, Tu-Kila-Kila," the lesser god made answer, bending his head slightly.

"Fire," Tu-Kila-Kila said, like a monarch giving orders to his attendant minister, "if any man touch the newcomers on the reef before I cause my sun to rise to-morrow morning, scorch up his flesh with your flame, and consume his bones to ash and cinder. If any woman go near them before Tu-Kila-Kila bids, let her be rolled in palm-leaves, and smeared with oil, and light her up for a torch on a dark night to lighten our temple."

The King of Fire bent his head in assent. "It is as Tu-Kila-Kila wills," he answered, submissively.

Tu-Kila-Kila whistled again, this time twice. "The King of Water!" he exclaimed, in the same loud tone of command as before.

At the words, a man of about forty, tall and sinewy, clad in a short cape of white albatross feathers, and with a girdle of

nautilus shells interspersed with red coral tied around his waist, came forth to the summons.

"The King of Water is here," he said, bending his head, but not his knee, before the greater deity.

"Water," Tu-Kila-Kila said, with half-tipsy solemnity, "you are a god too. Your power is very great. But less than mine. Do, then, as I bid you. If any man touch my spirits, whom I have brought from my home in the sun in a fiery ship, before I bid him to-morrow, overturn his canoe, and drown him in lagoon or spring or ocean. If any woman go near them without Tu-Kila-Kila's leave, bind her hand and foot with ropes of porpoise hide, and cast her out into the surf, and dash her with your waves, and pummel her to pieces."

The King of Water bent his head a second time. "I am a great god," he answered, "before all others save you: but for you, Tu-Kila-Kila, I haste to do your bidding. If any man disobey you, my billows shall rise and overwhelm him in the sea. I am a great god. I claim each year many drowned victims."

"But not so many as me," Tu-Kila-Kila interposed, his hand playing on his knife with a faint air of impatience.

"But not so many as you," the minor god added, in haste, as if to appease his rising anger. "Fire and Water ever speed to do your bidding."

Tu-Kila-Kila stood up, turned toward the distant flame, and waved his hands round and round three times before him. "Let this be for you all a great taboo," he said, glancing once more

toward his awe-struck followers. "Now the mysteries are over. Tu-Kila-Kila will sleep. He has eaten of human flesh. He has drunk of cocoanut rum and of new kava. He has brought back his sun on its way in the heavens. He has sent it messengers of fire to reinforce its strength. He has fetched from it messengers in turn with fresh fire to Boupari, fire not lighted from any earthly flame; fire new, divine, scorching, unspeakable. To-morrow we will talk with the spirits he has brought. To-night we will sleep. Now all go to your homes; and tell your women of this great taboo, lest they speak to the spirits, and fall into the hands of Fire or of Water."

The savages dropped on their faces before the eye of their god and lay quite still. They made a path as it were from the pyre to the temple door with their prostrate bodies. Tu-Kila-Kila, walking with unsteady steps over their half-naked forms, turned to his hut in a drunken booze. He walked over them with no more compunction or feeling than over so many logs. Why should he not, indeed? For he was a god, and they were his meat, his servants, his worshippers.

CHAPTER IV.
THE GUESTS OF HEAVEN

All that night through—their first lonely night on the island of Boupari—Felix sat up by his flickering fire, wide awake, half expecting and dreading some treacherous attack of the unknown savages. From time to time he kept adding dry fuel to his smouldering pile; and he never ceased to keep a keen eye both on the lagoon and the reef, in case an assault should be made upon them suddenly by land or water. He knew the South Seas quite well enough already to have all the possibilities of misfortune floating vividly before his eyes. He realized at once from his own previous experience the full loneliness and terror of their unarmed condition.

For Boupari was one of those rare remote islets where the very rumor of our European civilization has hardly yet penetrated.

As for Muriel, though she was alarmed enough, of course, and intensely shaken by the sudden shock she had received, the whole surroundings were too wholly unlike any world she had ever yet known to enable her to take in at once the utter horror of the situation. She only knew they were alone, wet, bruised, and terribly battered; and the Australasian had gone on, leaving them there to their fate on an unknown island. That, for the moment, was more than enough for her of accumulated misfortune. She

come to herself but slowly, and as her torn clothes dried by degrees before the fire and the heat of the tropical night, she was so far from fully realizing the dangers of their position that her first and principal fear for the moment was lest she might take cold from her wet things drying upon her. She ate a little of the plantain that Felix picked for her; and at times, toward morning, she dozed off into an uneasy sleep, from pure fatigue and excess of weariness. As she slept, Felix, bending over her, with the biggest blade of his knife open in case of attack, watched with profound emotion the rise and fall of her bosom, and hesitated with himself, if the worst should come to the worst, as to what he ought to do with her.

It would be impossible to let a pure young English girl like that fall helplessly into the hands of such bloodthirsty wretches as he knew the islanders were almost certain to be. Who could tell what nameless indignities, what incredible tortures they might wantonly inflict upon her innocent soul? Was it right of him to have let her come ashore at all? Ought he not rather to have allowed the more merciful sea to take her life easily, without the chance or possibility of such additional horrors?

And now—as she slept—so calm and pure and maidenly—what was his duty that minute, just there to her? He felt the blade of his knife with his finger cautiously, and almost doubted. If only she could tell what things might be in store for her, would she not, herself, prefer death, an honorable death, at the friendly hands of a tenderhearted fellow-countryman, to the

unspeakable insults of these man-eating Polynesians? If only he had the courage to release her by one blow, as she lay there, from the coming ill! But he hadn't; he hadn't. Even on board the Australasian he had been vaguely aware that he was getting very fond of that pretty little Miss Ellis. And now that he sat there, after that desperate struggle for life with the pounding waves, mounting guard over her through the livelong night, his own heart told him plainly, in tones he could not disobey, he loved her too well to dare what he thought best in the end for her.

Still, even so, he was brave enough to feel he must never let the very worst of all befall her. He bethought him, in his doubt and agony, of how his uncle, Major Thurstan, during the great Indian mutiny, had held his lonely bungalow, with his wife and daughter by his side, for three long hours against a howling mob of native insurgents; and how, when further resistance was hopeless, and that great black wave of angry humanity burst in upon them at last, the brave soldier had drawn his revolver, shot his wife and daughter with unerring aim, to prevent their falling alive into the hands of the natives, and then blown his own brains out with his last remaining cartridge. As his uncle had done at Jhansi, thirty years before, so he himself would do on that nameless Pacific island—for he didn't know even now on what shore he had landed. If the savages bore down upon them with hostile intent, and threatened Muriel, he would plunge his knife first into that innocent woman's heart; and then bury it deep in his own, and die beside her.

So the long night wore on—Muriel pillowed on loose cocoanut husk, dozing now and again, and waking with a start to gaze round about her wildly, and realize once more in what plight she found herself; Felix crouching by her feet, and keeping watch with eager eyes and ears on every side for the least sign of a noiseless, naked footfall through the tangled growth of that dense tropical under-bush. Time after time he clapped his hand to his ear, shell-wise, and listened and peered, with knitted brow, suspecting some sudden swoop from an ambush in the jungle of creepers behind the little plantain patch. Time after time he grasped his knife hard, and puckered his eyebrows resolutely, and stood still with bated breath for a fierce, wild leap upon his fancied assailant. But the night wore away by degrees, a minute at a time, and no man came; and dawn began to brighten the sea-line to eastward.

As the day dawned, Felix could see more clearly exactly where he was, and in what surroundings. Without, the ocean broke in huge curling billows on the shallow beach of the fringing reef with such stupendous force that Felix wondered how they could ever have lived through its pounding surf and its fiercely retreating undertow. Within, the lagoon spread its calm lake-like surface away to the white coral shore of the central atoll. Between these two waters, the greater and the less, a waving palisade of tall-stemmed palm-trees rose on a narrow ribbon of circular land that formed the fringing reef. All night through he had felt, with a strange eerie misgiving, the very foundations of the land

thrill under his feet at every dull thud or boom of the surf on its restraining barrier. Now that he could see that thin belt of shore in its actual shape and size, he was not astonished at this constant shock; what surprised him rather was the fact that such a speck of land could hold its own at all against the ceaseless cannonade of that seemingly irresistible ocean.

He stood up, hatless, in his battered tweed suit, and surveyed the scene of their present and future adventures. It took but a glance to show him that the whole ground-plan of the island was entirely circular. In the midst of all rose the central atoll itself, a tiny mountain-peak, just projecting with its hills and gorges to a few hundred feet above the surface of the ocean. Outside it came the lagoon, with its placid ring of glassy water surrounding the circular island, and separated from the sea by an equally circular belt of fringing reef, covered thick with waving stems of picturesque cocoanut. It was on the reef they had landed, and from it they now looked across the calm lagoon with doubtful eyes toward the central island.

As soon as the sun rose, their doubts were quickly resolved into fears or certainties. Scarcely had its rim begun to show itself distinctly above the eastern horizon, when a great bustle and confusion was noticeable at once on the opposite shore. Brown-skinned savages were collecting in eager groups by a white patch of beach, and putting out rude but well-manned canoes into the calm waters of the lagoon. At sight of their naked arms and bustling gestures, Muriel's heart sank suddenly within her. "Oh,

Mr. Thurstan," she cried, clinging to his arm in her terror, "what does it all mean? Are they going to hurt us? Are these savages coming over? Are they coming to kill us?"

Felix grasped his trusty knife hard in his right hand, and swallowed a groan, as he looked tenderly down upon her. "Muriel," he said, forgetting in the excitement of the moment the little conventionalities and courtesies of civilized life, "if they are, trust me, you never shall fall alive into their cruel hands. Sooner than that—" he held up the knife significantly, with its open blade before her.

The poor girl clung to him harder still, with a ghastly shudder. "Oh, it's terrible, terrible," she cried, turning deadly pale. Then, after a short pause, she added, "But I would rather have it so. Do as you say. I could bear it from you. Promise me *that*, rather than that those creatures should kill me."

"I promise," Felix answered, clasping her hand hard, and paused, with the knife ever ready in his right, awaiting the approach of the half-naked savages.

The boats glided fast across the lagoon, propelled by the paddles of the stalwart Polynesians who manned them, and crowded to the water's edge with groups of grinning and shouting warriors. They were dressed in aprons of dracæna leaves only, with necklets and armlets of sharks' teeth and cowrie shells. A dozen canoes at least were making toward the reef at full speed, all bristling with spears and alive with noisy and boisterous savages. Muriel shrank back terror-stricken at the sight, as they

drew nearer and nearer. But Felix, holding his breath hard, grew somewhat less nervous as the men approached the reef. He had seen enough of Polynesian life before now to feel sure these people were not upon the war-path. Whatever their ultimate intentions toward the castaways might be, their immediate object seemed friendly and good-humored. The boats, though large, were not regular war-canoes; the men, instead of brandishing their spears, and lunging out with them over the edge in threatening attitudes, held them erect in their hands at rest, like standards; they were laughing and talking, not crying their war-cry. As they drew near the shore, one big canoe shot suddenly a length or so ahead of the rest; and its leader, standing on the grotesque carved figure that adorned its prow, held up both his hands open and empty before him, in sign of peace, while at the same time he shouted out a word or two three times in his own language, to reassure the castaways.

Felix's eye glanced cautiously from boat to boat. "He says, 'We are friends,'" the young man remarked in an undertone to his terrified companion. "I can understand his dialect. Thank Heaven, it's very close to Fijian. I shall be able at least to palaver to these men. I don't think they mean just now to harm us. I believe we can trust them, at any rate for the present."

The poor girl drew back, in still greater awe and alarm than ever. "Oh, are they going to land here?" she cried, still clinging closer with both hands to her one friend and protector.

"Try not to look so frightened!" Felix exclaimed, with a

warning glance. "Remember, much depends upon it; savages judge you greatly by what demeanor you happen to assume. If you're frightened, they know their power; if they see you're resolute, they suspect you have some supernatural means of protection. Try to meet them frankly, as if you were not afraid of them." Then, advancing slowly to the water's edge, he called out aloud, in a strong, clear voice, a few words which Muriel didn't understand, but which were really the Fijian for "We also are friendly. Our medicine is good. We mean no magic. We come to you from across the great water. We desire your peace. Receive us and protect us!"

At the sound of words which he could readily understand, and which differed but little, indeed, from his own language, the leader on the foremost canoe, who seemed by his manner to be a great chief, turned round to his followers and cried out in tones of superstitious awe, "Tu-Kila-Kila spoke well. These are, indeed, what he told us. Korong! Korong! They are spirits who have come to us from the disk of the sun, to bring us light and pure, fresh fire. Stay back there, all of you. You are not holy enough to approach. I and my crew, who are sanctified by the mysteries, we alone will go forward to meet them."

As he spoke, a sudden idea, suggested by his words, struck Felix's mind. Superstition is the great lever by which to move the savage intelligence. Gathering up a few dry leaves and fragments of stick on the shore, he laid them together in a pile, and awaited in silence the arrival of the foremost islanders. The first

canoe advanced slowly and cautiously, the men in it eying these proceedings with evident suspicion; the rest hung back, with their spears in array, and their hands just ready to use them with effect should occasion demand it.

The leader of the first canoe, coming close to the shore, jumped out upon the reef in shallow water. Half a dozen of his followers jumped after him without hesitation, and brandished their weapons round their heads as they advanced, in savage unison. But Felix, pretending hardly to notice these hostile demonstrations, stepped boldly up toward his little pile with great deliberation, though trembling inwardly, and proceeded before their eyes to take a match from his box, which he displayed ostentatiously, all glittering in the sun, to the foremost savage. The leader stood by and watched him close with eyes of silent wonder. Then Felix, kneeling down, struck the match on the box, and applied it, as it lighted, to the dry leaves beside him.

A chorus of astonishment burst unanimously from the delighted natives as the dry leaves leaped all at once into a tongue of flame, and the little pile caught quickly from the fire in the vesta.

The leader looked hard at the two white faces, and then at the fire on the beach, with evident approbation. "It is as Tu-Kila-Kila said," he exclaimed at last with profound awe. "They are spirits from the sun, and they carry with them pure fire in shining boxes."

Then, advancing a pace and pointing toward the canoe, he

motioned Felix and Muriel to take their seats within it with native savage politeness. "Tu-Kila-Kila has sent for you," he said, in his grandest aristocratic air, "for your chief is a gentleman. He wishes to receive you. He saw your message-fire on the reef last night, and he knew you had come. He has made you a very great Taboo. He has put you under protection of Fire and Water."

The people in the boats, with one accord, shouted out in wild chorus, as if to confirm his words, "Taboo! Taboo! Tu-Kila-Kila has said it! Taboo! Taboo! Ware Fire! Ware Water!"

Though the dialect in which they spoke differed somewhat from that in use in Fiji, Felix could still make out with care almost every word of what the chief had said to him; and the universal Polynesian expression, "Taboo," in particular, somewhat reassured him as to their friendly intentions. Among remote heathen islanders like these, he felt sure, the very word itself was far too sacred to be taken in vain. They would respect its inviolability. He turned round to Muriel. "We must go with them," he said, shortly. "It's our one chance left of life now. Don't be too terrified; there is still some hope. They say somebody they call Tu-Kila-Kila has tabooed us. No one will dare to hurt us against so great a Taboo; for Tu-Kila-Kila is evidently some very important king or chief. You must step into the boat. It can't be avoided. If any harm is threatened, be sure I won't forget my promise."

Muriel shrank back in alarm, and clung still to his arm now as naturally as she would have clung to a brother's. "Oh, Mr.

Thurstan," she cried—"Felix, I don't know what to say; I *can't* go with them."

Felix put his arm gently round her girlish waist, and half lifted her into the boat in spite of her reluctance. "You must," he said, with great firmness. "You must do as I say. I will watch over you, and take care of you. If the worst comes, I have always my knife, and I won't forget. Now, friend," he went on, in Fijian, turning round to the chief, as he took his seat in the canoe fearlessly among all those dusky, half-clad figures, "we are ready to start. We do not fear. We wish to go. Take us to Tu-Kila-Kila."

And all the savages around, shouting in their surprise and awe, exclaimed once more in concert, "Tu-Kila-Kila is great. We will take them, as he bids us, forthwith to heaven."

"What do they say?" Muriel cried, clinging close to the white man's side in her speechless terror. "Do you understand their language?"

"Well, I can't quite make it out," Felix answered, much puzzled; "that is to say, not every word of it. They say they'll take us somewhere, I don't quite know where; but in Fijian, the word would certainly mean to heaven."

Muriel shuddered visibly. "You don't think," she said, with a tremulous tongue, "they mean to kill us?"

"No, I don't *think* so," Felix replied, not over-confidently. "They said we were Taboo. But with savages like these, of course, one can never in any case be quite certain."

CHAPTER V.
ENROLLED IN OLYMPUS

They rowed across the lagoon, a mysterious procession, almost in silence—the canoe with the two Europeans going first, the others following at a slight distance—and landed at last on the brink of the central island.

Several of the Boupari people leaped ashore at once; then they helped Felix and Muriel from the frail bark with almost deferential care, and led the way before them up a steep white path, that zigzagged through the forest toward the centre of the island. As they went, a band of natives preceded them in regular line of march, shouting "Taboo, taboo!" at short intervals, especially as they neared any group of fan-palm cottages. The women whom they met fell on their knees at once, till the strange procession had passed them by; the men only bowed their heads thrice, and made a rapid movement on their breasts with their fingers, which reminded Muriel at once of the sign of the cross in Catholic countries.

So on they wended their way in silence through the deep tropical jungle, along a pathway just wide enough for three to walk abreast, till they emerged suddenly upon a large cleared space, in whose midst grew a great banyan-tree, with arms that dropped and rooted themselves like buttresses in the soil beneath.

Under the banyan-tree a raised platform stood upon posts of bamboo. The platform was covered with fine network in yellow and red; and two little stools occupied the middle, as if placed there on purpose and waiting for their occupants.

The man who had headed the first canoe turned round to Felix and motioned him forward. "This is Heaven," he said glibly, in his own tongue. "Spirits, ascend it!"

Felix, much wondering what the ceremony could mean, mounted the platform without a word, in obedience to the chief's command, closely followed by Muriel, who dared not leave him for a second.

"Bring water!" the chief said, shortly, in a voice of authority to one of his followers.

The man handed up a calabash with a little water in it. The chief took the rude vessel from his hands in a reverential manner, and poured a few drops of the contents on Felix's head; the water trickled down over his hair and forehead. Involuntarily, Felix shook his head a little at the unexpected wetting, and scattered the drops right and left on his neck and shoulders. The chief watched this performance attentively with profound satisfaction. Then he turned to his attendants.

"The spirit shakes his head," he said, with a deeply convinced air. "All is well. Heaven has chosen him. Korong! Korong! He is accepted for his purpose. It is well! It is well! Let us try the other one."

He raised the calabash once more, and poured a few drops

in like manner on Muriel's dark hair. The poor girl, trembling in every limb, shook her head also in the same unintentional fashion. The chief regarded her with still more complacent eyes.

"It is well," he observed once more to his companions, smiling. "She, too, gives the sign of acceptance. Korong! Korong! Heaven is well pleased with both. See how her body trembles!"

At that moment a girl came forward with a little basket of fruits. The chief chose a banana with care from the basket, peeled it with his dusky hands, broke it slowly in two, and handed one half very solemnly to Felix.

"Eat, King of the Rain," he said, as he presented it. "The offering of Heaven."

Felix ate it at once, thinking it best under the circumstances not to demur at all to anything his strange hosts might choose to impose upon him.

The chief handed the other half just as solemnly to Muriel. "Eat, Queen of the Clouds," he said, as he placed it in her fingers. "The offering of Heaven."

Muriel hesitated. She didn't know what his words meant, and it seemed to her rather the offering of a very dirty and unwashed savage. The chief eyed her hard. "For God's sake eat it, my child; he tells you to eat it!" Felix exclaimed in haste. Muriel lifted it to her lips and swallowed it down with difficulty. The man's dusky hands didn't inspire confidence.

But the chief seemed relieved when he had seen her swallow

it. "All is well done," he said, turning again to his followers. "We have obeyed the words of Tu-Kila-Kila, and his orders that he gave us. We have offered the strangers, the spirits from the sun, as a free gift to Heaven, and Heaven has accepted them. We have given them fruits, the fruits of the earth, and they have duly eaten them. Korong! Korong! The King of the Rain and the Queen of the Clouds have indeed come among us. They are truly gods. We will take them now, as he bid us, to Tu-Kila-Kila."

"What have they done to us?" Muriel asked aside, in a terrified undertone of Felix.

"I can't quite make out," Felix answered in the selfsame voice. "They call us the King of the Rain and the Queen of the Clouds in their own language. I think they imagine we've come from the sun and that we're a sort of spirits."

At the sound of these words the girl who held the basket of fruits gave a sudden start. It almost seemed to Muriel as if she understood them. But when Muriel looked again she gave no further sign. She merely held her peace, and tried to appear wholly undisconcerted.

The chief beckoned them down from the platform with a wave of his hand. They rose and followed him. As they rose the people around them bowed low to the ground. Felix could see they were bowing to Muriel and himself, not merely to the chief. A doubt flitted strangely across his mind for a moment. What could it all mean? Did they take the two strangers, then, for supernatural beings? Had they enrolled them as gods? If so, it might serve as

some little protection for them.

The procession formed again, three and three, three and three, in solemn silence. Then the chief walked in front of them with measured steps, and Felix and Muriel followed behind, wondering. As they went, the cry rose louder and louder than before, "Taboo! Taboo!" People who met them fell on their faces at once, as the chief cried out in a loud tone, "The King of the Rain! The Queen of the Clouds! Korong! Korong! They are coming! They are coming!"

At last they reached a second cleared space, standing in a large garden of manilla, loquat, poncians, and hibiscus-trees. It was entered by a gate, a tall gate of bamboo posts. At the gate all the followers fell back to right and left, awe-struck. Only the chief went calmly on. He beckoned to Felix and Muriel to follow him.

They entered, half terrified. Felix still grasped his open knife in his hand, ready to strike at any moment that might be necessary. The chief led them forward toward a very large tree near the centre of the garden. At the foot of the tree stood a hut, somewhat bigger and better built than any they had yet seen; and in front of the trunk a stalwart savage, very powerfully built, but with a sinister look in his cruel and lustful eye, was pacing up and down, like a sentinel on guard, a long spear in his right hand, and a tomahawk in his left, held close by his side, all ready for action. As he prowled up and down he seemed to be peering warily about him on every side, as if each instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. But as the chief approached, the people without set

up once more the cry of "Taboo! Taboo!" and the stalwart savage by the tree, laying down his spear and letting his tomahawk fall free, dropped in a second the air of watchful alarm, and advanced with some courtesy to greet the new-comers.

"We have found them, Tu-Kila-Kila," the chief said, presenting them to the god with a graceful wave of his hand. "We have found the spirits that you brought from the sun, with the fire in their hands, and the light in boxes. We have taken them to Heaven. Heaven has accepted them. We have offered them fruit, and they have eaten the banana. The King of the Rain—the Queen of the Clouds! Korong! Receive them!"

Tu-Kila-Kila glanced at them with an approving glance, strangely compounded of pleasure and terror. "They are plump," he said shortly. "They are indeed Korong. My sun has sent me an acceptable present."

"What is your will that we should do with them?" the chief asked in a deeply deferential tone.

Tu-Kila-Kila looked hard at Muriel—such a hateful look that the knife trembled irresolute for a second in Felix's hand. "Give them two fresh huts," he said, in a lordly way. "Give them divine platters. Give them all that they need. Make everything right for them."

The chief bowed, and retired with an awed air from the presence. Exactly as he passed a certain line on the ground, marked white with a row of coral-sand, Tu-Kila-Kila seized his spear and his tomahawk once more, and mounted guard, as

before, at the foot of the great tree where they had seen him pacing. An instantaneous change seemed to Muriel to come over his demeanor at that moment. While he spoke with the chief she noticed he looked all cruelty, lust, and hateful self-indulgence. Now that he paced up and down warily in front of that sacred floor, peering around him with keen suspicion, he seemed rather the personification of watchfulness, fear, and a certain slavish bodily terror. Especially, she observed, he cast upon Felix, as he went, a glance of angry hate; and yet he did not attempt to hurt or molest him in any way, defenceless as they both were before those numerous savages.

As they emerged from the enclosure, the girl with the fruit basket stood near the gate, looking outward from the wall, her face turned away from the awful home of Tu-Kila-Kila. At the moment when Muriel passed, to her immense astonishment the girl spoke to her. "Don't be afraid, missy," she said in English, in a rather low voice, without obtrusively approaching them. "Boupari man not going to hurt you. Me going to be your servant. Me name Mali. Me very good girl. Me take plenty care of you."

The unexpected sound of her own language, in the midst of so much unmitigated savagery, took Muriel fairly by surprise. She looked hard at the girl, but thought it wisest to answer nothing. This particular young woman, indeed, was just as dark, and to all appearance just as much of a savage, as any of the rest of them. But she could speak English, at any rate! And she said she was to be Muriel's servant!

The chief led them back to the shore, talking volubly all the way in Polynesia to Felix. His dialect differed so much from the Fijian that when he spoke first Felix could hardly follow him. But he gathered vaguely, nevertheless, that they were to be well housed and fed for the present at the public expense; and even that something which the chief clearly regarded as a very great honor was in store for them in the future. Whatever these people's particular superstition might be, it seemed pretty evident at least that it told in the strangers' favor. Felix almost began to hope they might manage to live there pretty tolerably for the next two or three weeks, and perhaps to signal in time to some passing Australian liner.

The rest of that wonderful eventful day was wholly occupied with practical details. Before long, two adjacent huts were found for them, near the shore of the lagoon; and Felix noticed with pleasure, not only that the huts themselves were new and clean, but also that the chief took great care to place round both of them a single circular line of white coral-sand, like the one he had noticed at Tu-Kila-Kila's palace-temple. He felt sure this white line made the space within taboo. No native would dare without leave to cross it.

When the line was well marked out round the two huts together, the chief went away for a while, leaving the Europeans within their broad white circle, guarded by an angry-looking band of natives with long spears at rest, all pointed inward. The natives themselves stood well without the ring, but the points of

their spears almost reached the line, and it was clear they would not for the present permit the Europeans to leave the charmed circle.

Presently, the chief returned again, followed by two other natives in official costumes. One of them was a tall and handsome young man, dressed in a long robe or cloak of yellow feathers. The other was stouter, and perhaps forty or thereabouts; he wore a short cape of white albatross plumes, with a girdle of shells at his waist, interspersed with red coral.

"The King of Fire will make Taboo," the chief said, solemnly.

The young man with the cloak of yellow feathers stepped forward and spoke, toeing the line with his left foot, and brandishing a lighted stick in his right hand. "Taboo! Taboo! Taboo!" he cried aloud, with emphasis. "If any man dare to transgress this line without leave, I burn him to ashes. If any woman, I scorch her to a cinder. Taboo to the King of the Rain and the Queen of the Clouds. Taboo! Taboo! Taboo! Korong! I say it."

He stepped back into the ranks with an air of duty performed. The chief looked about him curiously a moment. "The King of Water will make Taboo," he repeated after a pause, in the same deep tone of profound conviction.

The stouter man in the short white cape stepped forward in his turn. He toed the line with his naked left foot; in his brown right hand he carried a calabash of water. "Taboo! Taboo! Taboo!" he exclaimed aloud, pouring out the water upon the ground

symbolically. "If any man dare to transgress this line without leave, I drown him in his canoe. If any woman, I drag her alive into the spring as she fetches water. Taboo to the King of the Rain and the Queen of the Clouds. Taboo! Taboo! Taboo! Korong! I say it."

"What does it all mean?" Muriel whispered, terrified.

Felix explained to her, as far as he could, in a few hurried sentences. "There's only one word in it I don't understand," he added, hastily, "and that's Korong. It doesn't occur in Fiji. They keep saying we're Korong, whatever that may mean; and evidently they attach some very great importance to it."

"Let the Shadows come forward," the chief said, looking up with an air of dignity.

A good-looking young man, and the girl who said her name was Mali, stepped forth from the crowd, and fell on their knees before him.

The chief laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and raised him up. "The Shadow of the King of the Rain," he cried, turning him three times round. "Follow him in all his incomings and his outgoings, and serve him faithfully! Taboo! Taboo! Pass within the sacred circle!"

He clapped his hands. The young man crossed the line with a sort of reverent reluctance, and took his place within the ring, close up to Felix.

The chief laid his hand on Mali's shoulder. "The Shadow of the Queen of the Clouds," he said, turning her three times round.

"Follow her in all her incomings and outgoings, and serve her faithfully. Taboo! Taboo! Pass within the sacred circle!"

Then he waved both hands to Felix. "Go where you will now," he said. "Your Shadow will follow you. You are free as the rain that drops where it will. You are as free as the clouds that roam through heaven. No man will hinder you."

And in a moment the spearmen dropped their spears in concert, the crowd fell back, and the villagers dispersed as if by magic, to their own houses.

But Felix and Muriel were left alone beside their huts, guarded only in silence by their two mystic Shadows.

CHAPTER VI.
FIRST DAYS IN BOUPARI

Throughout that day the natives brought them, from time to time, numerous presents of yam, bananas, and bread-fruit, neatly arranged in little palm-leaf baskets. A few of them brought eggs as well, and one offering even included a live chicken. But the people who brought them, and who were mostly young girls just entering upon womanhood, did not venture to cross the white line of coral-sand that surrounded the huts; they laid down their presents, with many salaams, on the ground outside, and then waited with a half-startled, half-reverent air for one or other of the two Shadows to come out and fetch them. As soon as the baskets were carried well within the marked line, the young girls exhibited every sign of pleasure, and calling aloud, "Korong! Korong!"—that mysterious Polynesian word of whose import Felix was ignorant—they retired once more by tortuous paths through the surrounding jungle.

"Why do they bring us presents?" Felix asked at last of his Shadow, after this curious pantomime had been performed some three or four times. "Are they always going to keep us in such plenty?"

The Shadow looked back at him with an air of considerable surprise. "They bring presents, of course," he said, in his own

tongue, "because they are badly in want of rain. We have had much drought of late in Boupari; we need water from heaven. The banana-bushes wither; the flowers on the bread-fruit tree do not swell to breadfruit; the yams are thirsty. Therefore the fathers send their daughters with presents, maidens of the villages, all marriageable girls, to ask for rainfall. But they will always provide for you, and also for the Queen, however you behave; for you are both Korong. Tu-Kila-Kila has said so, and Heaven has accepted you."

"What do you mean by Korong?" Felix asked, with some trepidation.

The Shadow merely looked back at him with a sort of blank surprise that anybody should be ignorant of so simple a conception. "Why, Korong is Korong," he answered, aghast. "You are Korong yourself. The Queen of the Clouds is Korong, too. You are both Korong; that is why they all treat you with such respect and reverence."

And that was as much as Felix could elicit by his subtlest questions from his taciturn Shadow.

In fact, it was clear that in the open, at least, the Shadow was averse to being observed in familiar conversation with Felix. During the heat of the day, however, when they sat alone within the hut, he was much more communicative. Then he launched forth pretty freely into talk about the island and its life, which would no doubt have largely enlightened Felix, had it not been for two drawbacks to their means of inter-communication. In the

first place, the Boupari dialect, though agreeing in all essentials with the Polynesian of Fiji, nevertheless contained a great many words and colloquial expressions unknown to the Fijians; this being particularly the case, as Felix soon remarked, in the whole vocabulary of religious rites and ceremonies. And in the second place, the Shadow was so rigidly bound by his own narrow and insular set of ideas, that he couldn't understand the difficulty Felix felt in throwing himself into them. Over and over again, when Felix asked him to explain some word or custom, he would repeat, with naïve impatience, "Why, Korong is Korong," or "Tula is just Tula; even a child must surely know what Tula is; much more yourself, who are indeed Korong, and who have come from the sun to bring fresh fire to us."

In the adjoining hut, Muriel, who was now beginning in some small degree to get rid of her most pressing fear for the immediate future, and whom the obvious reality of the taboo had reassured for the moment, sat with Mali, her own particular Shadow, unravelling the mystery of the girl's knowledge of English.

Mali, indeed, like the other Shadow, showed every disposition to indulge in abundant conversation, as soon as she found herself well within the hut, alone with her mistress, and secluded from the prying eyes of all the other islanders.

"Don't you be afraid, missy," she said, with genuine kindliness in her tone, as soon as the gifts of yam and bread-fruit had all been duly housed and garnered. "No harm come to you. You

Korong, you know. You very great Taboo. Tu-Kila-Kila send King of Fire and King of Water to make taboo over you, so nobody hurt you."

Muriel burst into tears at the sound of her own language from those dusky lips, and exclaimed through her sobs, clinging to the girl's hand for comfort as she spoke, "Why, how did you ever come to speak English?—tell me."

Mali looked up at her with a half-astonished air. "Oh, I servant in Queensland, of course, missy," she answered, with great composure. "Labor vessel come to my island, far away, four, five years ago, steal boy, steal woman. My papa just kill my mamma, because he angry with her, so no want daughters. So my papa sell me and my sister for plenty rum, plenty tobacco, to gentlemen in labor vessel. Gentlemen in labor vessel take Jani and me away, away, to Queensland. Big sea; long voyage. We stop there three yam—three years—do service; then great chief in Queensland send us back to my island. My island too faraway; gentleman on ship not find it out; so he land us in little boat on Boupari. Boupari people make temple slave of us." And that was all; to her quite a commonplace, everyday history.

"I see," Muriel cried. "Then you've been for three years in Australia! And there you learned English. Why, what did you do there?"

Mali looked back at her with the same matter-of-fact air of composure as before. "Oh, me nurse at first," she said, shortly. "Then after, me housemaid, live three year in gentleman's house,

good gentleman that buy me. Take care of little girl; clean rooms; do everything. Me know how to make English lady quite comfortable. Me tell that to chief; that make him say, 'Mali, you be Queenie's Shadow.'"

To Muriel in her loneliness even such companionship as that was indeed a consolation. "Oh, I'm so glad you told him," she cried. "If we have to stop here long, before a ship takes us off, it'll be so nice to have you here all the time with me. You won't go away from me ever, will you? You'll always stop with me!"

The girl's surprise showed more profoundly than ever. "Me can't go away," she answered, with emphasis. "Me your Shadow. That great Taboo. Tu-Kila-Kila great god. If me go away, Tu-Kila-Kila kill me and eat me."

Muriel started back in horror. "But, Mali," she said, looking hard at the girl's pleasant brown face, "if you were three years in Australia, you're a Christian, surely!"

The girl nodded her head in passive acquiescence. "Me Christian in Australia," she answered. "Of course me Christian. All folks make Christian when him go to Queensland. That what for me call Mali, and my sister Jani. We have other names on my own island; but when we go to Queensland, gentleman baptize us, call us Mali and Jani. Me Methodist in Queensland. Methodist very good. But Methodist god no live in Boupari. Not any good be Methodist here any longer. Tu-Kila-Kila god here. Him very powerful."

"What! Not that dreadful creature that they took us to see

this morning!" Muriel exclaimed, in horror. "Oh, Mali, you can't mean to say they think he's a *god*, that awful man there!"

Mali nodded her assent with profound conviction. "Yes, yes; him god," she repeated, confidently. "Him very powerful. My sister Jani go too near him temple, against taboo—because her not belong-a Tu-Kila-Kila temple; and last night, when it great feast, plenty men catch Jani, and tie him up in rope; and Tu-Kila-Kila kill him, and plenty Boupari men help Tu-Kila-Kila eat up Jani."

She said it in the same simple, matter-of-fact way as she had said that she was a nurse for three years in Queensland. To her it was a common incident of everyday life. Such accidents *will* happen, if you break taboo and go too near forbidden temples.

But Muriel drew back, and let the pleasant-looking brown girl's hand drop suddenly. "You can't mean it," she cried. "You can't mean he's a god! Such a wicked man as that! Oh, his very look's too horrible."

Mali drew back in her turn with a somewhat terrified air, and peeped suspiciously around her, as if to make sure whether any one was listening. "Oh, hush," she said, anxiously. "Don't must talk like that. If Tu-Kila-Kila hear, him scorch us up to ashes. Him very great god! Him good! Him powerful!"

"How can he be good if he does such awful things?" Muriel exclaimed, energetically.

Mali peered around her once more with terrified eyes in the same uneasy way. "Take care," she said again. "Him god! Him

powerful! Him can do no wrong. Him King of the Trees! Him King of Heaven! On Boupari island, Methodist god not much; no god so great like Tu-Kila-Kila."

"But a *man* can't be a god!" Muriel exclaimed, contemptuously. "He's nothing but a man! a savage! A cannibal!"

Mali looked back at her in wondering surprise. "Not in Queensland," she answered, calmly—to her, all the world naturally divided itself into Queensland and Polynesia—"no god in Queensland. Governor, him very great chief; but him no god like Tu-Kila-Kila. Methodist god in sky, him only god that live in Queensland. But no use worship Methodist god over here in Boupari. Him no live here. Tu-Kila-Kila live here. All god here make out of man. Live in man. Korong! What for you say a man can't be a god! You god yourself! White gentleman there, god! Korong, Korong. Chief put you in Heaven, so make you a god. People pray to you now. People bring you presents."

"You don't mean to say," Muriel cried, "they bring me these things because they think me a goddess?"

Mali nodded a grave assent. "Same like people give money in church in Queensland," she answered, promptly. "Ask you make rain, make plenty crop, make bread-fruit grow, make banana, make plantain. You Korong now. While your time last, Queenie, people give you plenty of present."

"While my time last?" Muriel repeated, with a curious sense of discomfort creeping over her slowly.

The girl nodded an easy assent. "Yes, while your time last,"

she answered, laying a small bundle of palm-leaves at Muriel's back by way of a cushion. "For now you Korong. By and by, Korong pass to somebody else. This year, you Korong. So people worship you."

But nothing that Muriel could say would induce the girl further to explain her meaning. She shook her head and looked very wise. "When a god come into somebody," she said, nodding toward Muriel in a mysterious way, "then him god himself; him Korong. When the god go away from him, him Korong no longer; somebody else Korong. Queenie Korong now; so people worship him. While him time last, people plenty kind to him."

The day passed away, and night came on. As it approached, heavy clouds drifted up from eastward. Mali busied herself with laying out a rough bed in the hut for Muriel, and making her a pillow of soft moss and the curious lichen-like material that hangs parasitic from the trees, and is commonly known as "old man's beard." As both Mali and Felix assured her confidently no harm would come to her within so strict a Taboo, Muriel, worn out with fatigue and terror, lay down at last and slept soundly on this native substitute for a bedstead. She slept without dreaming, while Mali lay at her feet, ready at a moment's call. It was all so strange; and yet she was too utterly wearied to do otherwise than sleep, in spite of her strange and terrible surroundings.

Felix slept, too, for some hours, but woke with a start in the night. It was raining heavily. He could hear the loud patter of a fierce tropical shower on the roof of his hut. His Shadow, at

his feet, slept still unmoved; but when Felix rose on his elbow, the Shadow rose on a sudden, too, and confronted him curiously. The young man heard the rain; then he bowed down his face with an awed air, not visible, but audible, in the still darkness. "It has come!" he said, with superstitious terror. "It has come at last! my lord has brought it!"

After that, Felix lay awake for some hours, hearing the rain on the roof, and puzzled in his own head by a half-uncertain memory. What was it in his school reading that that ceremony with the water indefinitely reminded him of? Wasn't there some Greek or Roman superstition about shaking your head when water was poured upon it? What could that superstition be, and what light might it cast on that mysterious ceremony? He wished he could remember; but it was so long since he'd read it, and he never cared much at school for Greek or Roman antiquities.

Suddenly, in a lull of the rain, the whole context at once came back with a rush to him. He remembered now he had read it, some time or other, in some classical dictionary. It was a custom connected with Greek sacrifices. The officiating priest poured water or wine on the head of the sheep, bullock, or other victim. If the victim shook its head and knocked off the drops, that was a sign that it was fit for the sacrifice, and that the god accepted it. If the victim trembled visibly, that was a most favorable omen. If it stood quite still and didn't move its neck, then the god rejected it as unfit for his purpose. Couldn't *that* be the meaning of the ceremony performed on Muriel and himself in "Heaven"

that morning? Were they merely intended as human sacrifices? Were they to be kept meanwhile and, as it were, fed up for the slaughter? It was too horrible to believe; yet it almost looked like it.

He wished he knew the meaning of that strange word, "Korong." Clearly, it contained the true key to the mystery.

Anyhow, he had always his trusty knife. If the worst came to the worst—those wretches should never harm his spotless Muriel.

For he loved her to-night; he would watch over and protect her. He would save her at least from the deadliest of insults.

CHAPTER VII.
INTERCHANGE OF CIVILITIES

All night long, without intermission, the heavy tropical rain descended in torrents; at sunrise it ceased, and a bright blue vault of sky stood in a spotless dome over the island of Boupari.

As soon as the sun was well risen, and the rain had ceased, one shy native girl after another came straggling up timidly to the white line that marked the taboo round Felix and Muriel's huts. They came with more baskets of fruit and eggs. Humbly saluting three times as they drew near, they laid down their gifts modestly just outside the line, with many loud ejaculations of praise and gratitude to the gods in their own language.

"What do they say?" Muriel asked, in a dazed and frightened way, looking out of the hut door, and turning in wonder to Mali.

"They say, 'Thank you, Queenie, for rain and fruits,'" Mali answered, unconcerned, bustling about in the hut. "Missy want to wash him face and hands this morning? Lady always wash every day over yonder in Queensland."

Muriel nodded assent. It was all so strange to her. But Mali went to the door and beckoned carelessly to one of the native girls just outside, who drew near the line at the summons, with a somewhat frightened air, putting one finger to her mouth in coyly uncertain savage fashion.

"Fetch me water from the spring!" Mali said, authoritatively, in Polynesian. Without a moment's delay the girl darted off at the top of her speed, and soon returned with a large calabash full of fresh cool water, which she lay down respectfully by the taboo line, not daring to cross it.

"Why didn't you get it yourself?" Muriel asked of her Shadow, rather relieved than otherwise that Mali hadn't left her. It was something in these dire straits to have somebody always near who could at least speak a little English.

Mali started back in surprise. "Oh, that would never do," she answered, catching a colloquial phrase she had often heard long before in Queensland. "Me missy's Shadow. That great Taboo. If me go away out of missy's sight, very big sin—very big danger. Man-a-Boupari catch me and kill me like Jani, for no me stop and wait all the time on missy."

It was clear that human life was held very cheap on the island of Boupari.

Muriel made her scanty toilet in the hut as well as she was able, with the calabash and water, aided by a rough shell comb which Mali had provided for her. Then she breakfasted, not ill, off eggs and fruit, which Mali cooked with some rude native skill over the open-air fire without in the precincts.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.