THE FLEMMINGS

By

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CHAPTER I

On a certain island in the Paumotu Group, known on the charts as Chain Island, but called Anaa by the people themselves, lived a white man named Martin Flemming, one of those restless wanderers who range the Pacific in search of the fortune they always mean to gain, but which never comes to them, except in some few instances—so few that they might be counted on one's fingers.

Two years had come and gone since Flemming had landed on the island with his wife, family, and two native servants, and settled down as a resident trader at the large and populous village of Tuuhora, where he soon gained the respect and confidence—if not the friendship—of the Anaa people, one of the proudest, most self-reliant, and brave of any of the Polynesian race, or their offshoots. For though he was a keen business man, he was just and honest in all his transactions, never erring, as so many traders do, on the side of mistaken generosity, but yet evincing a certain amount of liberality when the occasion justified it—and the natives knew that when he told them that tobacco, or biscuit, or rice, or gunpowder had risen in price in Tahiti or New Zealand, and that he would also be compelled to raise his charges, they knew that his statement was true—that he was a man above trickery, either in his business or his social relations with them, and would not descend to a lie for the sake of gain.

Flemming, at this time, was about forty years of age; his wife, who was an intelligent Hawaiian Islander, was ten years his junior, and the mother of his three half-caste children—a boy of thirteen, another of ten, and a girl of six. Such education as he could give them during his continuous wanderings over the North and South Pacific had been but scanty; for he was often away on trading cruises, and his wife, though she could read and write, like all Hawaiian women, was not competent to instruct her children, though in all other respects she was everything that a mother should be, except, as Flemming would often tell her, she was too indulgent and too ready to gratify their whims and fancies. However, they were now not so much under her control, for soon after coming to the island, he found that one of the three Marist Brothers living at the mission was able to, and willing to give them a few hours' instruction several times a week. For this, Flemming, who was really anxious about his children's welfare, made a liberal payment to the Mission, and the arrangement had worked very satisfactorily—Father Billot, who was a good English scholar, giving them their lessons in that language.

I must now make mention of the remaining persons constituting the trader's household—the two servants—one a man about thirty years of age, the other not more than eighteen or nineteen. They were both natives of Arorai (Hurd Island), one of the Eingsmill Group, and situated something less than three degrees south of the Equator. They had both taken service with him on their own island six years previously, and had followed his and his family's fortunes ever since, for they were both devotedly attached to the children; and when, a year after he had settled on

their island, misfortune befell him through the destruction of his trading station by fire, and he found himself a ruined man, they refused to leave him, and declared they would work for him without payment until he was again in a position to begin trading—no matter how long it might be ere that took place.

For some months after the loss of all his property, Flemming worked hard and lived meanly. Most fortunately for him, he had a very good whaleboat, and night after night, and day after day, he and his two faithful helpers, as long as the weather held fine, toiled at the dangerous pursuit of shark-catching, cutting off the fins and tails, and drying them in the sun, until finally he had secured over a ton's weight of the ill-smelling commodity, for which he received £60 in cash from the master of a Chinese-owned trading barque, which touched at the island, and this amount enabled him to leave Arorai, and begin trading elsewhere—in the great atoll of Butaritari, where owing to his possessing a good boat, sturdy health, and great pluck and resolution, his circumstances so mended that he came to look on the incident of the fire as the best thing that could have happened.

In appearance these two men were like nearly all the people of the Kingsmill Group—dark-skinned, strongly built, and with a certain fierceness of visage, born of their warlike and quarrelsome nature, and which never leaves them, even in their old age. The elder of the two, whose native name was Binoké, but who had been given the nickname of "Tommy Topsail-tie," had this facial characteristic to a great degree, and was, in addition, of a somewhat morbid and sullen disposition, disliking all strangers. But he was yet the veriest slave to Flemming's children, who tyrannised over him most mercilessly, for young as they were, they knew that his savage heart had nothing in it but adoration and affection for both them and their parents. Nobal, the younger man, who also had a nickname—"Jack Waterwitch" (taken from a colonial whaler in which he had once sailed) was of a more genial nature, and had constituted himself the especial guardian and playmate of the little girl Medora, who spoke his native tongue as well as himself; while Tommy Topsail-tie was more attached, if it were possible, to Flemming's eldest boy Robert, than to any other member of the family.

After two or three years' successful trading in the northern islands of the Kingsmill Group, Flemming had sold out his trading interests very satisfactorily, and, always eager to go further afield, had sailed for the Paumotu Group, choosing Anaa as his home, for he thought he should like the people, and do very well as a trader, for the island was but a few days' sail from Tahiti in the Society Group, where there was always a good market for his produce, and where he could replenish his stock of trade goods from the great mercantile firm of Brander—in those days the Whiteleys of the South and Eastern Pacific.

One afternoon, about six o'clock, when work at the trading station had ceased for the day, and the store door had been shut and locked by Mrs. Flemming, the trader was seated on his shady verandah, smoking a cigar and listening to the prattle of his little daughter, when his two boys raced up to him from the beach, and noisily asked him permission to take the smallest of the boats (a ship's dinghy) and go fishing outside the reef until the morning. They had just heard some natives crying out that a vast shoal of *tau tau*—a large salmonlike fish, greatly prized throughout the South Seas—had made their appearance, and already some canoes were being got ready.

"Who is going with you, boys?" asked Flemming, looking at their deeply-bronzed, healthy faces—so like his own, though his hair had now begun to grizzle about his sunburnt temples.

"Jack and Tom, and two Anaa men," they replied, "they sent us to ask you if they could come. They have finished the new roof for the oil-shed, and want to go very badly. Say 'yes,' father."

"All right boys. You may go. Tell your mother to give you plenty to eat to take with you—for it's only six o'clock, and I suppose you won't be home till daylight."

The delighted boys tore into the house to get their fishing tackle, whilst their mother, telling them to make less clamour, filled an empty box with biscuit, bread, and tinned meats enough for the party of six, and in less than ten minutes they were off again, shouting their goodbyes as they raced through the gate, followed by a native woman carrying the heavy box of food.

Martin Flemming turned to his wife with a smile lighting up his somewhat sombre face.

"We shall have a quiet house to-night, Kaiulani," he said, calling her by her Hawaiian name.

"Which will be a treat for us, Martin. Those boys really make more noise every day. And do you know what they have done now?"

He shook his head.

"They have a live hawkbill turtle in their room—quite a large one, for I could scarcely move it—and have painted its back in five or six colours. And they feed it on live fish; the room smells horribly."

Flemming laughed. "I thought I could smell fresh paint about the house yesterday. Never mind, 'Lani. It won't hurt the turtle."

CHAPTER II

At seven o'clock on the following morning the boys had not returned, and Martin Flemming, just as his wife brought him his cup of coffee, was saying that they probably were still fishing, when he heard a sound that made him spring to his feet—the long, hoarse, bellowing note of a conch shell, repeated three times.

"That's a call to arms!" he cried, "what does it mean, I wonder. Ah, there is another sounding, too, from the far end of the village. I must go and see what is the matter."

Scarcely, however, had he put his foot outside his door when he heard his boys' voices, and in another moment he saw them running or rather staggering along the path together with a crowd of natives, who were all wildly excited, and shouting at the top of their voices.

"Father, father," and the eldest boy ran to him, and scarcely able to stand, so exhausted was he, he flung himself down on the verandah steps, "father, Jack and Tom, and the two Anaa men... been stolen by a strange ship... we must... we must save them."

Hastening inside, Flemming returned with a carafe of cold water, and commanding the boys not to try to speak any more just then, he poured some over their wrists, and then gave them a little in a glass to drink. When they were sufficiently "winded," they told him their story, which was, briefly, this.

In company with two canoes, they had put out to sea and began fishing. Then they parted company—the boat pulling round to the other side of Anaa, where they fished with fair success till daylight. Suddenly a small white-painted barque appeared, coming round the north end of the

island. She was under very easy canvas, and when she saw the boat, backed her main-yard, and ran up her ensign.

"They want us to come aboard," said Bob, hauling in his line. "Up lines everybody."

His companions at once pulled up their lines, and took to the oars, and in a few minutes they were alongside the ship, and an officer leant over the side of the poop, and asked them to come aboard.

The boys ascended first, the four natives following; the former were at once conducted into the barque's cabin, where the captain, an old man with a white moustache, asked them their names, and then began to question them as to the number of natives on the island, &c., when they started to their feet with alarmed faces as they heard a sudden rush of feet on deck, followed by oaths and cries, and Walter the younger of the two, fancied, he heard his brother's name called by Jack Waterwitch.

"Sit down, boys, sit down," said the captain, dropping his suave manner, and speaking angrily, "you can go on deck and be off on shore presently." As he spoke a man came below, and made a sign to him.

"All right, sir."

The captain nodded, and then told the boys to go on deck and get into their boat. They at once obeyed, but the moment they reached the deck they were surrounded by five or six of the crew, who hustled them to the gangway, and forced them over the side, despite their struggles, and their loud cries to their native friends, of whom they could see nothing whatever.

The boat's line was cast off, and as she fell astern the boys saw that a number of sailors were aloft, loosing her light sails, and in a few minutes she was some distance away from them, heading to the eastward with a light breeze. As quickly as possible the two boys set the boat's sail, and sailing and pulling, they ran straight for the weather side of the island, crossed over the reef into the lagoon, and gave the alarm to the first people they met.

"Good lads," said Flemming, "you have done all that you could do. We shall see presently what can be done to save our men."

Then turning to his wife, he bade her get ready enough provision for his three boats, and have them launched and manned by their usual crews, whilst he went to the mission to consult with Father Billot and the chiefs, for he had already heard from one of the excited natives that the barque was still very near the land, and almost becalmed; and he knew that the Anaa natives would to a man assist him in recovering the four men from captivity.

Half way to the mission house, he met the priest himself, hurrying along the shaded path, to tell him the further news that the two canoes which had accompanied the boat had just returned, after narrowly escaping capture by the barque. It appeared that they, too, had seen the barque crawling along under the lee of the land and close in to the reef, just as daylight broke, and from the number of boats she carried—she had two towing, as well as three others on deck—they imagined her to be a whaler. They paddled up alongside without the slightest suspicion of danger, and three or four of their number in the first canoe were clambering up the side when they suddenly sprang overboard, just as three or four grapnels with light chains were thrown from the bulwarks over the canoes so as to catch their outriggers, and capsize them. Most fortunately, however, only one of the grapnels caught—it fell upon the wooden grating or platform between the outrigger and the hull of one canoe, and was quickly torn away by the desperate hands of the natives—in less than a minute both canoes were clear of the ship, and

racing shoreward without the loss of a single man. No attempt was made to follow them in the barque's boats, her ruffianly captain and crew evidently recognising that there was no chance of overtaking them when the land was so near.

"The villains!" exclaimed Flemming, as he and the priest set off at a run to the house of the head chief, who had just sent an urgent message for them to come and meet him and his leading men in counsel, "she must be a slaver from the coast of South America."

The consultation with the chiefs was a hurried one, and a resolution to board the barque and recapture the four men if possible, was quickly arrived at. Over thirty canoes, and five or six boats, manned and armed by nearly two hundred of the picked men of the island, and led by Martin Flemming and three chiefs, were soon underway, and passing out through the narrow passage in the reef, went northward till they rounded the point, and saw the barque about five miles away. She had every stitch of canvas set, but was making little more than steerage way, for only the faintest air was filling her upper canvas.

The canoes and boats, at Flemming's suggestion, approached her in a half-circle, his own boat leading. It was his intention to recover the men if possible, without bloodshed, and he would first make an attempt to board the slaver—for such she was—and alone try to achieve the men's liberation by pointing out to the captain that his ship would be captured and destroyed by the infuriated natives if he refused. If he did refuse there would be a heavy loss of life—of that he (Flemming) was certain.

Apparently no notice was taken by the barque of the approaching flotilla, until it was within three quarters of a mile, then she hauled up her mainsail, came slowly to the wind, and began firing with two of the four guns she carried—nine-pounders. Flemming at once ordered all the other boats and canoes to cease pulling and paddling, and he went on alone. He was not again fired at till he came within a quarter of a mile of the vessel, when a volley of musketry was fired, together with the two heavy guns, both of which were loaded with grape. How any one of them in the boat escaped was a marvel, for the bullets lashed the water into foam only a few yards ahead, and some, ricochetting, struck and damaged two of the oars.

To advance in face of such a fire would be madness. The barque evidently carried a large and well-armed crew, so he slewed round and pulled towards the little fleet, as those on the slaver yelled derisively, and again began firing with the nine-pounders, and small arms as well.

And then, to his bitter rage and disappointment, a puff of wind came over from the westward, and the barque's sails filled. In ten minutes she was slipping through the water so quickly that she was leaving them astern fast, and in another hour she had swept round the south end of the land, and they saw her no more.

Sad and dejected, he and his native friends returned to Tuuhora, and drawing up their boats and canoes, went to their homes in silence.

CHAPTER III

TEN years had passed, and fortune had proved kind to Martin Flemming and his family, who were now, with the exception of the eldest son, settled on the island of Barotonga, one of the Cook's Group.

For some years after the abduction of the four unfortunate natives, Flemming had tried every possible means of ascertaining their fate, and at first thought that he would succeed, for within a few weeks after the visit of the barque to Anaa, there came news of similar outrages perpetrated by three vessels, through the Ellice, Line Islands and Paumotu Group. One of these vessels was a barque, the others were brigs, and all sailed under Peruvian colours, though many of the officers were Englishmen.

In one instance they had descended upon the unsuspecting inhabitants of the island of Nukulaelae in the Ellice Group, and carried off almost the entire population, and at Easter Island—far to the eastward, over three hundred unfortunate natives were seized under circumstances of the grossest treachery and violence, and manacled together, taken away to end their days as slaves in working the guano deposits on the Chincha Islands, off the coast of South America.

Though not then a rich man, Flemming at his own expense made a long and tedious voyage to the Ghinchas. By the time he arrived there nearly a year had elapsed since the four men had been stolen, and he found that both the British and French Governments had compelled the Peruvian Government to restore all of the wretched survivors—there were but few, alas!—to their homes. Over one hundred of the wretched beings had perished of disease in the hot and stifling holds of the slavers; scores of them, attempting to regain their liberty, had been shot down, and the fearful toil in the guano pits of the Ghincha Islands carried off many more.

At the Chincha Islands he was unable to gain any definite information about the four men, but was told that the British Consul at Gallao might be able to tell him what had become of them—whether they had died or had been among those restored to their homes. So to Gallao be went, for he was ever bearing in mind the grief of his children at the loss of their dear "Tommy Topsail-tie" and "Jacky Waterwitch," and his promise to them that if they and their Anaa companions were alive he would bring them back.

But a bitter disappointment awaited him at Gallao—for the Consul, who had been largely instrumental in forcing the Peruvian Government to liberate the captured people, gave him absolute proof that none of the four men had reached the Ghinchas, for he had obtained a great deal of information from the survivors, all of which he had carefully recorded.

"Here is what Vili, a native of Nukulaelae, told me, Mr. Flemming. He was one of those who were captured by the barque, and was rather well treated by the captain on account of his speaking English, being put into the mate's watch as he had been to sea for many years in whale ships. He says:—

'After we of Nukulaelae had been on board the barque for about twenty days, we came to an island in the Paumotus, where the captain tried to capture two canoes full of natives but failed, though quite soon after he seized four from a boat, and they were carried down into the hold and ironed, for they had fought very hard and all were much hurt and bleeding. I spoke to them and they told me that they had been out fishing with the two sons of a white man, who was a trader on the island. The captain did not hurt the two boys, but let them go. Then a lot of canoes and boats came off and the ship fired her cannons at them, and drove them away.

'Next day we met another ship, a small schooner, flying the German flag, and her captain came on board our ship and had a long talk with our captain, and presently an officer and six men

came down into the hold, and took the irons off nine men and drove them on deck. Among these men were the four who were taken from the boat. The captain of the schooner paid our captain money for them, and took them on board his vessel, which then sailed away.'

"Now, Mr. Flemming," resumed the Consul, "that is all I can tell you. I have written to the British Consul at Apia in Samoa, and at Levuka in Fiji, asking them to endeavour to find out the schooner's name and trace the nine men. I have no doubt but that she was some Fijian or Samoan 'blackbirder,' and that the poor devils are working on some of the plantations in either Fiji, Samoa or Tonga. There is, therefore, good reason for you to hope that you will succeed in your search. I shall gladly give you all the assistance in my power to facilitate your enquiries."

Returning to Anaa, Flemming, through the aid of the French authorities in Tahiti, placed himself in communication with the British Consuls in Fiji and Samoa, telling them the details of the capture of the four men and of their transference with five others to another vessel, and enclosing a sum of money—all he could spare—to be given to Tommy Topsail-tie so that he and his three companions might be enabled to find their way back to Anaa.

At the end of another long weary year of hopeful expectation, he received replies from the Consuls, returning the money he had sent, and saying that after most careful inquiries, they could learn nothing of the nine men; but that they (the Consuls) had strong reason to believe that the schooner to which they had been transferred was a notorious German "blackbirder" named the *Samoa*, though the captain and the crew swore they knew nothing of the matter.

"It is quite possible," they said in their joint report, "that some or all of the men are on one of the German plantations in Samoa or Tonga, and that you will yet discover them. But the German Consuls will give us no assistance, and absolutely decline to permit us to send any one to visit the plantations, unless the managers or owners are agreeable. And, as you can imagine, the owners and managers are *not* agreeable, and have declined in terms of great rudeness to even supply us with the names of any of their labourers, or the names of the various islands from which they come."

But even in face of this Flemming did not despair, and told his wife and children, who could not restrain their tears when they read the Consuls' report, that he would not let the matter rest. He had several friends in Samoa and Fiji—merchants, traders and ship captains, and to them he wrote asking them to institute enquiries quietly, and let him know the result.

After spending another five years on Anaa, during which time he had heard nothing of the missing men, he determined to settle on Rarotonga, where there was an excellent opportunity of making money. His eldest boy by this time was almost a grown man, and was earning his living as a supercargo of a trading vessel, running between Auckland in New Zealand and the various groups of islands in the South Pacific.

CHAPTER IV

In the quiet little harbour of Mulifanua, situated at the western end of the island of Upolu, a fine-looking brigantine was lying at anchor, and the captain and supercargo were pacing the deck together enjoying their after-breakfast pipes.

The brigantine was the *Maori Maid* of Auckland, Captain Heselton, and the supercargo was young Robert Flemming. The vessel had run into Mulifanua Harbour owing to her having struck on a reef a few days previously whilst beating up against the south-east trades from Wallis Island to Leone Bay, a port on the island of Tutuila, one of the Samoan Group, and as she was leaking rather seriously her captain decided to run into Mulifanua, put her on the beach, and get at the leak or leaks.

"There is no need for you to stay on board, Bob," said Heselton presently to his young supercargo. "Go ashore and stay ashore until we are ready for sea again. All going well we'll find out where the damage is by this time to-morrow, and be afloat again in a few days. But there is nothing to keep you aboard, and you might as well put in your time shooting or otherwise enjoying yourself; why not go and have a look at Goddeffroy's big plantation? It's only about a couple of miles away."

"Thank you, captain, I think I shall. As you know for years past I have always been hoping that during one of our cruises, I might come across some native or other on one of these plantations who might be able to tell me something about those four poor fellows who were collared by that Peruvian barque ten years ago. And this plantation of Goddeffroy's is one of the biggest in the South Seas—there are over seven hundred labourers, Line Islanders, Solomon Islanders, New Britain niggers and heaven knows what else."

"Well, you'll have a good chance now. And look here, Bob—take your time, a day or two more or less doesn't matter to us. I shall have plenty to do even after I get at this confounded leak. The rigging wants setting up badly, so we may be here any time under a week."

"Right. I'll go and have a look at the plantation; and if the manager is a decent sort of a Dutchman he might put me up. If he's a hog—which he probably is—I'll go to the native village, sleep there to-night and have a day's pigeon-shooting to-morrow."

Just then a boat was seen putting off from the shore, manned by Samoans, but steered by a white man, who as soon as he came on deck introduced himself as the local trader. He was a quiet, good-natured old fellow—an Englishman—and as soon as he learned of the mishap to the brigantine, at once offered to get a gang of natives to assist in beaching her; and then pressed Flemming to make his house his home during the stay of the vessel.

"Thank you," replied the young man, "I shall be very pleased. I want to have a look at the big plantation here and try to have a yarn with some of the Eingsmill Island labourers." Then he told the trader, who was much interested, the object he had in view.

"I'm sure that the manager will let you talk to any of the labourers," he said, "for he's one of the 'White men' kind of Dutchmen. His name is Knorr. He succeeded a regular brute of a man who used to flog the plantation hands right and left. A lot of them have run away during the past six or seven years and have taken to the mountains. They are all armed, and sometimes, when they are in want of food, will lay the Samoan villages under tribute, and if any resistance is shown, they set fire to the houses. The Samoans are terribly afraid of them, for there are two or three cannibal Solomon Islanders among them, and a Samoan has a holy terror of a man-eater."

"Why don't the Dutchmen capture the beggars?" asked the captain. "There are enough of them in Samoa."

The old trader laughed—"Ay, too many, sir; too many for us poor English traders. But they have tried, time and time again, to capture these fellows, but only got badly mauled in two or three fights. There is a standing reward of two hundred dollars for every one of them, dead or alive, and about a year ago ten flash young Samoan *manaias*{*} set out, well armed and well

primed with grog, to surprise the escapees, who were known to be living in an almost inaccessible part of the mountains. Only four of the ten came back; the other six were shot down one by one as they were climbing the side of a mountain, and these four were made prisoners by the outlaws, who gave them such a fright that they will never get over it. It was as good as any novel to hear them talk about it, I can assure you."

** Warriors or rather would-be warriors—young men whom the local white men usually speak of as "bucks,"—i.e., flashy, saucy fellows.*

"Go on, tell us the whole yarn," said the skipper of the *Maori Maid*, as he pushed a decanter of brandy towards his visitor, and take a cigar. "It's pleasant to meet an Englishman in these Dutchman-infested islands, especially when he has a good yarn to spin."

"The yarn isn't a pleasant one, captain," said the trader. "It's a d————d unpleasant one, but it's true, sir."

He lit a cigar and then resumed: "Well, after six of these flash young fellows were shot down, the other four dropped their rifles and cried out, *Fia ola! Fia ola!* (Quarter! Quarter!) and in a few minutes about a dozen of the escapees made their appearance, took away their rifles and cartridges, and tying their arms behind their backs made them march in front of them up the mountain-side till they came to a bit of a thicket in which were four or five small huts. Telling their prisoners to sit down, half of their number went away, returning in half an hour with the six heads of the men who had been shot.

"Take these heads back with you," said one of the outlaws, who could speak Samoan, "and tell all Mulifanua that we are strong men. We fear no one, for we have plenty of guns and cartridges, and five hundred men such as you cannot take us. And say to the chief of the village, that on every fourth day, food for us must be brought to the foot of the eastern spur of the mountain. If this be not done, then shall we kill all whom we meet—men, women or children. Now go and tell the man who flogged us that some day we shall cook and eat his head, for we are very strong men.'

"Well, the four poor trembling beggars were liberated, and carrying the six heads of their comrades, they went back, and their story so terrified the people of Mulifanua that no further attempt was ever made to capture the outlaws. And although the Germans don't know of it, the villagers are to this very day, gentlemen, supplying these dangerous devils with food, and I know for a fact that sometimes two or three of them come down from the mountains and sleep in the village without fear. They have never troubled me; but very often a native boy or girl will come to me and buy a 28-lb. bag of shot, caps and powder, and I know perfectly well that it is for the 'wild men,' as the people here call the escaped men. Every one of them has not only a rifle, but a shot-gun as well, for they one night broke into the plantation store and carried off all the rifles and guns they could find."

"Take care, Bob, that they don't take some pot shots at you," said the captain, with a laugh, as his supercargo rose to get ready to go ashore with the trader.

"They would if they thought Mr. Hemming was a German from the plantation," said the trader, seriously, "so you had better not go too far away when you are shooting, unless you take a native guide with you. For, as I have said before, these men and the people of the village are

now, I really believe, in secret friendship, or rather alliance—an alliance born out of terror on one side and savage desperation on the other."

A few minutes later young Flemming and the trader were being pulled ashore.

CHAPTER V

The German manager of the great plantation proved to be, as the old trader had said, "one of the white-men kind of Dutchmen." He received the young supercargo most hospitably, and insisted upon his remaining to lunch, and when Flemming told him frankly of the long quest for the four missing men, he at once became deeply sympathetic.

"You shall see every one of the six or seven hundred natives I have working for me, Mr. Flemming. They are all now scattered about in different portions of the plantation, but at five o'clock, when they knock off, I shall have them all mustered. But I am almost certain that you will not find any one of the nine who were transferred from the Peruvian slaver to the German 'black-birder,' for I have always taken an interest in these people, and know pretty well from where they all come. My predecessor here was very rough with them—the less I say about him the better—and there is now quite a number of runaways living in the bush. They have defied all efforts to capture them. Who they are, and where they come from, I cannot well tell, for the former manager never kept an accurate account of the numbers of new arrivals brought here by the various labour vessels, nor did he specify in his books, as he should have done, from what particular islands they came. 'Natives' he considered to be a sufficient designation, and 'three years' or 'six years' indicated the time for which they were engaged. He left the identification of themselves and their islands to the captains of the various vessels which, at the end of their time, take them back again."

"I wonder if it is possible that the four men I am looking for are among the outlaws," said Flemming.

"Possible, quite possible," replied the manager, "but you will never be able to see them if they are. The gang is very desperate and determined, and though they have no animus against me personally, they would shoot me, or you, or any white man who attempted to get into communication with them."

After a little further conversation with the manager, Flemming said he would have a few hours' pigeon-shooting, returning in time to see the plantation hands mustered. Knorr wished him to take a Samoan guide, but the young man laughingly reminded him that he was half a native himself, and from his infancy almost had been used to wandering about the mountain forests of the islands of Micronesia and Polynesia; so, bidding his host good morning, he shouldered his gun and set off, and in another hour was ascending the first spur of the mountain range, which traverses the island of Upolu from one end to the other.

He had a reason for declining the services of a guide, for he had determined to attempt to reach the outlaws' refuge, and, at the risk of his life, finding out if Tommy Topsail-tie and Jack Waterwitch were among them. The old trader had told him that one of their number was a very big man, whose legs, back, and neck were tattooed as the Kingsmill Islanders tattoo, and he

(Flemming) had formed the idea, since his conversation with the manager of the plantation, that this big man was Binoké—the dear friend of his boyhood's days, the ever-wanted "Tommy Topsail-tie" of his brother and his sister Medora, the man who, with Jack Waterwitch, had stood to his father and mother in their poverty and distress, and had toiled night and day for them without recompense.

As he walked over the soft carpet of fallen leaves which covered the mountain-side so thickly that no sound came from his footsteps, he listened carefully. He knew that he was proceeding in the right direction for the outlaws' refuge—the direction the plantation manager had impressed on him to avoid—and after a two hours' stiff climb he found himself on the summit of the spur and overlooking the harbour. Far below him he could see the *Maori Maid* being hauled on to the beach, and eight miles away the beautiful little island of Manono lay basking in the sun on a sea of deepest, glorious blue.

Suddenly he heard a sound, a faint, soft creeping on the ground somewhere near him, and he knew that it was the sound of a human footstep, and that he was watched.

He laid down his gun, and stood up and pretended to closely scan the thick, leafy canopy of the mighty trees overhead, as if he were searching for pigeons. Then his voice rang out clearly, and echoed and re-echoed in the grey and silent forest aisles.

"Binoké, Binoké! 'Tis I! Nobal, Nobal! 'Tis I who call! Tis I, Papu (Bob), of Anaa! I, who have sought thee long. Binoké! Nohal!"

Then came a sudden rush of feet and brown, naked bodies from all around, and in another moment the young man was almost lifted off hid feet by Tommy Topsail-tie, who, clasping his mighty arms around him, pressed him passionately to his bosom.

"My boy, my boy!... See, 'tis I, Binoké, thy friend, thy slave, thy Binoké!" and then the savage creature wept as only wild people such as he was weep from excess of joy.

In a few minutes Flemming was hurried along by the friendly hands of six or eight of the "wild men" to their refuge further up on the mountain-side, where he found not only "Jack Waterwitch," but one of the Anaa natives, who had been carried off ten years before; the other native of Anaa, he was told by Tommy Topsail-tie, had died a year or two previously. There were, he found, twelve natives in all—Topsail-tie, who was their leader, Jack Waterwitch, the Anaa man, four Solomon Islanders, and five others from various islands.

For an hour or more the young man conversed with his old friends, who delightedly agreed to leave their mountain retreat and go on board the brigantine as soon as she was ready to sail. The remaining eight men, however, refused to leave, although Flemming told them that they could all come down from the mountain at night-time, and be very easily stowed away on board, and that even if they were discovered the captain would be able to protect them, should the German manager make any demand for them to be delivered over to him. But all his arguments were in vain—they shook their heads and said that never, again would they go, willingly or unwillingly, upon the deep sea.

Then the supercargo and Topsail-tie made their plans, and after spending another hour or so with the escapees, Flemming shook hands with them all, and guided by Nobal, returned to the base of the mountain.

Here he parted from his companion, who quickly plunged into the forest again, and reached the plantation just as the manager was mustering the plantation hands for his inspection. Not deeming it advisable to tell his host of the discovery he had just made, he yet tried to display as

much interest as possible, and after walking up and down the triple rows of men and looking at them rapidly one by one, he said that there was no one of them whom he had ever seen before. Then the manager dismissed the men, and Flemming, thanking him for his kindness, hurried on board and told his story to Captain Heselton.

Two days afterwards the *Maori Maid* was sailing slowly out through Mulifanua passage. Flemming, with the skipper beside him, was standing on the poop, looking for'ard.

"Tell them they can come up on deck now, boatswain," he cried, "we are a good mile off the land."

And then the three of the four men from whom he and his brother had parted ten years before rushed up from the hold, knelt at his feet, and laughing and sobbing like children, threw their brown arms around his legs.

Binoké rose, and stretching out his huge right arm towards the rising sun, turned his black eyes on "the boy" he so loved.

"Is it to the east we sail, Papu?"

"Ay, to the east, Binoké, far, far to the east, to a fair, fair land with green mountains and falling streams. And there awaits us my father and mother, and my brother, and Medora. And they will be well content with me, for never hast thou and Nobal been forgotten."

"FLASH HARRY" OF SAVAIT

Nearly thirty years ago, when the late King Malietoa of Samoa was quietly arming his own adherents and conciliating his rebel chiefs in order to combine against the persistent encroachments of the Germans, I was running a small trading cutter between Upolu and Savaii, the two principal islands of the group.

One day I arrived in Apia Harbour with a cargo of yams which I was selling to an American man-of-war, the *Resacca*. I went alongside at once, had the yams weighed and received my money from the paymaster, and then went ashore for a bathe in the Vaisigago River, a lovely little stream which, taking its rise in the mountains, debouches into Apia Harbour. Here I was joined by an old friend, Captain Hamilton, the local pilot, who, stripping off his clothes, plunged into the water beside me.

As we were laughing and chatting and thoroughly enjoying ourselves, a party of natives—young men and boys—emerged from the trees on the opposite bank, and casting off their scanty garments, boisterously entered the water and began disporting themselves, and then to my surprise I saw that their leader was a white man, tattoed in every respect, like a Samoan. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, was clean-shaven, and had bright red hair.

"Who is that fellow?" I inquired.

"One of the biggest scoundrels in the Pacific," replied my companion, "'Flash Harry' from Savaii. He deserted from either the *Brisk* (or the *Zealous*) British man-of-war, about seven years ago, and although the commanders of several other British warships have tried to get him, they have failed. He is the pet *protégé* of one of the most powerful chiefs in Savaii, and laughs at all attempts to catch him. To my knowledge he has committed four atrocious murders, and, in

addition to that, he is a drunken, foul-mouthed blackguard. He only comes to Apia occasionally—when there is no British man-of-war about—and paints the town red, for although he is merely a loafing beachcomber, he is liberally supplied with money by his chief, and possesses an extensive harem as well. He simply terrorises the town when he breaks out, and insults every timid European, male and female, whom he meets."

"Why doesn't some one put a bullet through him?"

"Ah, now you're asking! Why? Porter" (a respectable Samoan trader) "told him that he would riddle him if he came inside his fence, and the scoundrel knows *me* well enough not to come into my place with anything but a civil word on his foul tongue; but then you see, Porter and I are Americans. If either or both of us shot the man no commander of an American man-of-war would do more than publicly reprimand us for taking the law into our own hands; but if you or any other Englishman killed the vermin, you would be taken to Fiji by the first man-of-war that called here, put on your trial for murder, and, if you escaped hanging, get a pretty turn of penal servitude in Fiji gaol."

We finished our bathe, dressed, and set out for Hamilton's house on Matautu Point, for he had asked me to have supper with him. On our way thither we met the master of a German barque, then in port, and were chatting with him in the middle of the road, when Mr. "Flash Harry" and his retinue of *manaia* (young bucks) overtook us.

The path being rather narrow we drew aside a few paces to let them pass, but at a sign from their leader they stopped. He nodded to Hamilton and the German captain (neither of whom took any notice of him) then fixed his eyes insolently on me and held out his hand.

"How do yer do, Mister. You're a nice sort of a cove not to come and see me when you pass my place in your cutter"—then with sudden fury as I put my hands in my pockets—"you, you young cock-a-hoopy swine, do you mean to say you don't mean to shake hands with a white man?"

"Not with you, anyway," I answered.

"Then the next time I see you I'll pull your ——— arm out of the socket," he said, with an oath, and turning on his heel he went off with his following of bucks. All of them were armed with rifles and the long beheading knives called *Nifa oti* (death-knife), and as we three had nothing but our fists we should have had a bad time had they attacked us, for we were in an unfrequented part of the beach and would have been half murdered before assistance came. But in Samoa in those days street brawls were common.

"The next time you *do* meet him," said Hamilton as we resumed our walk, "don't give him a chance. Drill a hole through him as soon as he gets within ten paces, and then clear out of Samoa as quick as you can."

Quite a month after this I had to visit the little port of Asaua on the Island of Savaii; and as I was aware that "Flash Harry" was in the vicinity of the place on a *malaga*, or pleasure trip, I kept a sharp lookout for him, and always carried with me in my jumper pocket a small but heavy Derringer, the bullet of which was as big as that of a Snider rifle. I did not want to have my arm pulled out of the socket, and knew that "Flash Harry," being twice my weight almost, would give me a sad time if he could once get within hitting distance of me, for like most men-of-war's men he was very smart with his hands, and I was but a stripling—not yet twenty.

I had come to Asaua with a load of timber to be used in the construction of a church for the French Mission, and in the evening went to the resident priest to obtain a receipt for delivery. As he could not speak English and I could not speak French we had to struggle along in Samoan—to our mutual amusement. However, we got along very well, and I was about to accept his hospitable offer to remain and have sapper with him when a young chief whom I knew, named Ulofanua ("Top of a High Tree") came in hurriedly and told us that "Flash Harry" and ten or fifteen young men, all more or less drunk, were coming to the village that night with the avowed intention of boarding the cutter under the pretence of trading, seizing all the liquor and giving me a father of a beating—the latter to avenge the insult of a month before.

Laughingly telling the priest that under the circumstances discretion was the better part of valour, I bade him goodbye, walked down to my boat, which was lying on the beach, and with two native sailors pulling, we started for the cutter, a mile away. The night was beautifully calm, but dark, and as I was not well acquainted with the inner part of Asaua Harbour and could not see my way, I several times ran the boat on to submerged coral boulders; and, finally, lost the narrow channel altogether.

Then I told one of my men, a sturdy, splendid specimen of a native of the Gilbert Islands named Te Manu Uraura ("Bed Bird") to come aft and take the steer oar, knowing that his eyesight, like that of all Polynesians, was better than that of any white man.

"Come here, Te Manu, and steer, I'll take your oar. Your eyes are better than mine."

The poor fellow laughed good-naturedly, and I little thought that this simple request of mine would be the cause of his being a cripple for life. He came aft, took the steer oar from me, and I, seating myself on the after thwart, began to pull. We were at this time about thirty yards from the beach, and between it and the inner reef of the harbour. We sent the boat along for two or three hundred yards without a hitch, and I was thinking of what my cook would have for my supper, when we suddenly plumped into a patch of dead coral and stuck hard and fast.

Knowing that the tide was falling, we all jumped out, and pushed the boat off into deeper water as quickly as possible, just as half a dozen bright torches of coco-nut leaves flared up on the shore and revealed the boat dimly to those who were holding them.

At first I imagined that the chief of the village had sent some of his people to help us through the channel, but I was quickly undeceived when I heard "Flash Harry's" voice.

"I've got you now, my saucy young quarter-deck-style-of-pup. Slew round and come ashore, or I'll blow your head off."

One glance ashore showed me that we were in a desperate position. "Flash Harry," who was all but stark-naked—he had only a girdle of *ti* tree leaves round his waist—was covering the boat with his Winchester rifle, and his followers, armed with other guns, were ready to fire a volley into us, although most of them were pretty well drunk.

"They can't hit us, Te Manu," I cried to the Gilbert Islander, whose inborn fighting proclivities were showing in his gleaming eyes and short, panting breaths, "most of them have no cartridges in their guns, and they are all too drunk to shoot straight. Let us go on!"

Te Manu gripped the haft of the steer oar and swung the boat's head round, and then I and the other native at the bow oar—a mere boy of sixteen—pulled for all we were worth just as "Flash Harry" dropped on one knee and fired.

Poor Te Manu swayed to and fro for a few moments and then cried out, "He has broken my hand, sir! But go on, pull, pull hard!"

Under a spattering fire from the beachcomber's drunken companions we pulled out into deeper water and safety, and then, shipping my oar, I sprang to Te Manu's aid. The bullet had struck him in the back of the right hand and literally cut off three of the poor fellow's knuckles. I did what I could to stop the loss of blood, and told him to sit down, but he refused, and although suffering intense pain, insisted on steering with his left hand. As soon as we reached the cutter I at once hove up anchor and stood along the coast before a strong breeze to Matautu Harbour, where I was able to have the man's hand properly attended to. He never recovered the use of it again except in a slight degree.

I never saw "Flash Harry" again, for a few months later I left Samoa for the Caroline Group, and when I returned a year afterwards I was told that he had at last found the country too hot for him and had left the island in a German "blackbirder" bound to the Solomon Islands.

Quite six years had passed, and then I learnt, in a somewhat curious manner, what became of him. One day in Sydney, New South Wales, three captains and myself met for lunch at the Paragon Hotel, on Circular Quay. We were all engaged in the South Sea trade, and one of the company, who was a stranger to me, had just returned from the Solomon Islands, with which group and its murderous, cannibal people he was very familiar. (He was himself destined to be killed there with his ship's company in 1884.) He was a young man who had had some very narrow escapes and some very thrilling experiences, some of which he narrated.

We were talking of the massacre of Captain Ferguson and the crew of the Sydney trading steamer *Ripple*, by the natives of Bougainville Island in the Solomon Group, when our friend remarked—

"Ah, poor Ferguson ought to have been more careful. Why, the very chief of that village at Numa Numa—the man who cut him down with a tomahawk—had killed two other white men. Ferguson knew that, and yet would allow him to come aboard time after time with hundreds of his people, and gave him and them the run of his ship. I knew the fellow well. He told me to my face, the first time I met him, that he had killed and eaten two white men."

"Who were they?" I asked.

"One was a man trading for Captain MacLeod of New Caledonia; the other chap was some beachcombing fellow who had been kicked ashore at Numa Numa by his skipper. I heard he came from Samoa originally. Anyway the chief told me that as soon as the ship that had put the man ashore had sailed, he was speared through the back as he was drinking a coco-nut.

"When they stripped off his clothes to make him ready for the oven, they found he was tattoed, Samoan fashion, from the waist to the knees. Then, as he had red hair, they cut off his head and smoke-dried it, instead of eating it with the rest of the body; they kept it as an ornament for the stem of a big canoe. A white man's head is a great thing at any time for a canoe's figurehead in the Solomons, but a white man's head with red hair is a great *mana*" (mascotte).

Then I told him that I had known the man, and gave him his antecedents.

"Ah," he said, "I daresay if you had been there you would have felt as if you could have eaten a bit of the beggar yourself."

"I certainly do feel pleased that he's settled," I replied, as I thought of poor Red Bird's hand.

THE END


Freeditorial