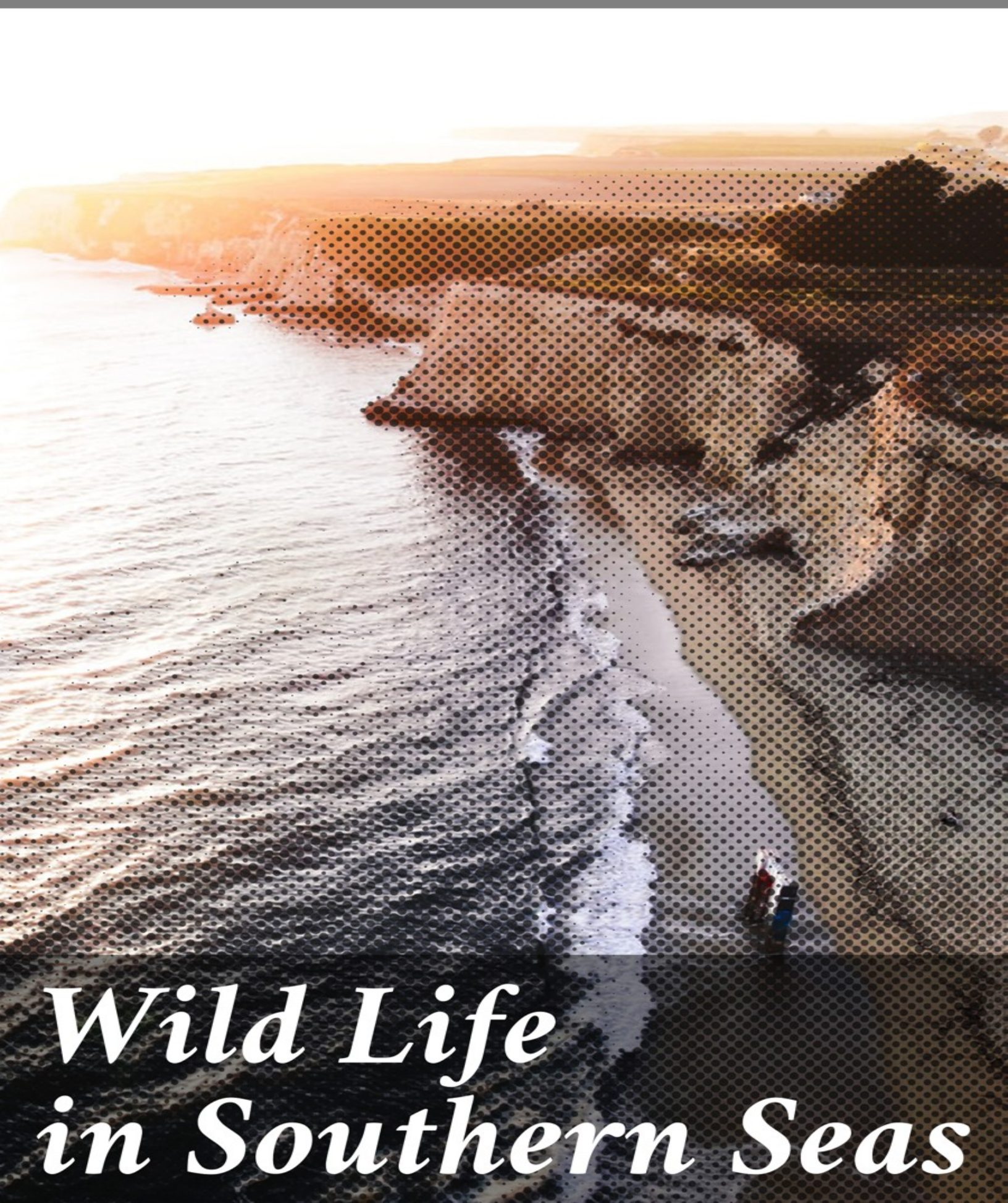
Louis Becke



Wild Life in Southern Seas

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Orca Gladiator

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We—a little girl of six, and myself—were seated upon a high, flat-topped, grassy headland of a lonely part of the northern coast of New South Wales, five miles from the old penal settlement of Port Macquarie. Three hundred feet below, the long Pacific rollers, unruffled by the faintest breath of air, swept in endless but surfless succession around a chain of black, isolated, and kelp-covered rocks that stood out from the shore at a distance of a cable-length or so. The tide was low, and some of the rocks raised their jagged, sun-dried summits perhaps six feet above the surface; others scarce a foot, so that each gentle swell as it came wavering shoreward poured over their faces in a creamy lather of foam; others again were fathoms below, and their thick garments of kelp and weed swayed to and fro unceasingly to the sweep of the ocean roll above them. And in and about the rocks, and hovering over the white gleam of sandy bottom that, like a great table of ivory, lay between them and the cliff-bound shore, swam droves of bright, pink-coloured schnapper, and great, lazily moving blue-fish. Half a mile away a swarm of white gulls floated motionless upon the blue expanse; upon the time-worn foreshore boulders beneath us stood lines and groups of black divers, with wings outspread in solemn silence, gazing seaward.

We had climbed the headland to look for whales; for it was the month of October, when the great schools of

humpbacks and finbacks were travelling southward to colder seas from their breeding grounds among the Bampton Shoals, nine hundred miles away, north-east. For three weeks they had been passing south, sometimes far out from the land, sometimes within a mile of the shore—hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of rich blubber, with never a whaleship nor whaleboat's crew within two thousand miles; for the brave old days of Australian whaling enterprise died full thirty years ago.

At last, a mile or so away, a jet of smoky spray, and then another and another! Five humpbacks—two cows, two calves, and a bull —only a small "pod"—that is, a school. Nearer and nearer they came, their huge, black humps gleaming brightly in the dazzling sunlight as they rose to spout. A hundred yards in front, the old bull rolls lazily along, "sounding" but rarely, for the sea is full of squid, and he and his convoy, with drooping lower jaws, suck in the lovely morsels in countless swarms.

Six weeks before, as they had rolled and spouted northwards to the great lagoons of the Bampton and Bellona Reefs, they had passed within, perhaps, a hundred yards of the headland upon which we sat. Perhaps, too, a fierce "north-easter" blew, and the chain of rocks that was now so gently laved by the murmuring waves was smothered in the wild turmoil of a roaring surf, and the great bull, although his huge, corrugated belly itched sorely from the thick growth of inch-long barnacles that had so tormented him of late, spouted regretfully and headed seaward again—even he could not scratch his giant frame in such a surf as that. But to-day it was different; and now he could enjoy that

long-delayed pleasure of dragging his great body over the rough surfaces of the submerged rocks, and tearing those dreadfully irritating barnacles off his twenty-five feet of grey-white ridgy stomach. For, suddenly, he raised his vast head, and then “sounded,” straight on end, and the child by my side gave a gasp of wondering terror as she saw his mighty tail rise a good ten feet in air and then slowly vanish beneath the sea.

On went the cows and calves, apparently taking no heed of father’s sudden dive shoreward. He would soon be back, they knew, as soon as the poor fellow had rid himself of those tormenting barnacles; and so with diminished speed they kept in southwards towards Camden Haven. But just as the great bull came bursting through the blue depths into the greeny hue of six fathoms of water, we saw between him and the “pod” two small jets, like spurts of steam, shoot up from the water between him and his convoy; and in another second the cows and calves had sounded in deadliest terror, and were rushing seaward, two thousand feet below. For they knew that out there in the depths lay their only hope of safety from their dreaded and invincible enemies, the “killers” and “threshers” of the South Pacific—the murderous, savage cetacean pirates that lie in wait for the returning “pods” as they travel southwards to the colder seas of Tasmania. As the great humpback reached the chain of rocks, and had begun to scratch, his foes had advanced silently but swiftly towards him. Before them swam their equally fierce and dreaded ally, *Alopias Vulpes*, the “thresher,” or fox-shark. But, before I tell of that noble fight of giants, which for nearly two hours we gazed at on that

October morning from the lonely headland, let me say something about *Alopias Vulpes* and his fellow pirate, *Orca Gladiator*, the “killer.”

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First of all, then, as to the “thresher.” He is a shark, pure and simple, and takes his name from his enormous, scythe-like, bony tail, which forms two-thirds of his length. His mouth is but small, and whales have little to fear from that, but dread the terrible knife-like sweep and downward slash of his tail; for each stroke cuts through the tough skin and sinks deep into the blubber. Such is the “thresher,” and in every drove of “killers” there is always one thresher, sometimes two.

The “killer” is actually a whale, for he is warm-blooded and rises to the surface to spout, which he does in a manner that has often led to his being mistaken for a humpback, or finback whale. He is distinguishable only from the grampus by his mouth, which has teeth—and terrible teeth—in both jaws: the grampus has teeth in his lower jaw only. When he (the grampus) is a baby he has teeth in both jaws, but those of the upper jaw are shed and fall out when he is about half grown. The killer has teeth in both jaws, as many a poor humpback and finback has found out to his cost, for the fierce creature does justice to his name—*Orca Gladiator*.

The killers have a business, and they never neglect it. It is the business of whale catching and killing. They are the bull-dog pirates of the deep sea, and on the coast of Australia their headquarters are at Twofold Bay. Sometimes, but not often, they have been known to attack the monarch of the ocean, the sperm whale. But they generally leave him

alone. He is too big, too powerful, and his great eight-inch teeth and fierce spirit render him a dangerous customer to tackle. But with the right whale, the humpback, and the seventy-foot flying finback, the killers can work their cruel will.

And now to the fight we saw.

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For about ten minutes or so the great humpback dragged his monstrous fifty feet of flesh and blubber across the tops of the submerged rocks, raising sometimes his vast head and sometimes his mighty flukes out of the water, as with all the weight of his giant body he rubbed, and scraped, and scratched his itching belly against the surface of the rocks. Suddenly, a long, slender, greyish object swept like lightning upon him, and the thresher buried his teeth in the loose skin of his “small”—that is, about fifteen or sixteen feet from his tail. And at the same moment, with savage puffs of spray shooting high from their blow-holes, the two killers darted at his head and seized him by the jaws. In ten seconds there was nought to be seen but a maddened whirl and seeth of foam, as the unfortunate victim sought to escape seaward. Well did he know that in such shallow water—there was but five or six fathoms—he could not sound far below into ocean’s depths, and, carrying his foes with him, compel them to rise for air. Fifteen, perhaps twenty minutes exhausts the air supply of a killer; a whale can remain below the surface for sixty. But he made a bold attempt.

Raising his enormous head high in air, and giving it a mighty shake, he freed himself from one of the killers, whose body, twenty feet in length, he hurled from him as if

it were a minnow; but the other, with his cruel teeth buried bull-dog fashion in his thick lips, hung on with savage tenacity. And down upon his “small” the thresher, with his teeth gripping the loose, tough, and wrinkled skin, upreared his lengthy form, and brought his awful scythe-like tail down upon the victim’s back, with a smack that could be heard half a mile away. It cut, and then, as the whale rolled in his agony from the blow, a broad, white streak of blubber oozed through the severed skin. Before he could gather his strength for that seaward rush, which meant life, the thrown-off killer was back, and had seized him again by his starboard lip. Too late! he could not sound and could not flee, and the poor, worried animal seemed to know it, for suddenly he lay quiet, while the bulldogs shook him and the thresher dealt him steady but fearful blows upon his broad expanse of shining back.

“Oh, the poor whale!” said my little companion, as she shudderingly clutched my arm. “Look at that!”

The killer fastened to the left jaw of the helpless, floating monster, raising his square white and black head about a foot or two out of the water, gave it that quick jerk one sees a fox-terrier give to a rat, and brought away in his jaws a piece of lip about a yard long—a thick strip of bloody white and red. And, as a terrier throws a rat backward and upward, so did the killer throw away the gory mass; it fell with a heavy splash upon the water some fathoms away. Then with a mighty leap the wretched whale sprang clear out of the water, standing for a moment or two straight up and down, and as he swung his body round in falling, we saw the blood pouring from his jaws in a stream. He fell

upon his back with a terrific splash of foam, and for a few seconds was out of sight; again he raised his head—the killers were both fastened to his lips again, tearing off the blubbery flesh in monstrous strips. Once, as he wallowed in his agony, he opened his vasty jaw, and ere he could close his mouth one of his foes thrust in his bull-dog head and sought to tear away a piece of his great tongue. And then came such a crashing and splashing and bewildering leaping of foam, and his tail upreared itself and swept round and round in all directions, and then struck the water a blow that sounded like a thunderclap.

“Look,” said the child again, “there are more of those cruel killers coming; see, there they are, just below us! Oh! how I hate them!”

Fifty feet away from the persecuted humpback, and sailing round and round in the green water beyond the rocks, were five sharks. They had smelt the blood of the battle, and were waiting till they could join in, and, while the killers forced their heads into the humpback’s mouth and tore out his toothsome tongue, feed upon the quivering mass of blubber and rend him in pieces from his head down to his “small.”

The unfortunate animal was now becoming rapidly exhausted, and although he still struck the water resounding blows with his tail, he was convulsed with pain and terror, and swam slowly round and round in a circle, spouting feebly, and rolling from side to side in a vain effort to shake off the killers, and find his way to the open sea. Then, as if wearied with their attempts to get at his tongue, the two destroyers suddenly let go their hold and swam

away some twenty yards or so; and the thresher, too, although he still lay alongside, ceased his fearful blows and let his long, narrow, and tapering body lie motionless upon the water, and the five grey sharks drew nearer and nearer. But the killers had not left him, for after spouting once or twice, they slewed round and came at the prey with a savage rush, and, leaping bodily out of the water, flung themselves upon his back time and time again with the most cruel and extraordinary pertinacity. And so, at last, there he lay, his monstrous head and thirty feet of his back raised high out of the water, and the white seethe of foam in which his colossal frame writhed and shuddered in deadly torment was tinged deeply with a bloodied red. Better far would have been for him the swift, death-dealing stroke of the whaler's lance, or the dreadful "squish" of the bursting bomb as it entered his vitals, and put an end to him at once, than endure such tortures as now were his. But, presently, gathering his strength for one final effort, one last spout slowly curled out, he lowered his head, raised his tail, and dashed headlong seaward. And like demons from the pit the two killers followed him down. They knew that for a mile out the water was too shallow for him to get away from them. Behind, the five sharks swept in swift pursuit; ahead of all *Alopias Vulpes* cleft the water with sharp vicious "tweeps" of his long tail.

Five, perhaps six, minutes passed, and then, with a roaring burst of foam, and spouting quickly, he raised his immense form half out of the water and, supporting himself upon his tail, spun round and round. Twice his cavelike mouth opened and shut, and as he beat the sea into froth

and spume around, a strange, awe-inspiring sound accompanied his last spout; for the sharks were at him below, tearing and riving out mouthfuls of blubber, and the killers had dragged out his tongue. One last shuddering gasp, and the now unconscious creature sank backward, and describing a circle in his final “flurry,” rolled over, “fin up,” and gave up his greasy ghost.

Green Dots of the Empire — The Ellice Group

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Dots only. And if the ship that carries you is running past them in the night, with the steady force of the south-east trades filling her canvas, you would never know that land lay within a few miles, save for the flashing of lights along the low sandy beaches or, mayhap, the dulled roar of the beating surf thrashing the reef on the windward side of the island. This, of course, implies that when ships pass in the night they do so on the lee-side. It is not a safe thing for even a daring trading schooner to have a long, long stretch of low-lying reef-encircled islets for a lee; for sometimes *Matagi toe lau* (as the brown-skinned people call the trade wind) is apt, a few hours before dawn, to lull itself to slumber for a space, till the sun, bursting from the ocean, wakes it to life again. And should the schooner have drifted down upon the land with the stealthy westerly current there is no such thing as trusting even to good ground tackle on the weather side of an Ellice Group atoll. Did the ocean slumber too, and the black ledges of the windward reef were laved but by the gentlest movement of the water, there would be no anchorage, unless the ship were loaded with a cable long enough; and ere the sun has dried the dews of the night on the coconuts the merry trade wind pipes up again, the smooth surface of the ocean swells and undulates, the rollers sweep in from the eastward and charge wildly against the black wall of coral rock, smothering it in a maddened tumble of froth and foam, the

while the smoky sea-spume is carried on high to fall in drenching showers upon the first line of coco-palms and *puka* scrub growing down close to the iron-bound shore. And of the eight islands of the Ellice Group all are alike in this respect—a wild tumultuous surf for ever beats upon the weather shore even under the influence of the ordinary trade wind; and, on the lee, there lies a sea as placid and motionless as a mountain lake.

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Four years ago the Gilbert and Kingsmill Groups (known collectively as the Line Islands) and the Ellice Group were annexed by Great Britain; and although people in Australia hear and read a good deal about the Gilberts and Kingsmills by reason of their being the location of the newly-appointed British Resident and Deputy-Commissioner for the Western Pacific, seldom is anything heard about or told of the almost equally important Ellice Group. The reason for this is not far to seek. The Line Islanders — fierce, turbulent, and war-loving people, island hating island with the same savage animosity that characterised the Highland clans of the thirteenth century—are a difficult race to govern, and although the London Missionary Society has done much good, the Resident has his work cut out to prevent the people of his sixteen islands shooting and cutting each other's throats as they did in the good old days. For when Captain Davis, of Her Majesty's ship *Royalist*, hoisted the English flag, he sternly intimated that there was to be no more fighting, and later on the High Commissioner, Sir John Thurston, in the *Rapid*, made them disarm; but scarce had the smoke from the steamer's funnel vanished from the

horizon than the old leaven worked, and rifles, carefully hidden away from the naval men, were brought forth from their concealment and put to use. And so every few months or so the Australian newspapers notify that “there has been fresh trouble in the Gilbert Group.” However, all this will be a thing of the past in another year or two, although it is safe to predict that it will be long ere the Gilbert Islander—man or woman —gives up the manufacture and use of sharks’ teeth swords and daggers. And as these weapons are not necessarily fatal, and are time-honoured arguments for settling public and family differences, perhaps it will be as well for the High Commissioner to let them possess the means of letting out in a moderate degree some of their quick, hot blood.

But the people of the Ellice Group show the other side of the picture, and their calm, placid existence, undisturbed except by a family quarrel, explains why—saving the visit of a surveying ship—no men-of-war steam up to the anchorages outside the reefs, or into the lagoons, and hold courts of inquiry into native outbreaks or private shootings. The Ellice Islanders never fight, for they have a horror of bloodshed, and except for a few fowling-pieces used for shooting pigeons, there are no firearms in the group— save those in the possession of the white traders.

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Six hundred miles from Samoa, sailing northwesterly, the first of the group, Sophia Island, is sighted. It is the south-easterly outlier of the Ellices, and is the only one of sufficient height to be seen from the vessel’s deck at a distance of twenty miles. Until a few years ago it was

uninhabited, although the people of the next island, Nukulaelae, say that “in the old, old time many people lived there.” It is about three and a half miles in circumference, has but few coconuts growing upon it, and would have remained untenanted in its loneliness to this day but for the discovery of a fairly valuable deposit of guano. Then it was taken possession of by an enterprising American store-keeper in Samoa named Moors, who landed native labourers and worked, and is still working, the deposit. The old native name of this spot is Ulakita—a name, by the way, that is almost unknown even to the local traders in the Ellice Group, and the present generation of natives.

Eighty or ninety miles away is Nukulaelae, a cluster of thirteen low-lying islets, forming a perfect atoll, and enclosing with a passageless and continuous reef a lagoon five miles in length by three in width. This narrow belt of land— in no case is any one of the islets over a mile in width —is densely covered with coconuts, and, seen from the ship, presents an enchanting appearance of the brightest green, accentuated on the westerly or lee shore by beaches of the most dazzling white. Thirty years ago Nukulaelae had a population of four hundred natives.

Then one day, in 1866, there came along two strange vessels, a barque and a brig, and hove-to close to the reef, and in a few hours nearly two hundred of the unfortunate, unsuspecting, and amiable natives were seized and taken on board by the Peruvian cut-throats and kidnappers that had swept down upon them, and, with other companions in misery, torn from their island homes, taken away to slavery in the guano pits of the Chincha Islands, on the coast of

South America. Of the Nukulaelae people none but two ever returned—they all perished miserably under their cruel taskmasters on the gloomy Chinchas. In 1873 it was the writer's lot to meet, in the Caroline Islands, with one of the two survivors of this dreadful outrage. By some means he had escaped in an English guano ship to Liverpool, and then, after years of wandering in American whalers among the islands of the Pacific, he settled down among the natives of Las Matelotas, in the Carolines, thousands of miles away from his birthplace; and although sorely tempted to accept the offer made to him by our captain of a passage to Nukulaelae, the Matelotas people refused to let him go, as he had married a girl of the island and had a family. (*Apropos* of these Peruvian slavers, it may be mentioned that a few months after their visit to Nukulaelae, joined by another barque, they made a similar descent upon the people of Rapa-nui—the mysterious Easter Island—and secured three hundred and ten victims.) At present the population of Nukulaelae is about one hundred and fifty, all of whom are Christians. Like all the other islands of *this* group, the population is showing a slow but certain increase.

Within a few hours' sail lies Funafuti, an extensive chain of some thirty-four or thirty-five islands similar in appearance to the islets of Nukulaelae, but enclosing a noble lagoon, entrance to which is given by good passages both on the south-west and north-west sides. The Russian navigator Kotzebue sailed his frigate through Funafuti Lagoon from one end to the other with a strong breeze blowing, and found, what trading vessels to-day know well, that unless a vessel is making something like eight knots it

is almost impossible to stem the fierce current that sweeps through the passages at half-tide. But once well within the lagoon, and away from the trend of the passage current, there is room for half a dozen or more battleships in which to manœuvre. About six miles from the southwest entrance the ship may drop anchor off the main island of the chain; and here the native settlement is situated. Fifty years ago nearly every island in the lagoon supported a population; to-day there are but four or five hundred natives all told, all of whom live on the island from which the whole group takes its general name, Funafuti.

The natives are a hospitable, good-tempered, and intelligent lot, and express themselves as being delighted to be included as British subjects. And there can be but little doubt that in a few years, once assured of the good intentions of the English authorities to them, they will agree to lease out to traders and copra-buyers the long stretch of dense but narrow sea-girt coconut forests that form the southern boundary of the lagoon. At present, and, indeed, for the past forty years, some millions of coconut palms are there allowed to fruiten and literally cover the ground with coconuts from year to year without the natives gathering more than will provide them with their few wants in the way of clothing, tobacco, etc., which they purchase from the one or two resident traders. Time after time have the people been approached by white agents of trading firms—notably in years past by Godeffroy’s of Hamburg—on the subject of leasing one particularly noble island, named Funafala, for the purpose of making the coconuts into copra. Liberal terms—and for a South Sea trading firm to offer liberal

terms to natives shows the value of the concessions sought —were offered, but the Funafutans would have none of the white men on Funafala. A solitary trader or so they would tolerate in the only village, but no body of strange, dissolute foreigners would they have to live among them, accompanied by wild people from the Gilbert Islands, who fought with sharks'-teeth swords among themselves, and got madly drunk on toddy every few days. And so the trading firms retired discomfited, and the coconuts rotted away quietly in millions, and the rotting thereof troubled the careless owners not a whit. Time was when there were three thousand people to eat them, and, save for a cask of coconut oil sold now and then to some whaleship, white men visited them but at long intervals. But things are different now, and even these tiny spots that dot the broad bosom of the blue Pacific are sought out to appease the earth-hunger of the men of the civilised world. Yet not, be it said, altogether for their coconuts' money value, but because of the new Pacific cable that is soon to be; for among these equatorial isles it is to be laid, thousands of fathoms deep, and no Power but England must possess a foot of soil in the mid-Pacific that would serve an enemy as a lair whence to issue and seize upon any of the islands that break the cable's length.

Take Funafuti and its people as a fair type of the other islands of the group, save Nui—of which more anon. Sixty or seventy years ago, so the American whaleship captains of those days said, there were three thousand people in the thirty and odd islets. Then, for the next thirty years, unknown and terrible diseases, introduced by the white

men, ravaged not Funafuti alone, but the whole group, and where there were once thousands, only hundreds could be counted; and until about 1860 it looked as if the total extinction of the whole race was but a matter of another decade. But, fortunately, such was not the case. In 1870 the writer counted 160 people; in 1882 they had increased to nearly 200; and now, through better means of intercourse with the people of the other islands of the group, which has brought about a consequent and rapid intermarriage, the people of Funafuti number over 500, and show a gradual but steady increase.

Oaitupu (literally “the fountain of water”) is, although nearly the smallest, the most thickly populated of all the Ellices. It has no lagoon accessible from the sea, and even landing is not always easy. Here, although the soil is better than that of the other islands, and the natives have taro, bananas, and pumpkins to vary the monotonous diet of coconut and fish obtaining elsewhere in the Ellices, they are very subject to that species of eczema known as *tinea desquamans* (locally it is called “lafa”). While not incapacitating them from labour, or affecting their stamina or physique, it gives the subject a most unpleasant and disgusting appearance. It is, however, often curable by a residence in a colder climate, such as New Zealand.

Nui, the island alluded to as possessing distinct and peculiar racial characteristics from the others, has a population of about six hundred. Unlike their neighbours, both to the north and south, whose language, customs, and traditions have a purely Samoan basis, the people of Nui are plainly the descendants of some wandering or drifted

voyagers from the Gilbert Group, the inhabitants of which they resemble in language, customs, appearance, and demeanour. From what particular island the original people of Nui came is a mystery. There are no really reliable traditions of the present race that can throw any light on the matter. So far as they know they were always “Tafitos”—namely, people from the Gilberts; but how they came to be on Nui they cannot tell. To show the sharp line of racial distinction between the natives of Nui and those of the surrounding islands, it may be mentioned that the translations of the Old and New Testaments, published by the Boston Board of Missions for the use of the people of the Gilbert Islands, are used by the natives of Nui, while in every other island of the Ellice Group the Samoan version is alone understood and read. And although they can communicate with the inhabitants of the rest of the group in a peculiar, bastard patois, and of late years have intermarried with them, they always will be Gilbert Islanders, and preserve their vernacular and other racial characteristics.

Nanomaga, the Hudson Island of Commodore Wilkes, is the smallest of the group. It is barely a mile and a half long, and not one in width, yet supports a population of six hundred people. The writer, who in 1870 spent a year on the island, can bear testimony to the kindly nature and honesty of its people. During all the time he lived there as agent for Messrs. Tom De Wolf and Co., of Liverpool, he never had as much as a scrap of tobacco stolen from him, although his trade goods were piled up indiscriminately on the floor of his house, which had neither doors, locks, nor a bolt of any

kind. In this, however, the Nanomagans are peculiar — the other islanders are not so particular.

The last of the group is Nanomea, a fine island, or rather two islands connected by a reef dry at very low tides. The people of Nanomea have long been known in the Pacific for their great size and muscular development. Indeed, the Rev. J. S. Whitmee, of the L.M.S., considers them a race of giants, and believes “that nine out of ten would measure six feet or more high, and their breadth is proportionate to their height.” This, however, since their adoption of clothing is not so noticeable. However, they certainly are a fine race, and almost free from *tinea desquamans*. There were, last year, 830 people on the two islands, Nanomea and Lakena.

The group suffers but seldom from droughts or hurricanes, although the terrible drought experienced in the near-to Gilbert Group in 1892 also affected the Ellices, and during 1893-4 Nanomea and Nanomaga presented a parched-up appearance. A heavy blow in 1890 also did terrible havoc among the coconuts, which thus had not the strength to bear up against the drought.

The whole group of the nine islands or subgroups lies between lat. 5.35 deg. and 11.20 deg. S., and between 171 and 176 deg. W. longitude.

The Tia Kau

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Four miles north-west from Nanomaga, a tiny isle of the lately annexed Ellice Group in the South Pacific, lies a great patch of submerged coral, called Tia Kau—the best fishing ground in all the wide South Sea, except, perhaps, the atolls of Arrecifos and Christmas Island, in the North Pacific. Thirty years ago, when the smoke and glare from many a whaler's try-pots lit up the darkness of the ocean night from the Kermadecs to the far Pelews, the Tia Kau was known to many a sailor and wandering trader. But now, since the whaling industry died, and the trading vessels are few and far between, the place is scarcely even known by name.

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A hot, steamy mist lies low upon the glassy surface of the sleeping sea encompassing Nanomaga, and the lazily swelling rollers as they rise to the lip of the reef have scarce strength enough to wash over its flat, weedy ledges into the lagoon beyond. For since early morn the wind had died away; and the brown-skinned people of the little reef-girt island, when they rose from their slumbers and looked out upon the dew-soaked trees, and heard the moan of the distant breakers away on Tia Kau, said to one another that the day would be calm and hot till the sun was high and the wind came. And, as your true South Sea Islander dreads the blistering rays of the torrid sun as much as he does the stinging cold, each man lay down again upon his mat and smoked his pipe or cigarette, and waited for the wind to come.

Along the silent and deserted beach long lines of coco-palms, which slope seaward to the trades, hang their drooping, languid plumes high above the shallow margin of the lagoon, which swishes and laps in gentle wavelets along the yellow sand. A shoal of pale grey mullet swim close inshore, for out beyond in the deepening green flit the quick shadows of the ever-preying frigate birds that watch the waters from above.

'Tis roasting hot indeed. As the mist begins to lift, the steely ocean gleam pains the eye like a vast sheet of molten lead, and the white stretch of sand above high-water mark in front of the native village seems to throb and quiver and waver to and fro; the mat coverings of the long row of slender canoes further down crackle and warp and swell upward.

Presently the one white trader on the little island comes to the doorway of his house and looks out. Not a living thing to be seen, except, far out beyond the reef, where the huge bodies of two blackfish lie motionless upon the water, sunning themselves; and just above his head, and sitting on its perch, a tame frigate-bird, whose fierce eye looks upward and outward at the blazing sun.

"What a terror of a day!" mutters the trader to himself, as he drinks his morning coffee, and then lazily sinks into a cane lounge on his verandah. He, too, will go to sleep until the breeze springs up, or some inconsiderate customer comes to buy tobacco, or tell him the local gossip.

In and about the village—which is a little further back from the trader's house—the silence of the morning heat reigns supreme.

The early meal of fish and taro has been eaten, and every one is lying down, for the smooth white pebbles of sea-worn coral that cover the ground around the high-roofed houses of pandanus thatch are hot even to the native foot, though here and there may be a cool strip of darkened shade from the overhanging branch of palm or breadfruit tree. Look through the open doorway of a house. There they lie, the brown-skinned lazy people, upon the cool matted floor, each one with a wooden *aluga*, or bamboo pillow, under his or her head, with their long black tresses of hair lying loosely uncoiled about the shoulders. Only three people are in this house, a big reddish-brown skinned man, a middle-aged woman, and a young girl. The man's and woman's heads are on the one pillow; between them lies the mutual pipe smoked out in connubial amity; the girl lies over in the corner beside a heap of young drinking coconuts and a basket of taro and fish, her slender figure clothed in nought but a thick girdle of fine pandanus leaf. She, too, has been smoking, for in her little hand is the half of a cigarette.

A wandering pig, attracted by the smell of food, trots slowly to the door, and stands eyeing the basket. His sleepy grunt betrays him, and awakens the girl, who flings her bamboo pillow at his head with a muttered curse; and, crawling over to where her sleeping parents lie, she pillows her head upon her mother's naked thigh, and falls asleep again.

Another hour passes, and then a faint breath moves and sways and rustles the drooping palms around the village, and the girl awakes. Had she been dreaming, or did she hear a faraway curious sound—a mingling of sharp,