

Sailor and Beachcomber published by Grant Richards (1914)

I *I run away to sea - Outbound for Australia -
Apprenticed Solo Violinist in the Saloon - I watch
Sailors sleep*

At school I read more from the pages of romance than from school-books. At fourteen years of age the opportunity arrived and secretly, with the help of an older friend, I succeeded in securing a berth on a full-rigged sailing ship and, within four hours of my trembling carcass creeping up the gangway and down on to the great decks, I was before the masts going down the Channel bound for Australia.

My recollections of the first few days are dim. The skies bobbed about, I swayed on deck, the brave old heroes of ages past flew out of my brain into the stormy moonlight and shrieked into the sails overhead, as my head swelled to the size of the dome of St Paul's and I vomited. I longed to be home again. Alas, deep-sea sailing strips do not turn round and speed for their native ports in response to a schoolboy's tearful voice. I was done for. Hopes, glories, vast ambitions - all vanished! My thin legs trembled along the decks till I staggered through a little cabin door and fell into my bunk. By some great oversight in the sea-discipline I was allowed to sleep for five hours; I cannot remember to a certainty now, but I think I was drowned and died about a thousand times in that first off-watch sleep.

I soon recovered and discovered that sea captains do not stand on the poop cracking jokes and shying oranges and coconuts up at the crew as they laughingly toil among the sails. I also found that the Bo'sun wore very stout boots, and I have never met a man in my life who could kick so true and aim with such precision. Five years later, whilst I was in 'Frisco I called on a phrenologist and speculated one dollar to discover that the everlasting bump formed at the back of my head by a Bo'sun's belaying pin was an inherited strain derived from the over-burdened brains of my ancestors. Well, I recovered my equilibrium; secured good sea-legs; went aloft, crawled along the yards and helped reef the sails. Often in the

wild nights the sailors cursed and swore as I clung with might and main - my hands and teeth clinging to the rolling rigging up in the fore-mast top-gallants. My comrades shouted orders to me, their voices blown away on the thundering night gales, but I only heard a cry of self preservation within me as the moon and great beast-like clouds swayed like mighty pendulums across the night sky while the masts shivered to the roll and thunder of the broad-side swell as the ship flew along at eighteen knots before the gale. Often I would gaze down deckwards, watching the figurehead's lifted hands leaping skywards as the tropic moonlight made brilliant the hills of bubbling foam over the bows as she dived and plunged along. I loved that figurehead, for as I gazed from aloft on moon-bright nights, it seemed to bear a strong resemblance to my dear mother, and with my legs curled around the yards in the lonely sea-nights, I would look down and fancy that her shadow moved along over the waters below the swaying jib-boom - with extended hands praying for me, as no one has ever prayed for me before or since.

I slept amidships with the cook and three other apprentices. was a favourite with them all, being of a cheerful temperament and a good fiddle player. Often in the off watches I would play old familiar strains while they joined in the rollicking chorus. awakening the silence of lonely nights, as the sails swayed silently and filled out at intervals like drums, then flopped, as the lazy tropic breeze once more sighed and fell asleep. The old Scotch Captain heard me playing one night; he was a religious man and taught me some beautiful sea-hymns, and in due course I played in the cabin aft during Sunday service, when all the crew mustered, and John the cook, who swore and cursed most fearfully all day long in his galley, opened his big-bearded mouth and sung most expressively those pious old hymns, knocking even the Skipper out in reverential pathos.

The dear old skipper had brought his daughter with him. She was a pretty Scotch girl - a crew of thirty six men, one girl and me! Well, I combed my hair, cleaned my teeth, and gazed in my little bit of a cracked mirror-glass fifty times an hour for I had fallen in love. I have never been what you would call really lucky in love, like some happy men; trouble always arose after the first embarrassment had worn off and I felt truly happy, and blessed the universe. And it was so in this my first love affair. One dark night as she stood in shelter by the bulwarks near the saloon door I was admiring her eyes and swearing eternal love, calling all the bright stars to be witnesses to my unchangeable fidelity, and just as I kissed her sweet white ear, I received a tremendous clump from the old Skipper. That night I also received stern orders from the Chief Mate never to be seen near the saloon again after dark.

I crept into my bunk heartsick and wretched. The affair got about the ship. I was chaffed a good deal by the whole crew. Real old sea-salts they were. I can see them now as I dream, walking across the decks by moonlight, muffled up to the teeth in oilskins, some with big crooked noses, all with weary sea-beaten faces. Up aloft they go. Again I see their big figures move up the ratlings as they reach the moonlit sails and, climbing, vanish into the sky. All around is sky and water and stars, as the ship travels silently onward, a tiny grey-winged world under blue skies, starry and stormy seas, towards a skyline that forever fades.

They were a motley crew those sailors. Some read books, some believed in spirits, and some in beer, and one would tell us over and over again of his experiences in distant lands and his brave deeds and his wonderful self-sacrifices and many other virtues, not one of which he really possessed.

There was one old sailor who on arriving home on his last voyage found that his wife was dead. He would sit on a little empty salt-beef tub and tell me about his courting days and his "old girl who was one of the best," the tears rolling down his coarse-looking face all the time. He was an extraordinary mixture; in one breath he would almost curse his wife's memory, and in the next ask me if I thought there was really another world. He could not read or write, and seeing me play the violin and read music as well as books made me almost omnipotent to his sad old eyes. I remember

well enough how my heart was touched by his manner and questions as I put on a wise air and convinced him of the soul's immortality. I even went so far as to tell him that my dead relations had returned to my family as shadows from another world, and the poor fellow perched on his tub listened eagerly, believing all I said, and then went off and found his comrades, who sat playing cards by the fo'c'sle door, and he laughed the loudest till they all snored in the fo'c'sle bunks, half stupefied by the smoke and smell of ship's plug tobacco. I have often seen them by the dingy fo'c'sle lamp fast asleep, seared unshaved faces, all their worldly passions asleep, looking like big children, so innocent as they snored away, and some who had fallen asleep whilst they were chewing tobacco, dribbled black juice from the corners of their mouths, their big chests upheaving at each slumbering breath. Outside, just overhead, the night winds wailed and whistled weirdly in the rigging as the jib-boom swayed along, and at regular intervals came the thunder of the diving bows as the ship dipped and heaved and plunged along over the primeval waters.

Five months passed away on that ship. Storms blew from all directions and sometimes dead ahead and then we never slept. Hauling the mainsail up and tacking is more nuisance than flying before a thousand gales. To stand by the top-gallant halyards as comes the wind; to clew the main sky-sails up, singing chanteys, as you cling to the yards with a thundering gale smashing the highways of the water world into a myriad travelling hills as the wild poetry of the sea sings to the ears of the sailor, and I was never so happy as when the green chargers ramped across the world.

I shall never forget my delight as we were towed down Brisbane River, with the solid hills all around. I will not weary you with any more details beyond telling you that when we lay alongside the next night I hired a wharf loafer and got my sea-chest ashore and bolted.

*Stranded in Brisbane -I look for a Shop -Meet typical
House Agent -The Vanity of Youth - I stock my Shop-
Alone in the Bush - House Agent calls for Agreement
Money and the Rent - I do a Moonlight Flit*

I must tell you that I never saw the Captain's daughter again, but in my chest of old letters and unaccepted manuscripts I still keep her little notes, dropped near me on the deck of the ship that took me to Australia.

The atmosphere of a new world sparkled in my head as I stood in the old colonial town of Brisbane. It was a sweltering hot night, and as I sat by the river and gazed up the gas-lamp-lit streets, watching the passing Australian girls in many-coloured attires and the colonial "corn-stalks" in big hats slouching about, I felt a tremendous loneliness come over me, a strange homesick longing crept and crept, and from my heart to my eyes a mist arose. I have had many homesick breakdowns in my time, but never one as deep and sincere as I experienced standing there alone in that strange country. I was not yet fifteen years of age, and the thought of my being absolutely dependent on my own exertions was naturally a big oppression to a boy of my inexperience. A good comrade by my side at that moment would have been untold wealth to me. Under a lamp-post I counted my money. I had just three pounds ten shillings! That night I slept in a little low lodging-house by North Quay. With daylight and a good breakfast my courage returned and I sat up in bed and played several old operatic airs on my violin. A week after I pawned it for three pounds.

I had made no friends. My money was going. I knew that I must get a job or meet disaster. The idea of starting work was most distasteful to me, and yet what was I to do? Walking along Queen Street one night I came across a tea shop. I gazed at the window. My old school-chum's father was a tea merchant and I had helped them to blend the teas in England, and as I stood there, it suddenly occurred to me that I would start a shop and become a tea merchant.

The next day I tramped my legs off looking for a likely shop. I found the rents too high and moreover I had no references and the agents gazed suspiciously at my cheese-cutter hat. I at once

bought a large big-rimmed straw hat in a second-hand shop, and on the advice of a more sympathetic agent than the rest I made for the outskirts of Brisbane. Here and there on the scrub-covered slopes were scattered wooden houses raised on posts. Upon a post board just off the main track I saw written "Jonathan Bayly, House Agent." Taking my handkerchief out I carefully dusted my boots, wiped the sweat from my sunburnt face, walked into the little office room, and came face to face with the gentleman whose name appeared on the board outside. I did not like the look of him at all. He had a long goatlike face and grew pointed whiskers on the chin only.

"Are you the House and Shop Agent?" I asked.

"Yes," he said as he eyed me attentively.

"Oh," I said, "I am looking out for a small shop which would be suitable for a tea shop."

I had observed business men in London put on important voices and cough in an affluent way, and as he once more eyed me I made a bold effort, placed my hand in an affected way to my mouth and coughed in two little important jerks, swayed slightly on one leg and gazed round his office.

In a moment his manner changed. I had impressed him and, to clinch the coming deal, I dropped my remaining three sovereigns on the floor, picking them up carelessly as though they were buttons.

I have travelled the world over since, made deals with moneyed men, bought gold claims worth thousands of pounds, which I sold for a dollar - and glad to get it! - and done many more strange and unfortunate things in my time, but never since did I so completely gull a human being as I did that old colonial house agent - but nevertheless he did me also.

Taking down his big white helmet hat from a solitary peg, he placed it carefully over the three remaining hairs of his cranium, and bowed me out of the door to view the proposed shop. Walking off the main track he led me across the bush, and

after walking for about one hour, he apologised for the distance telling me that the shop I was about to view was in an excellent position, inasmuch as it was in the centre of a proposed Township, and indeed when at last I stood by its little shanty-like front door I inwardly realised that it needed a good deal of apology on its behalf. A small broken-down shanty was the only other habitation in view for miles! The description of this shop's position would sound like a silly attempt to be humorous. I only wish it were, for I took that shop! I had listened to that old Agent's palaver; I was only a boy and I had some dim idea in my head that gold-miners and bushrangers passed by it at regular intervals, and when he waved his arms about and pointed out the proposed spot for the Church, the Bank and the main streets, I choked down my misgivings and clinched the bargain. I took the place on a "seven years' agreement with the option of a renewal of fourteen more years at the expiration of the aforesaid term." Of course, all this long lease was proposed by the old Agent. I knew no more about agreements and expirations of leases than a baby, but as I signed the long important-looking document in his office that same afternoon, I carefully read it through and through as though I were taking my ninety-fifth shop!

The next day I obtained the key and went into Brisbane, bought a pair of scales, some paper bags, a bottle of ink, a pen and one chest of cheap tea - I think it was fourpence a pound by the thirty-six pound chest. I also got the manager of the wholesale department to send me ninety-five empty chests for show purposes. I was full of business. I kept thinking of my old father's advice to my elder brothers when he said, "My sons, do not go in for professions, nothing succeeds like business; sell and trade in something that the world must have. Who wants poets, musicians and authors? - with their men and women made of moonrise!" And well was he able to speak on the subject, since he had reared a large family up by his pen, which is in no wise mightier than the sword in many cases, excepting when you sit concocting letters to your immediate creditors for kind consideration and more time before you pay up!

Oh, the vanity and pride of youth! As I turned the key of my shop door and entered beyond the

portals, placing carefully on the floor my parcel, which contained a cup and saucer, a small oil lamp and the few absolutely necessary things to sustain a decent domestic life, a thrill of extreme pride went through me. I gazed around the spacious room, my hands were itching to get hold of the ninety-five empty tea-chests and place them in commercial rows in the two large shop windows that gazed at the sunset like two mammoth glass eyes of melancholy across the silent Australian Bush.

I took a stroll around, and you can imagine my delight as I stumbled across some foundations already half dug out, which no doubt were for the future homesteads of the coming Township! They looked pretty old and I noticed that a young gumtree had grown to a considerable height in one of them, but I did not stop to criticise; time, growth of gums and Townships were outside my experiences of life. I simply lent my imagination to the future scenery and saw myself a prosperous tea merchant; around me rose in the dreamy rays of the dying sunset the grey terraces of splendid villas; I heard the hum of human voices, the laughter of the bush children romping on the streets-to-be. Like a grey old pioneer of the desert, uncharted on the map of civilisation, stood my shop, and I the proud landlord, stroking the first sprout of down on my upper lip, gazed innocently around, and wondered what my kind old father would think of my first business move up the steps into the portals of the grim commercial world. I felt considerably bucked up at the splendid outlook, I even felt a tenderness springing up in my heart for that old Agent. He had patted me on the shoulder too, and told me that I was a plucky young chap with real business ability in my head.

Next morning, standing under my piazza, I spied a large carrier van rapidly moving across the thin track that divided the immense grey slopes of the outstretching country. It was my ninety-five empty tea-chests and one full one approaching me! The old colonial carrier grinned from ear to ear as he dumped the lot in my shop, smelt my sixpence twice, and placing it in his pocket, drove away leaving me once more alone in the vast solitudes. Profiting by my memories of a tea shop in the Old Kent Road, I at once set to work and wrote on white cards, "Genuine Pekoe Ceylon Tea, 2/- per

pound," and underneath, in very bold letters, "The cup that cheers but does not inebriate." Of course, in those days I knew nothing whatever of the Australian Bushman's temperament; had I done so I should, of course, have written, "The cup that inebriates and cheers!"

Ah, how I remember my pride as I stood on the slope and gazed at my solitary shop window. Sunset was sinking into the sea out westward, and sent over the hills a dying beam that touched as though with tenderness those words, written in big chalk letters over the doorway of my shop, "Middleton & Co., Tea Merchants." I climbed onto an old tub and added this after-thought, "late of London," and the sunbeam died away as my eyes instinctively turned westward. I knew that that same sun was stealing round the world and those beams would steal likewise over the lattice windows of my sleeping parents, my brothers and my sisters, all dreaming and snoring in velvet comfort, and I wondered if they dreamed of me, and whether their wildest dreams could picture my shop and my heroic ignorance as the shadows of the Australian night crept over me and the parrots stirred in the leafy gums, and the innumerable frogs and locusts in the swamps hard by chanted a fit accompaniment to my dreams.

I tell you, I felt pretty lonely in that old place. I would stand at the shop door and watch the fleets of parrots and magpies sail away into the sunset, day after day. And oh, the lonely nights! I often would climb up to the extreme tip of a hill near by and stare across the scrub to catch the last gleam of the old Agent's house; its slim brows far off would twinkle with good comradeship and cheered me up wonderfully.

Well, I think it was just about three weeks after my first opening of the shop that I was standing one evening at the door feeling pretty downcast; the sun was setting over the blue hills and the thickening shadows made the landscape look for all the world like a dried-up primeval ocean bed, and the weird scattered gums like the masts of old sunken wrecks, that through some strange freak of nature had burst into leaf. Suddenly on the distant range I saw a moving speck; my astonished eyes gazed steadily and then brightened with enthusiasm; it was a lonely horseman! Surely he would not pass by my shop without buying a pound of tea, thought I. What on earth could I do

to attract him? A happy thought struck me. I rushed to my old seachest, out came my old bugle-horn, and placing it to my lips, I stood at that lonely shop door and gave three tremendous blasts, then watched. To my huge delight, as the echoes reverberating faded away over the silent steppes, the horseman altered his course; he was coming towards me!

He was a burly, brick-coloured, dusty-looking fellow, and as he sat astride by my shop door gazing first at me, then at my shop, and then again on the surrounding country, he coughed twice and spat over his shoulder. I felt extremely riled by his manner. Then he said, "How's biz?" With good business forethought I replied, "Pretty good the last two days!" Then suddenly making a bold effort I asked, "Would you like to try a pound of my Pekoe?"

With a kindly look in his grey eyes he said, "Good tea I 'spose?" "Nothing to beat it," I answered quickly.

Looking quietly across the country he remarked, "No complaints about its quality round these parts I bet." Without another word he gave me two shillings, took the tea and galloped away.

I think it was about four days after selling that pound of tea that I spotted the Agent coming down the hill-side track right opposite my shop. The month was up, and the rent due!

"Well," he said as I stood at the door and boldly faced him, "I've called for the rent."

For a moment I fumbled in my pocket. I knew to be an honourable citizen, I should pay my way and let all earthly considerations of sustaining existence and thoughts of the future go to the winds, but I had only fifteen shillings in the world, and the month's rent was four pounds, and the cost of the agreement two pounds ten shillings. Pulling myself together I said, "Can you give me another month?"

"Not a day," he answered hotly, and then looking up quickly asked, "Where's the agreement money?"

Then I saw that my first boyish instincts were to be relied upon - the man was a hard-hearted scoundrel. I answered quickly, "Where's the Township you spoke of?" At this he almost spat

with rage, and thrusting his pointed whiskered chin in my face said, "Do you expect me to supply you with a Town as well as with a shop?"

I pretended to see some fine logic in that remark quieted myself down, and then said, "Parrots magpies, 'possums and mosquitoes do not buy tea so how can I pay the rent?"

His temper now got the upper hand of him " You've taken the shop," he snarled; "where the hell's your capital?"

On hearing him say this, the sudden inspiration that has stood me in such good stead in the sorrows and joys which I am going to tell you of, flashed in my brain, and I quickly answered, "You cannot supply a Town, and yet you expect me to supply capital. Put your Township here and I'll soon show you the capital." And then I trembled and forced a smile to my lips. He looked so dangerous that I did not know what might occur to me in those lonely parts. But he was only a bully after all. For a moment he looked me up and down with interest, and then said, "Can you pay me to-morrow?"

Pointing my trembling hand to my rows of empty tea-chests, I said, "Look here, I'll go to Brisbane to-morrow, sell that tea at cost price, and you shall have your rent and the agreement money." At this he turned and went away. That night I hastened off to Brisbane, hired a van, got my sea-chest out of that wretched shop and was never seen in any shop in those parts again.

STRANDED in Brisbane without a cent, I slept down on the wharfs and sometimes curled my half-starved body up by the warm funnel of the deep-sea tramp boats. I was soon in rags, sunburnt and miserable. I mixed with English and Colonial tramps, some good men and some no good; most of them wore shaggy beards and others tried to keep shaved and had forgotten their names in the attempt to lose their identity - sad "ne'er-do-wells" of the civilised world, who had hurried across the world to save their necks or preserve their liberty.

It is wonderfully easy to sink into the depths of Failure's Hell. The human relics that make up the sad side of existence are fascinating folk, full of sarcastic wit and most of them of a sentimental turn of mind, and strange as it may seem, deep in their hearts better men than those who climb the heights of ambition on one leg - instead of crawling up on all-fours and dying of old age half-way up.

I remember one night while we were all sitting huddled in our rags round the funnel of the English Mail Boat, one old chap (at least he seemed old to me as I was only fifteen years of age) would sit by moonlight reading and writing poetry. He had fine eyes and it came upon me that he was a University man, who in a moment of mental aberration had forged a cheque and passed it. He had travelled the South Seas, lived in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, could quote all the poets and as far as I was able to judge wrote beautiful poems. When he read one of them to me, inspired by memories of his boyhood, I was quite touched and he noticed it by my eyes, and I with my impulsive temperament could have kissed that sad old mouth as the beautiful words trembled out of it and his face lit up to find that at last in the cold old world he had found an appreciative listener. Out of the big tail pocket of his ragged coat he pulled a dirty old bundle which was all of his poetic work. He read all the poems to me; the longer ones I could not understand, as they were on Greek subjects, but nevertheless I listened attentively, and now that I am older I thank God that I did. We slept for nights and nights in a wharf dust-bin together, and one night I waited and waited and he never came. I know he

would have come if he were able to. I never saw him again; he and his poetry left me for ever -God bless him wherever he is.

After that I spent days and days trying to get a berth on one of the home-bound ships, but there were so many looking for the same post that I gave it up as hopeless and eventually got a job in a tanning yard where they cured sheep and cow skins. Even after all these years I can still smell that yard under the tropic sun and the terrible odours of advanced putrefaction. My wages were thirty-five shillings a week. I stayed just three weeks, got my violin out of pawn and started fiddling on the public streets. After the second day I chummed in with an Italian harp-player. He taught me a lot of fine Italian melodies, and in a week we were the talk of Queensland capital. I used to stand by his side at night when all the streets were lighted up and put my whole soul into my playing as I thought of my proud old father and my sisters, and then with my big-rimmed Australian hat in my hand bowed to the street audience as they shied in the silver pieces. In two weeks I had eight pounds in my pocket, and as it always does happen, and will happen till the world ends, when I went to the post office there was a letter from home with four five-pound notes in it! How I would have jumped to get that a week before; but my heart was touched nevertheless by those kindly hands and tender thoughts across the world, heedful of my welfare.

Bidding my wizened dark-eyed old Italian harpist "Good-bye," I made for the bush, and travelled north. I had a comrade with me. He was not a bad fellow - hailed from the East End of London, was utterly devoid of romance, and swore fearfully. As we slept out in the bush at night I cheered him up by playing the fiddle, till we both lay down side by side, our feet towards the camp fire, and slept.

I shall never forget that bush tramp. For three weeks we toiled along, our swags on our backs, from steep to steep, and from plain to plain, nothing but vast solitude and sweltering silence broken at intervals by the flocks of large parrots migrating across the tropic skies; as they passed overhead we would hear their dismal mutterings,

till their curling wings faded away.

Brisbane was about one hundred miles away. Day after day we continued our voyage across those everlasting seas of grey scrub and rock. The tropic sun belching down with full vigour raised blisters as big as soap bubbles on our bare necks; they would often burst and bring us great relief. Our supplies were running short, and we had got off the track and were completely bushed! The stiff bush grass tore the ends of our trouser legs completely away, and we looked terrible scarecrows, and got thin too. Often we would climb the highest steeps and gaze around in the hope of seeing some sign of human habitation. We were indeed two sad castaways on seas of desolation, moving slowly onward on sore feet under the tropic sun. As we sat by our camp fire at night my comrade would curse me for bringing him to such a God-forsaken country, indeed all my own valour vanished as we lay curled together in the darkness of that endless bush and heard the dingo's wail as its creeping feet explored the waste far away.

One night, over the hills far off on the skyline, regiments of ragged gum-trees suddenly burst into view, as up crept the white Australian moonrise. We sat up and stared into each other's eyes for company. I shall never forget the terror that made our teeth chatter. I gripped my revolver (I had bought it and a tin of one hundred cartridges before starting off from Brisbane). There far away on the steeps, like a monstrous human shadow, moved something, leaping from steep to steep like some ghastly spring-heeled Jack. The perspiration rolled down our faces. We were both speechless as we stood up and gazed at that terrible sight. Instinctively we clutched each other, as that terrible Aboriginal came towards us; up went our trembling hands in the moonlight. We shook visibly as we leaned against each other for support, and fired the six chambers of our revolvers in rapid succession. The hills echoed and re-echoed that cannonade; the enemy fell and we fainted! I poured some water down my comrade's throat and half raised him up.

At daybreak, crestfallen and miserable that we had killed it, my chum and I buried the fallen enemy, a poor old man kangaroo!

Two days after that incident we were both hard

at work pulling pumpkins and stacking straw on the cleared bush ground of a shanty.

The stockman was a good fellow, he treated us kindly and rigged us both out in decent trousers. I had fine times at that lonely bush homestead. The stockman's wife took a great fancy to me, and they would sit together by their shanty door, after the day's work, and listen to my playing on the violin as though an angel had fallen from the clouds specially to entertain them. They had three little girls, plump little sunburnt girls too. They all loved me. How they romped with me, and how they cried when I went away! The stockman's wife shed tears, and the old fellow's voice sounded husky as he wished me " Good luck," and those three little girls, with their bright eyes, wet with tears, are still looking up into my boyish sunburnt face, and their dear little hands still wave on the ridge of the steep as I ride away for ever, fading from their sight.

My companion got work on another station and found another comrade more suitable to his temperament than I. He swore that I was mad.

*My first Whiskies and Sodas -And after! -Secure
position as a Violinist in Orchestra - We stowaway
-Sight the South Sea Islands -Samoa*

ONCE again I arrived in Brisbane, and walking up the main street, feeling rather down in the mouth, To my surprise I met an old school chum out from England. We almost fell into each other's arms. As soon as we had both recovered from our mutual astonishment, I inquired and learnt that he was working as a clerk in one of the Brisbane wholesale establishments. I had seven pounds in my pocket when we met that night. I went with him into my first public-house, and started on whisky and soda. I have made up my mind to tell the whole truth, in this the book of my life, and so I must tell you to my utter shame that I got fearfully drunk.

How it really occurred I do not know. My comrade was evidently used to intoxicating refreshments and showed huge delight as I got more and more excited. I did not know what had come over me. After the third whisky I felt an intense tenderness creep over me for everyone in the bar. The whole street got to know I was in that wretched place. I smacked my old school chum on the back over and over again, and as the old sailors and cunning old Colonial loafers poured into the bar and called me a fine and splendid young fellow, I shouted hurriedly for "deep seas," "schooners," "whiskies," and all the thousand orders which they poured into my ears. I was not too far gone not to notice the "old salts" wink at each other as they lifted their tremendous glasses and clinked them one against the other, drinking my health and long life, as with pride I paid. That night, when I eventually got on to my bed, the room whirled round and round, and slowly sank into vast depths of infinity, and I became insensible. I will not describe my feelings the next morning, as it would make woeful reading, but I will tell you this, I have never drunk whiskies and sodas since, and so the "ill wind" blew into me a deal of good.

In the next room to me lodged a violinist, and he could play too. I introduced myself to him and he gave me several good lessons and recommended me to some good studies. I told him my tale, and to my delight he got me a job as violin player in the Brisbane Theatre. It was an easy matter for

him to do this, as he was the leader of the orchestra. I shall never forget the novelty of those first nights, and the sights as the stage beauties whirled round and round, cocked their legs skyward, and bowed with blushing modesty as the audience loudly cheered. I have never seen anything like those sights, not even in the Fiji and Samoan Islands, where I met women attired in half of a coco-nut shell, and stalwart brown men standing under beautiful blue skies as nude as Grecian statues, and yet not half so nude as white women wearing only about a quarter of their clothes.

Sickening of orchestral life, I bade my few friends farewell, and sailed for Sydney. I found the harbour beautiful, also the city itself, with its long streets - Pit Street, George Street and the parallel streets - along which thundered, in those days, the big engines of the steam trams. Alas! ill luck befell me, my money was soon all spent. I strove to get into the theatre again; but the whole of Italy was standing at the door offering their services for a macaroni-living wage, and I was done for, as they were mostly good players and old in experience. I hastily wrote home to England, begging them to send me some cash. In those days however it took quite three months to get a reply, and long before the letter-due period was near I was once more stranded and sleeping on North Shore Ferry boats and on the Domain, chummy with the old unfortunates again, as like mammoth rats we crept through cracks and slept the sleep of the downcast and weary. One day I made the acquaintance of two more lads who were about my own age. They had been sleeping out in sheds for weeks, and were both half-starved, and that afternoon we went down on the wharf of Circular Quay together, and watched a ship unloading fruit and bananas. Taking our opportunity, we stole a fine bunch of the latter. I shall never forget how we enjoyed that gorgeous feed, as we sat in the Domain hard by and shared out our stolen meal. My comrades were both English fellows. That same afternoon we decided to stowaway on a large tramp steamer - I believe it was a "Blue Anchor Boat." At dusk that very night, as she lay

alongside, getting up steam so as to sail next morning, we three crept up the gangway, and after asking the chief steward and the chief officer if there was a chance of "working our passages home" we waited our opportunity and stole down the stokehold ladder at dark, as quiet as three mice, right down into the big ship's depth, and lay by the coal bunkers all curled up together on some old sacks. For a long time we whispered together, full of glee at the thought of such easy success in getting away from Sydney, all Homeward Bound!

About midnight, we fell asleep. Suddenly I was awakened by footsteps, and coming down the iron ladder right over our heads I saw the big boots of a man. Quickly pulling the peak of my cheesecutter cap over my eyes I pretended to sleep. My chums were both snoring beside me, and, as I once again peeped under the rim of my cap, I saw by the figure's uniform that it was the Chief Engineer. He struck a match and looked at a steam-gauge, and just as I thought that he was going up again on deck, and that we were undiscovered and safe, he turned and spotted us three boys curled there upon the old sacks, all asleep as he thought. For a moment he gazed down upon us, and then without a word crept away. I quickly awakened my two comrades, and told them. They would not believe me at first, but eventually I convinced them, and we all quietly climbed up the ladder and bolted. He had seen us there, three pale-faced starved boys curled together, and it had touched him, and now that I am older I know that he would never have split, wishing to give us a chance to get away back to our native land. And though we did not profit by his kindness, I often think of the tenderness that made that rough sea-engineer creep up to the decks and keep a still tongue for the sake of the three little stowaways.

Next morning we saw the ship sail away half steam ahead across the Bay; round the Point her stern passed out of sight as we three stood gazing wistfully close together on the wharf. Away she went, with the white hands of the passengers waving farewells, and in my dreams I saw her pass through Sydney Heads, and heard her thundering screw start as she passed out into the ocean and rolled away full speed ahead on the long, long track Homeward Bound for England - and I cried myself to sleep that night.

I soon sickened of that life, I can tell you, and

one day out at "Miller's Point" I saw alongside the wharf a schooner which I had been told was bound for the South Sea Islands. I was lucky and secured a berth before the mast, and next morning as dawn crept over Sydney I was aboard her, flying through the "Heads" into the Pacific Ocean before a stiff breeze, with all sails set, bound for the Islands.

That night it blew like hell, and the ship almost turned upside down. I was not used to the tumbling of small craft, which is very different to the roll and heave of big ships, and so became terribly sea-sick. While I was aloft that night I brought up my dinner and tea, the whole of which was caught by the terrific wind and slashed on to the deck into the face of the skipper and the man at the wheel. By Jove! they did swear! But sailors are rough and forgiving, especially when you play the fiddle to them, as I did in the calms that followed that cursed gale and my illness.

In three weeks we sighted the first Island. At first it looked like a huge coco-nut sticking out of the calm shining sea afar, and as we approached, we saw that it was quite a decent little world about 300 yards across and 100 wide. A big crag, its population consisted of one hut, an old man and two daughters. They were quite nude, and running out to the extreme end of a small promontory they waved their thin long brown arms, and showed their white teeth, as we flew by with full sails set, 300 yards off.

At sunset, that tiny isle faded away into the infinity of travelling darkness, and I and the crew of eight, all told, lit our pipes and sat on deck as the schooner, urged by the increasing wind which always sprang up after nightfall, the sails filling out and flopping at longer intervals. The crew were rough sailor-men, two were Englishmen and four came from "Frisco," the cook was a mixture of Chinese and nigger blood, - a most extraordinary-looking being he was too, with his frizzly dark hair, slit-almond eyes, and thin yellow teeth dividing the lips which incessantly gripped a long pipe. He and I had no love for each other. I caught him spitting in a tin pannikin, and wiping it clean with his claw-like hand as he put my dinner on and handed it to me. I took it, and turning on my heel gave my arm a full-length swing and over the side it went into the Pacific! By Jove! he did glare viciously at me. After that I always carried my own plate to the galley and placed my food

carefully upon it myself.

Daybreak was stealing over the seas as the steep mountainous shores of Samoa burst through the, skyline ahead.

At midday the anchor dropped into the calm waters of the Bay. Out from the beach, where the thundering surf leaped over the barrier reefs in the sunlight like showers of broken rainbows, came the out-rigged catamarans, swarming with savage faces. Along they came paddling and singing weird tunes that sounded like the dark ages in dismal song to my trained ears. Behind the strings of those canoes swam the mothers. On their wave-washed backs clung their tiny brown babies. The bright maternal eyes gleamed, and the wistful tiny bright frightened eyes of the infants shone, as they rode securely on the brown soft backs. Behind them stretched the shores of their island home, thickly clad with big tropical trees, big fan-like leaves shimmering in the distance. In a few moments their naked feet were pattering on the deck of our ship. We all made a rush to save our belongings from their thieving hands, as they rushed under our very noses, like big children, to collar all that attracted their bright alert eyes. That night off I went in one of the catamarans with the rest of the crew. On the beach we met half-castes and white traders loafing and spitting by the sweltering grog shanties and Samoan women were also loafing around. I eyed them with great curiosity. They were nearly naked; some were dressed in cloth loin-strips only; others, leaning against posts smoking and chewing, were dressed in some sailor's old discarded shirt.

Never in my life have I seen such handsome women and men as some of those Samoans were - fine eyes, splendid physiques, the men standing nearly six feet in their skins. Beautiful heads of hair they had too, both the men and the women, and they were full of song; and when I thought of the white men of my own country, with pimply, dough-coloured skins, bald heads and stumbling gait, with pens behind shrivelled-up ears and eyes gleaming worlds of woe, as they were pulled up to London Town in the train every morning and every night pulled back again, my heart was touched over the sadness of the lot of the working people of the British Isles.

I extemporise Stirring Music on my Violin at Native Weddings - Dethroned Queens and Kings - Meet Papoo

My ship sailed away, but I was not on board. The Samoan climate suited my health, and I found decent fellows living there who made jolly companions. One of them was a reformed German missionary who had mended his ways, left off the drink and toiled honestly on a Coco-nut plantation which helped him to eke out a living for his accepted wife and family. They were pretty little children too - I knew them all well, thirteen altogether, some with blue-black eyes and some grey-black eyes. All had a tiny splash of white on their tiny plump bodies; their mothers were as brown as pheasants' eggs.

For a week I lodged with a dark old Samoan who had a bungalow on the beach. The walls were lined with the most beautiful South Sea shells. He traded with them, and I believe did a good business with sailors and traders. He certainly made more headway than I ever did in my tea shop. Well, I found my violin was a real fortune to me. I got in with all the wealthy Samoan chiefs and attended Samoan weddings; far away in the depths of the forest, I played and composed on the violin at those South Sea forest festivals. Stirring music! The hotly blushing bride, dressed in her bridal robe - her hair only! - was given away to the modest Samoan happy youth, and you must forgive me, dear reader, whoever you are, and remember I was only a romantic boy, when I tell you that my whole soul envied that youth! I was young and inexperienced in the ways of Western and Southern life, and I at first thought that the Samoan ladies were rather loose in their morals. I am older now, and I tell you this - the morals of the South Sea men and women place the morals of our Western life completely in the shade.

Certain phases of life in London could never occur in the South Seas, and even were the women inclined to traffic with their comeliness, the South Sea Samoan chief's war-club never misses!

At night I would steal up the steep shore hills under the mangroves and coco-palms and creep into the tiny dome-shaped dens, which were the

homesteads of the native men and women. They all got to know me and trust me, and I often would share their meals as they sat squatting around their big earthen steaming pots wherein they cooked fish and peculiar smelling vegetables. The heat of those dens was terribly stifling to me with my clothes on, and I would very soon make tracks and get outside, and from those steeps I would gaze out seaward at the vast calm Pacific trembling into silver under the South Sea moon; as the waters at intervals curled and broke to silvery waves up the shore, . On the beach through patches of moonlight passed the loafing half-caste traders and huddled groups of Samoan women with their tiny black children running round and round them like big black rats.

Laoleo, a Marquesan, was my special comrade on those nights out. He was the son of one of the South Sea queens who had seen her day - far away on one of the lonely Atolls, her beauty faded and mouth mumbling and toothless, she sat dreaming of her glorious past, and found life still sweet in living over the memories of all that had been. Laoleo's father was in my time a dethroned king. I saw him once as he sat by his den. He was fat and squatty, only had one big yellow tooth, a large head, cute twinkling eyes and fearfully wrinkled brows, and when he wrinkled them up, as he thought of his past, he looked like some grim personification of the dark ages.

I shall never forget the great prayer-chanting night. Laoleo took me into the inland scrub one night, and there, in the forest by their dens, chanting to their ancient gods, sat the old naked chief and his big brown wives and daughters, some with their ridis on, but most of them attired only in their hair and modest smiles

It was a beautifully calm night. Overhead from seaward crept cooling winds, drifting damp odours from wild flowers and orange-tree scents. Round and round whirled the nude maidens of that strange world, swaying their bodies and over their heads in rhythmic movement their long curved brown arms. The men squatting around slowly moved their big brown bodies to and fro, chanting

weirdly all the time. By his big domed den sat the dethroned king, Laoleo's father. There he sat rehearsing his grand past, his large thin feet on a little mat, his chin pointing towards heaven, his face once more alive with majesty as his warrior chiefs around him swayed their clubs, Young Laoleo and I stood in the shadows watching them all. As for me, I felt a bit nervous - they all looked so different sitting round there with inspired eyes bright with memories of their glorious past, wondrous battles and beautiful cannibalistic feasts, memories of the bygone days when they nibbled their choice old friends, found them of sweet dispositions and wept over tender memories. Through the spread tree-tops gleamed pale stars, and peeping through the hut doors hard by, among the coco-palms, through big leaves gazed the wistful eyes of their small brown naked babies.

How the memories return to me as I write on. It was on that very night which I have just described that I, the son of a proud English gentleman of ancient family, fell in love with a South Sea Island woman, ten years older than myself. You shall hear something of my downfall. I loved and lost,

and cried in my heart as I lay alone in my hut on a lone Pacific isle,

I have not told you before, but several days preceding the events which I have just spoken of, Laoleo and I were down in one of the shore grog shanties, talking and yarning to the batches of beachcombers, as they loafed in the sultry glooms by the coco-palms, smoking and spitting and playing cards -when an exceedingly beautiful Samoan girl of twenty-six years of age came in and sat just by my seat as I played the fiddle. She was accompanied by her father, an old chief. Silently she sat as I played on, her shining eyes gazing astonished at my white sunburnt face, and not till I had finished the fiddling, and the drunken old half-caste trader had finished his jig and swaggered up to the bar for another dose of stuff called brandy, did her eyes blink and her lips part in a smile of pleasure that revealed her white teeth. She gave me such a look as she sat there, dressed only in a narrow tappa loin-strip, that I quickly riveted all my attention on an attempt to tune up my violin, so as to hide the hot blush that flamed to my ear tips.