

"Collins will have a job to patch her up again," said Campbell, as he shook himself and looked at the shattered boat, which the Kanakas were dragging up the beach. "Now, my lads, try the other one, and send her out with a will. You are not afraid of getting your skins wet."

Accordingly every Kanaka who could find room to lay his hand on the boat seized hold of her, and lifting her they bore her out by main force through the waves, not quitting her till they had to swim for it. They were apparently as much at home in the water as so many fish.

"Now, we have a fair start," said Campbell. "Bend your backs to it, my lads."

If I had seen the previous day that they knew well how to sail a boat, I now found these South Sea Islanders to be as good at the oar. Before we got alongside the Zantippe they had broken three oars, by fair hard pulling against the head sea, but fortunately we had others with us. I must own that though sound and made of the best material, they were somewhat brittle from the effect of the hot, dry climate.

I found my friend Lieut. Mason on board the Zantippe, and he readily promised to secure me a passage to Brisbane.

"I had better not speak to the captain now," he said, "for he is in a fearful temper. We are going to some islands to the northward, and we must call here on our way back. The fact is, a schooner strongly suspected to belong to these gentlemen here, has been lately to one of the French islands and taken away a lot of natives. The authorities at New Caledonia have reported that some of the men were taken against their consent, and also that a woman was taken, both contrary to their regulations. A French man-of-war steamer went in chase, but the schooner with her light draught dodged over a sunken reef, where the

cruiser could not follow, and got away. So there was a formal complaint sent to Sydney, and we have orders to make enquiries."

I resigned myself philosophically to my week's stay on Blank Island: indeed I did not find the time hang heavy on my hands. The gale, as is often the case in these seas, subsided as rapidly as it had arisen. On the second day the boats were able to go out onto the reef for fishing, and I willingly caught at Campbell's offer to take me with them. The scene of operations was a large, detached reef, nearly eight miles from the island, and now, at low tide, it was partly above water. On these reefs, both above and under water, crawled the animals sought for—the *holothurus*, sea-slug, or *becke-de-mer*. There were various species, as the white man in charge of the boat pointed out to me: the black, red, white and prickly fish, differing in size, color and value. The most highly prized sorts are generally in the deepest water, and the way the darkies dived for them was marvellous. Down one of them would dive in several fathom water, seize a "prickly fish" nearly a foot long in each hand, and, rising quickly to the surface, throw it quickly into the boat. With hardly an interval he would again be down in search of fresh prey, which were plainly visible in the clear water. As to sharks, though several came in sight, the Kanakas seemed to take not the slightest notice of them, nor they of the Kanakas: indeed the white man (a title of courtesy: he really was mahogany color), who several times stript and dived too, to beguile the tedium of overseeing, seemed almost as indifferent to these sea-monsters, who, he said, were so frightened by the constant splashing, that they never ventured too near.

When I had watched this scene long enough, I went to explore the reef. The beauty and variety of the animal life was amazing. Every pool