

The Home Mission Journal

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Cruising for the Cross.

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CHAPTER XIX.

When the last of the company of missionaries rescued from the wrecked brig had been located the post of future duty on some atoll of the the Micronesian archipelago, Captain Henton laid the course of the *Glad Tidings* for Samoa, making a call on the way at the Gilbert Islands. Arriving at Samoa without incident the crew of the wrecked brig were put ashore, Henton asking in their behalf the good offices of the German and American consuls, so that none of the men might be shanghaied, or made the prey of any "land sharks."

At Samoa there was much to be seen of interest, especially to a student of Christian missions, and John Henton took a good many mental notes which proved of value on his return to America. He had a number of long talks with United States Naval Officers at Apia, and realized how difficult in many respects is the problem before them of developing a self-respecting, clean and healthy type of manhood among the natives over whom the United States is now exercising a kind of watch-care.

One of the crew of the brig, a native of one of the islands of Micronesia, who had knocked about pretty much over the whole extent of the Pacific, begged earnestly to be allowed to ship on the *Glad Tidings*, and as he was a likely fellow, well recommended by his former skipper, and might prove to be of service as an interpreter, "Jibby-jib," as the sailors called him, was engaged as a "landsman" with the privilege of leaving the ship if he wished at some port in the Pacific, before it rounded Cape Horn into the Atlantic.

After a pleasant stay at Samoa, during which the ship was overhauled and re-provisioned, all plain sail was made one bright morning and the barkantine, gracefully dipping its pennant in final salute to the American gunboat in the harbor, cut its course with gathering speed through the billows rolling in from the outside and before long was hull down before the horizon, standing away on a course east-south-by-north. As the *Glad Tidings* tranquilly bowled along under courses, top-sails, royals and top-gallant sails, existence seemed one splendid rhythm of motion. It was fascinating to watch the leaping seas cresting with a foamy welcome to the shapely yacht, and it was most invigorating to breathe the ozone with which the salty breezes were laden. John and Grace grudged every hour spent in the cabin, and lived as much as possible on deck. Their hearts were untroubled with care, and they were happy in the consciousness of their sincere purpose to honor their Creator and to do good unto all men as they had opportunity. Life seemed a bright, joyous dream, and though the seas over which they had sailed had their hidden reefs and treacherous currents, the Almighty had so far saved them from sore disaster.

Many days thus passed, happily by, as the *Glad Tidings* voyaged steadily over the deep, or occasionally luffed up off the shore of some pretty atoll, and perhaps, when the sea was calm, sent a boat ashore for water, or for barter with the natives, with whom "Jibby-jib" could converse with more or less ease and accuracy. Sometimes too, Grace would trip down the ladder over the ship's side, into the captain's gig, and with her brother enjoy a happy hour examining the coral reefs, gazing down through the clear depths upon the curious and brilliant structures reared

by the tiny zoophytes, taught by the great Creator to live in colonies and by their secretions year by year to add to the work of their industrious ancestors, until from unknown depths a coral reef had emerged to view, to form in time another island which may figure on the charts of the maritime nations. There was infinite poetry hid there beneath the waves—chain-like, fan-like, and feather-like coral formations—all the work of the tireless little polyps.

"If only man obeyed the laws of his Creator as perfectly, and built as nobly as these little anthozoans," exclaimed Grace after an interested scrutiny of the reefs, "how much more beautiful and how much happier this old world would be!"

Then back to the ship they rowed, to continue their voyage, perhaps encountering in the next island visited God's wonders on a vaster scale, where some "extinct" volcano—how long destined to slumber no one could be sure—reared its colossal head in pride above the liquid level of the Pacific.

One morning when cruising in the Polynesian seas a large island was sighted on the port bow, toward which the ship's course was shaped. Captain Henton thinking that he might there obtain a supply of fresh water, and perhaps some tropical fruits or vegetables. As the barkantine drew near to the shores of the island, which was heavily wooded with palms, a commotion was caused on the yacht both forward and aft by the sight of three men on the beach waving frantically bits of white cloth. Bringing his binoculars at once to bear on the men, Captain Henton made out that they were not natives, but white men, evidently the worse for exposure and hardship. "Those fellows have been marooned!" he exclaimed to Grace, who had gained his side on the bridge. "We must do something to help them!"

The *Glad Tidings* was age off shore, near the mouth of an inlet which bent in around a bluff, and Henton ordered away the barge, of which he took charge himself, the first officer and the chief engineer accompanying him. For the sake of diversion, Grace concluded that she would go along too. It was therefore a good-sized party that stepped ashore on the beach where the three marooned men, with many signs of eagerness, stood waiting its approach. Jumping ashore, Henton entered into a brisk conversation with the men, who told him that they had been put ashore by an unscrupulous captain, and left to fare as best they could on that lonely island, which was wholly without inhabitants—except, they added, for the presence inland of four shipmates of theirs, who were at a camp which they had managed to construct, and were too ill with fever to come down to the shore. The men had watched for days for a glimpse of some sail on the horizon, and had been overjoyed at last at the sight of the barkantine, which had seemed to draw near like a phantom ship of promise.

"How far away is the camp?" asked Henton.
"Four miles inland, sir," replied the spokesman of the three sailors, a burly American.

Captain Henton gave a hasty look at the sky. The barometer had not fallen when he left the ship, and though there was a moderate breeze blowing, the ship now riding easily at anchor was in no danger it seemed of drifting on a lee shore. Gesticulating to the officer of the watch, Captain Henton gave orders to allow shore liberty to the entire crew except the anchor watch. This concession was hailed with delight by the men, who were soon to be observed tumbling into the boats and heading for the beach. As the bronzed seamen drew their boats high and dry on the beach, Captain Henton gave them strict orders to return to the shore in three hours' time, appointed boat-keepers for each boat, and then allowed all the men but the few on duty at the boats to roam at their will over the island.

Captain Henton himself, leaving Grace in the care of the first officer and a few of the starboard watch, set off with the three unfortunates whom he had found on the island, and a good-sized party of his own men to visit the camp and to bring back, for treatment on board the yacht, the fever-stricken sufferers who were said to be languishing there.

Tumbling up and down, and pitching this way and that way through thickets and morasses for upwards of an hour and a half, Captain Henton and his men, not being used to land traveling

after so long a time at sea, began to pant and some of them to fume.

"How much farther is the camp?" asked Henton wearily, of the rearmost of the guides.

"Only a half mile farther, sir!" called back the man, as he leaped forward into the brush, through which he and his two companions could be heard crashing ahead out of sight. Beckoning to his men to follow, Captain Henton sprang forward, only the next moment to pitch violently into a tangle of wildwood, followed quickly by one of his men, who could not stop in time to avoid tumbling over his captain. In the excitement caused by this sudden turn of affairs the three guides were forgotten, and when presently the captain and the fallen seamen were extricated from their ridiculous predicament, loud shouts to the guides to "Hold on!" failed to reach their ears. The little company of would-be explorers realized that they were ignominiously lost amid the mazes of an unknown Pacific island, whose dimensions were probably far greater than their volunteer guides had stated them to be.

In the meantime Grace Henton, escorted by Nickerson, who, while he had followed the sea all his life, was a thorough gentleman, had strolled up to the brow of the headland at the mouth of the creek, and while the dozen seamen in their party lounged or wandered about not far off, spent a delightfully idle hour or two talking about the different objects to be seen from their eyrie while Nickerson spun the best and most fascinating of yarns narrating his experiences in the South Seas when a boy in the merchant service, and later when on a whaling voyage. At their feet far down the bluff the big billows plunged on the coral beach, or with undulating curves swept into the mouth of the inlet. At the landing place the boat-keepers dozed by their boats, while in the offing, a few cable lengths from shore, the *Glad Tidings* swung at anchor, with few signs of life about her decks.

After two hours had gone by, Grace, looking at her watch, expressed surprise that the rescue party had not returned.

"They could hardly be back by this time," replied the first officer. "They have had to beat their way through the thickets, and if on their return they carry the sick men on stretchers, they cannot make fast time!"

This explanation reassured Grace for a time, and as it was early in the afternoon, the delay seemed indeed to make little practical difference.

But when another and still another hour went by, the face of the first officer began to wear a troubled look, which he could hardly conceal from Grace. For the past half hour they had been nervously strolling up and down, picking a few berries from the bushes, and gathering here and there a few wild flowers. As they regained the bluff again and gazed up the island as far as they could see, there being no signs as yet of any returning party, Nickerson turned to Grace and began:

"Don't you think, Miss Henton, we would better return to the ship, for—?" when he was interrupted by a quick cry from Grace:

"There they come!"

Looking instantly up stream in the direction in which Grace pointed, the first officer saw a sight which did not seem to strike him strangely at the time, although afterward he often wondered at his own mental stolidity. Five heavily laden canoes were swinging silently and rapidly down stream, in the direction of the mouth of the creek. So rapidly were the following maneuvers executed that the experienced seaman, schooled to many exciting situations, seemed hardly to have time or wit to raise his voice or give to any one a sign of warning. Three of the canoes continued straight out into the offing. One swerved from its course and, touching for a moment on the bank of the creek below the bluff, tarried just long enough in the eddy to allow the crew to leave out on the bank a number of captives securely bound, whereupon the canoe thus lightened followed swiftly in the wake of the first three canoes. The fifth canoe skirted the shore with top speed, and was beached opposite the ship's boats. Its occupants promptly sprang out into the water, and almost before they knew it, the boat-keepers were overpowered, bound, and tossed on a heap of sea-weed. Not stopping to make off with the heavy ship's boats, the crew of the fifth canoe immediately struck out with bold strokes of their paddles for the barkantine.