

THE ISLANDS AND THEIR CHARM

DO those two words, "The Islands," convey anything to you, reader? White beaches of coral sand, shimmering lagoons reflecting tall coco-palms, spouting breakers on the coral reef? Or do they merely bring to your mind grubby colliers acting as temporary (and most unsuitable) fruiterers, bringing you bananas, oranges, pineapples? Oranges that leave Aitutaki and Rarotonga as big yellow-green globes of firm fruit that will yield nearly a tumblerfull of health-giving juice, and land at times on Auckland wharves as two inches of green, dripping scum at the bottom of the cases.

No wonder you have to pay long prices for your fruit.

Perhaps you are too near to the tropic isles, and know too much about the material side of things to feel the lure that undoubtedly exists, the lure that in other parts of the world has been responsible for boy runaways, for broken love affairs, for good billets thrown up by adventurous souls who must go and see for themselves.

The great demand for books on the islands in Europe and America, and the amazing sums derived from the tourist business in Honolulu, which last year amounted to about twenty-five million pounds, are proof enough that the fascination not only still exists, but is actually gaining ground, as year by year the places nearer home give up their secrets to the ubiquitous globe-trotter. Fortunately for those who desire peace and solitude, the islands are not likely to yield their mystery so easily. To begin with, they are scattered over so many thousands of miles that many of them take weeks to reach, and the holiday of the globe trotter is generally limited. To voyage to the far-away, off the beaten track islands, one must be prepared to face discomfort, perhaps even hardship and sometimes real danger.

IS it worth it? Well, that depends.

If your idea of a holiday is to motor from hotel to cool hotel, and you find the close proximity of an ice-chest indispensable, you had better keep away from the islands, with the possible exceptions of such tourist-frequented places as Honolulu, Fiji, and Tahiti.

But to others the very names are a clarion call that set the wanderer poring over charts and worrying

the travel agents about schooner services; think of them—the Gambiers, the dark Marquesas, whose deserted *paes-paes* or house platforms in the empty valleys bear witness to the thousands that are no more; Rapa Nui with its gigantic stone images which no man can explain; Ryevai-vai, the Australs, Tubuai, Bora-Bora, Raiatea, home of fire-walking and even more mysterious doings; the island Venice of Ponape in the Carolines, with its strange temples and breakwaters roughly built of



A Rarotongan Bellé

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piled-up basaltic columns—do they stir your imagination and wake in you any desire to brave the very evident discomforts and see them for yourself? If not, you can still find something of the lure which has brought writer after writer to the Southern Pacific, writers who have never left mail steamers and comfortable hotels; and yet have found ample material for profitable South Sea Island stories.

Honolulu, although American enterprise has made it a wonderful

resort, is fast losing its charm as a South Sea Island; big hotels, motor roads, and, above all, a population which is 65 per cent. Japanese, are gradually blotting out the real island atmosphere like an unpleasant fog, but in Tahiti the island charm may still be found.

THERE is so little one can tell that is new. Hermann Melville, whose "Typee" and "Omoo" still rank amongst the best. R. L. Stevenson, Louis Becke, Jack London, and Somerset Maugham, whose "Moon and Sixpence" is founded on the life of the unfortunate gauguin who died in squalor in the Marquesas before his paintings became the craze in Paris—all have told something of island life.

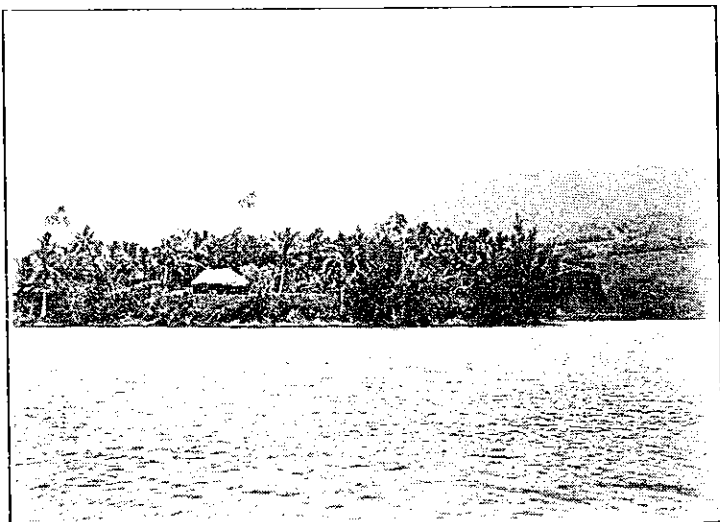
Rupert Brooke also spent some time in Tahiti; Beatrice Grimshaw writes of it in "The Strange South Seas" and O'Brien's fascinating trilogy "White Shadows in the South Seas," "Atolls of the Sun," and "Mystic Isles," about the Marquesas, Paumotus and Society Islands respectively have an enormous vogue in the States.

"Faëry Lands of the South Seas," by Nordhoff and Hall, deals with the more out-of-the-way islands of the Paumotus and Cook groups; Robert Service's "Roughneck" takes one to Tahiti and Murea, and now Robert Keable, forsaking Africa, has given us "Numerous Treasure."

Many of these are not illustrated, and, indeed, it is doubtful whether black and white really conveys much of the beauty of the South Seas, but the accompanying photographs may make it easier to visualise the various scenes and types which have been so often written about, even though the colours be lacking.

Take, in imagination if you cannot do so actually, the monthly mail boat *Tahiti* or *Makura* from Wellington, and five days after sailing you land for a few hours in foam-girt, mountainous Rarotonga. This is your very own tropic isle, and probably the fairest of them all, but for all that most New Zealanders know or care about it, it might as well be in the middle of the Sahara. Alone amongst islands accessible by mail steamer it has not been overrun by a horde of Orientals, and, in careful hands, would make an ideal winter resort.

Continued on page 27



A Rarotongan Shack



Social Amenities