

WHO HATH LOVED MUCH

By C. Menzies Miller.

It was about this time that the semaphore commenced to annoy him. It WAS annoying, he considered, that whenever he would pull a little lever in the little iron telegraph station under the hill, this gaunt black pole would wave its arms at him. It was more than annoying; it was positively impudent.

Of course, there were many things that had bothered him during the past few months. The crackling of the corrugated iron roof in the fierce glare of the tropical sun was another. Lately he had come to think of it as the ticking of the machinery inside the world. One night he had even gotten up and poured a whole canful of oil into the steaming hole in the ground, where the hot spring had once been. But it did not seem to be of any use. The crackling and the snapping still kept up, so he decided that there must be something quite wrong with the machine.

The semaphore, however, was another matter. One morning he took his belt axe, and climbed the pole and chopped away the arms until he was quite sure that he had quieted them.

Loba, the chief of the two or three hundred natives who comprised the population of the island, was artistically loafing with one of the members of his court in the shade of the cocoanut palms which fringed the beach. He watched the performance with interest.

"Huh," he said, "the Tic-Tac man is killing the white man's devil tree that waves its arms at the ships."

Now as this was so, and as his companion was a courier of long experience, his statement was allowed to stand uncontradicted.

"He will surely die," continued Loba complacently. This also stood, for was not Loba chief, and had not the Tic-Tac man himself said that whosoever laid hands upon the devil tree would die suddenly? Why, even when the puffing boat had come into the bay, and her men had stood up the tree on the hill, and put a spiky little fence around it, had not half the island died? Died, too, of the strange wit-heraft which left sores thick upon the face? It was in the memory of man.

The Man climbed slowly down the pole, and came along the winding path to the beach. He had an odd way of looking fearfully from side to side as he walked, and he made a curious figure in his soiled and ragged white pyjamas and palm leaf hat. The unkempt hair and beard had once been brown, but had now come to that bleached straw colour, given by long years of exposure to the tropic sun. It was a bad face, more vicious, perhaps, because it had once been handsome. There was that, too, in the eyes which wasn't pleasant to look at. In fact, there was not a harder specimen in the Archipelago. Even the wreckers and beach-combers, clung now and then to some shred of a decent past. Here was none at all. But then reputations count for very little among the islands. It was hard to find a man who would stay at this God-forsaken station more than a month, and he had been here now for nearly a year and a half. Besides, he was the best operator in the South Seas, and that covered a multitude of faults with the company.

As he approached Loba, he limped a little. He had not noticed, in the frenzy of his attack on the semaphore, that one of the iron spikes which made a ladder of the pole had cut his bare foot. But now it commenced to pain him, and he halted involuntarily.

"Why did you kill the devil tree, Tic-Tac man?" asked Loba as he came up. "Because it was bad medicine, my son," responded The Man, and, then half to

himself, "and because the d— thing annoyed me." "See here," he continued, after a pause; "some day they will come here to plant another one, and you mustn't let 'em. You mustn't let 'em," he cried again, grasping Loba's arm.

Loba drew himself up proudly. "They are good words that you speak, Tic-Tac man. When they come again we will not let them."

"They will come here into the bay, but you must not let them land," said The Man, stretching a shaking hand out toward the sea.

Loba looked at the hand that shook, at the wild eyes with their contracted pupils, at the dry lips and skin. He was too familiar with opium to give it a thought.

"We will not let them land," said he. Then the man turned up the zigzag path to the station, humming a snatch from Schubert's Serenade. When he got there he went to bed.

The next morning a German tramp steamer came wallowing along through the passage. She was loaded with copra a fathom past her Pimssol mark (if she had one), and had a bad list to port. Now, among other things which had lately come into The Man's brain was a grave dislike of all things German. The operator at Singapore was a German, and the operator at Singapore had called him an ass.

So when the steamer came to half speed off the station, and flew a string of gay little flags which said "H. B. N. F. Please report me to Lloyds," he took no notice of her.

Her captain had a look at the wrecked signal pole, consulted with the chief officer, and decided that something must be wrong. So he hoisted out a small boat, put the second officer in charge, and sent it to investigate.

Right here is where complications started. As the boat grated on the shingle, a broad spear thrown in Loba's best style took the bow or in the chest. He looked surprised for a moment, coughed a wet, choky cough a couple of times, and then fell over. A very pretty fight followed. Another man had a bad stab, and the second officer a spear through the arm, before they got the boat off into deep water.

Among the natives' casualties were light. Only Maya, inspired by a pair of dusky eyes, beneath a wreath of scarlet flowers, dared too much, and was brained by the tiller in the hands of No. 2.

The captain was following the affair through his glasses. He rushed below and brought up an antiquated rifle with which he took pot shots at the fray. But as he insisted on firing at the top of the roll to windward, he only succeeded in smashing a window in the telegraph station. When his boat at last came alongside, he swung it aboard, and cleared away in high wrath.

To the man watching the fight with restless, lustreless eyes, it brought the keenest satisfaction. Later in the day he met Loba, to whom he said:

"It was good, my son, the fight this morning."

"They did not land," said Loba with conscious dignity.

That night at sundown, Seaforth brought the Nemo to anchor off the station. The Nemo and Seaforth together, probably enjoyed and thoroughly enjoyed, the evildest name, and the worst reputation from Saghalien to Sumatra. But the Man took an old wig wag flag which some cruiser had left there, and signalled her gladly. Seaforth was an old friend. They had been mixed up together in more than one shady deal.

Esides, he knew that Seaforth seldom came his way that he did not leave him a box of opium, and plenty of gin to while away the monotony of the station.

Seaforth himself was in high good humour. In fact, he was gloriously drunk. He had run a cargo of arms for the insurgents into an obscure bay in Luzon. From there he had slipped over to China, and in a port not mentioned in the treaty, had shipped a load of opium for Macassar. Although not bulky this bade fair to pay him a handsome profit.

His men, equally drunk and hilarious, were received with open arms by the natives, to whom they were well known. A great feast was on—in honour of Maya's death; to which it must be acknowledged, Maya himself furnished the principal share of the "fusaal baked meats."

By midnight informality reigned to such a degree that a free fight followed. Before peace was restored the men of the Nemo had succeeded in setting fire to the warehouses of the French Trading Company. At the time they were filled to the roofs with copra awaiting the quarterly collection boat, and a heavy loss was the result.

After seeing the last ember die out, the Nemo's gathered their wounded together and retired on board, well pleased with their evening's outing.

Meanwhile in the telegraph station affairs were also taking a progressive turn. The Man, under the first exhilaration of the opium, was becoming more and more excited; and Seaforth, thanks to his own "squareface," more maudlin. The story of the attempted landing of the morning was told and retold. By the time Seaforth was ready to call his boat, he had solemnly declared between his bursts of noisily weeping, that he would "kill the first German who crossed his path."

He did not quite live up to this plan. But the next day, while in the Carmata Passage, he made out two pearl boats under the German flag. The story he had heard the night before still rankled deep in his mind. Perhaps some touch of Drake or Morgan burned in his veins. At any rate, he held them up, and relieved them of some very fine pearls, as well as their deckload of shells. He then thoughtfully smashed their rudders, consigned them in flowery language to

a very warm place, and rang for full speed ahead.

Now, all these happenings commenced to be known. The Man, in a lucid interval, telegraphed the news of the attempted landing and the burning of the warehouses. The captain of the tramp laid the matter before the first German consul he came across, and a day or so later two pearl boats limped into Batavia, steering with jury rudders, and lodged a very vigorous protest.

The London "Times" came out with the following:—

"Serakoa Island, December 20, 1908.—A German vessel attempted to land an armed party here on Tuesday. They were repulsed by the natives after sharp fighting. The loss was several killed and wounded. During the engagement the telegraph station was fired upon, and considerable damage done. The island is under British protection, and the motive for this attempt is unknown. The Secretary for Foreign Affairs has called upon the German Ambassador for an explanation. Meanwhile H.M.S. Blenheim has been ordered to the scene."

In Paris "La Presse" of the same date announced: "The warehouses of the French Trading Company on Serakoa Island were totally destroyed by fire on Tuesday night. The fire was started by a party of English seamen from a steamer lying off the beach. No particulars are given. The French ambassador in London has been instructed to demand an explanation, and the cruiser L'Intrepide has been ordered to Serakoa."

A few days later the Berlin papers appeared with double headed scare heads,

"PIRACY UNDER THE BRITISH FLAG."

and told that on Wednesday night an unknown steamer, flying the English flag had stopped two pearl fishing schooners and looted them. The affair had happened in the Carmata Passage. The Ministry of the Marine had filed a protest with the British Ambassador, and requested full particulars. The gunboat Siegfried was under hurry orders to proceed to the locality of the robbery. The Siegfried would also touch at Serakoa Island to investigate the reported collision between the natives and the crew of a German steamer which recently attempted a landing.

But The Man whose worn out brain had brought the eyes of all maritime Europe to his lonely dot upon the map, slept peacefully, ignorant of it all.

The British first-class cruiser Blenheim reached the island just at sunset, and found there before her the Siegfried and L'Intrepide, anchored a cable's length apart.

A string of signal flags was flying from each ship as the Blenheim swept in.

"What is it?" asked Commander Gordon of his signal lieutenant, who was on the bridge with him.

"The Siegfried says, 'I am about sending a boat ashore,' and the Intrepide says, 'If you do I'll sink you,'" answered the lieutenant a moment later.

"Humph," the commander granted, "our amiable friends are certainly losing no time."

The executive officer climbed up to the bridge and asked where he should lay her.

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