

White Shadows In The South Seas

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By FREDERICK O'BRIEN

III.--Seventh-Man-Who-Is-So-Angry-He-Wallows-In-The-Mud.

A Visit to a Native Chief and a Proposal of Marriage to Vanquished Often.

"The Iron Fingers that Make Words," the Marquesans called my typewriter. Such a wonder had never before been beheld in the islands, and its fame spread far. From other valleys and even from distant islands the curious came in throngs and flocks. They watched the strange thing write their names and carried away the bits of paper.

"Aue!" they cried as I showed them my speed, which would be a shame to a typist.

Chiefs especially were my visitors, thinking it proper to their estate and to mine that they should call upon me and invite me to their seats of government.

So it happened that one morning as I sat on my paepae eating a breakfast of roasted breadfruit prepared for me by Exploding Eggs, my naked skin enjoying the warmth of the sun and my ears filled with the bubbling laughter of the brook, I beheld two stately visitors approaching me. Exploding Eggs named them to me as they came up the trail.

Both were leading chiefs of the islands. Kato, Piece of Tattooing, of Hekeani, led the way. His severe and dignified face was a dark blue in color. His eyes alone were free from imbedded indigo ink. They gleamed like white clouds in a blue sky, but their glance was mild and kindly. Sixty years of age, he still walked with upright grace, only the softened contours of his face betraying that he was well in his manhood when his valley was still given over to tribal warfare, orgies and cannibalism.

Behind him came Neo Aftu Atrien, of Vait-hua, a sticky brown man with a lined face, stubby mustache, and brilliant, intelligent eyes. He mounted the steps, shook hands heartily, and poured out his informed soul in English.

"Johnny, I spik Ingriah. You Iris-man. You got 'O,' before name. I know you got tipwrite can make machine do any. I know Panama Canal. How is Teddy and Gotal?"

I assured the chief that both Roosevelt and Goethals were well at last account, and he veered to other topics. "Before time, come plenty whale-ship my place," he said. "I know geography, mappey grammat. I know Egyptee. Indee, all country; I know Buffalo. Before time, whale-ship come America for take water and wood. Stay two, tree week. Every night sailor come ashore catchee girls take ship. Frenty rum, biskit, molassi, good American tobacco. Now all finish. Whale-ship no more. That is not good."

His name means The Seventh Man Who Is So Angry He Wallows In The Mud. "Neo" means all but the number, and for so short a word to be translated by so detailed a statement would indicate that there were many Marquesans whose anger tripped them. Else such a word had hardly been born.

I showed the chiefs the marvels of my typewriter, displayed to their respectful gaze the Golden Bed, and otherwise did the honors. As they departed, Neo said earnestly:

"You come see me, you have my house. You like, you bring plenty rum, keep warm if rain."

"A wicked man," said Exploding Eggs in Marquesan when the trail lay empty before us. "One time he drink much rum. French gendarme go to arrest him, he bite." With an eloquent gesture my valet indicated that Neo's teeth had removed in its entirety the nose of the valiant defender of morals. "No good go see him," he added with finality.

However, the prospect intrigued my fancy, and finding a few days later that Ika Vaikoki, whose disarming parents had named him Ugh! Dried Up Stream! was voyaging toward Vait-hua in a whaleboat, I offered him ten francs and two litres of rum to take me. Remembering Neo's suggestion, I took also two other bottles of rum.

While our whaleboat shot across the Bodelaise Channel, pursued by a brisk breeze, Ugh! a wisp of a man of fifty, held the helm. He was for all the world like a Malay pirate; I have seen his double steering a proa off the Borneo coast, slim, high-cheeked, with a saffron of saw-like knives. Ugh! had no weapon, but his eye was a small flaming coal that made me thankful cannibalism is a thing of the past. He had been carried through the surf to his perch upon the stern because one of his legs was useless for walking, but once he grasped the tiller, he was a seaman of skill.

Straight across the channel we steered for Hana Hevane, a little bay and valley guarded by sunken coral rocks over which the water foamed in white warning. Two of the men leaped out into the waves and hunted on these rocks for squids, while we beached the boat on a shore uninhabited by any living creature but rats, lizards and centipedes.

There we ate, and when we had finished, the bowls of food remaining were tied in baskets of leaves and hung in a banyan tree to await the boatmen's return for the night, the steersman was carried to his place and the boat pushed through the surf.

A gaunt shark swam close to the reefs and we rowed out, a hungry, ill-looking monster. One of the bottles of rum the oarsmen had drunk on the way to Hana Hevane, the other was stored for their return, and to gain a third the son of Ugh! offered to go overboard and tie a rope to the shark's tail, which is a way the natives often catch them. A shark was not worth a litre of rum, I said, being in no mind to risk the limbs of a man in such a sort. Besides, I had no more to give away. I could imagine the rage of Seventh Man Who Wallows should he learn of my wasting in such foolishness what would keep us both warm if it rained.

In a sparkling sea we made our way past Iva Iva and Iva Iva Nui, rounding a high green shore into the bay of Vait-hua. The tiny settlement reaching from the beach half a mile up the glen was screened by its many trees.

The whaleboat slid up to a rocky ledge, and my luggage and I were put ashore. Exploding Eggs, who had insisted on accompanying me, took it

into his charge, and with it balanced on his shoulders we sauntered along the road to the village where the French gendarme had lost his nose to the mad manu-drinker.

The beach followed the semi-circle of the small bay, and was hemmed in on both sides by massive black rocks, above which rose steep mountains covered with verdure. The narrow valley itself sloped upward on either hand to a sheer wall of cliffs.

The tiny settlement with its scattered few habitations, was beautiful beyond comparison. A score or so of houses, small, but neat and comfortable, wreathed with morning-glory vines and shaded by white eucalyptus trees, clustered along the bank of a limpid stream crossed at intervals by white stepping-stones. Naked children, whose heads were wreathed with flowers, splashed in sheltered pools, or fed like moving brown shadows

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Mire. A laughing Juno of thirty years, large and rounded as a breadfruit tree, more than six feet in height, with a mass of blue-black hair and teeth that flashed white as a fresh-opened coconut, she rose from her mat on the paepae and rubbed her nose ceremoniously with hers. Clothed in a necklace of false pearls and a brilliantly scarlet loin-cloth, she was truly a barbaric figure, yet in her eye I beheld that instant pre-occupation with household matters that greets the unexpected guest the world over.

The gorge that parted the valley was wide and deep for the silver stream that sang its way to the bay. When the rain fell in cascades the channel hardly contained the mad torrent that had destroyed the road built years before when whalers' ships by the dozens came each year. Now the natives made their way as of old, up and down rocky trails and over the stepping-stones.

Near the beach we came upon a group of tumble-down shanties, remnants of the seat of government. Only childishly introspective. Her hands were slippy, and her lips were sweet, rosy-red, and her eyes were blue as the sea. She wore the finest on the sand. She wore the finest of sheer white cotton tunics, and there were flamboyant flowers in the shining dark hair that tumbled to her waist.

She greeted me with the eager artlessness of the child that she was. She was on her way to the vai puna, the spring by the beach, she said. Would I accompany her thither? And would I tell her of the women of my people in the strange islands of the

fighting fellows, congregated here to bathe and to fill their water-casks. Near this crystal rivulet they slashed each other in their quarrels over Vait-hua's fairest, and exchanged their slop-chest luxuries and grog for the favors of the island chiefs.

It was Standard Oil, sending around the world its tinned, or tin cans, filled with illuminating fluid cheaper than that of the whale, that ended the days of the ships in Vait-hua, and they sailed away for the last time, leaving the island so depopulated that its few remaining people could slip back into the life of the days before the whites came.

Vanquished Often, slipping from her white tunic, stepped beneath the stream of crystal water and laughed at the cool delight of it on her smooth skin. It was a picture of which artists dream, the naked girl laughing in the torrent of transparent water, the wet crimson blossoms of her hair, the striped shade of the palm-trunks her simple, savage companions waiting their turn, squatting on the sand or crowded on the canoe, their loins wrapped in crimson and blue and yellow parus.

Courtesy suggested that I should be next to feel the refreshing torrent. We let slip the garments of timorous covering very easily when nudity is commonplace. Vait-hua was to teach me to be modest without pother, to chat with those about in my ablutions without concern for the false vanities of screens or even the shelter of rocks as in the river in Aotuana. In such scenes one perceives that modesty is in the false shame that makes one cling to clothes, rather than in the simple virtues that walk naked and unshamed.

Tactless recites that chastity was controlling virtue among the Teutons, ranking among women as bravery among men; yet all Teutons bathed in the stream together. In Japan both sexes bathe in public in natural hot pools, and that without diffidence. Mohammedan women surprised in bathing cover their faces first; the Chinese the feet. Good Erasmus, that Dutch theologian said that "angels abhor nakedness." Devout Europeans of his day never saw their own bodies; if they bathed they wore a garment covering them from head to feet. Thus standards of clothing vary from age to age and from country to country.

Missionaries bewilder the savage mind by imposing their own standards of the moment and calling them modesty. The African negro, struggling to harmonize these two ideals, Putting the Canoe into the Water.

Life in Vait-hua was idyllic. The whites, having desolated and depopulated this once thronged valley, had gone, leaving the remnant of its people to return to their native virtue and quietude. Here, perhaps more than in any other spot in all the isles, the Marquesans lived as his forefathers had before the whites came.

Doing nothing sweetly was an art in Vait-hua. Pleasure is nature's sign of approval. When man is happy he is in harmony with himself and his environment. The people of this quiet valley did not crave excitement. The bustle and nervous energy of the white wearies them excessively. Time was never wasted, to their minds, for leisure was the measure of its value.

Swimming in the surf, lolling at the vai puna, angling from rock or canoe or fishing with line and spear outside the bay, searching for shell-fish, and riding or walking over the hills to other valleys, filled their peaceful, pleasant days. A dream-like, care-free life, lived by a people sweet to know, handsome, generous and loving.

Too soon the time came when I must return to my own paepae in Aotuana. Vanquished Often wept at my decision, and Mrs. Seventh Man rubbed my nose long with hers as she entreated me to remain in the home she had given over to me. The chief, finding remonstrance useless, volunteered to accompany me on my return, and one midnight woke me to be ready when the wind was right.

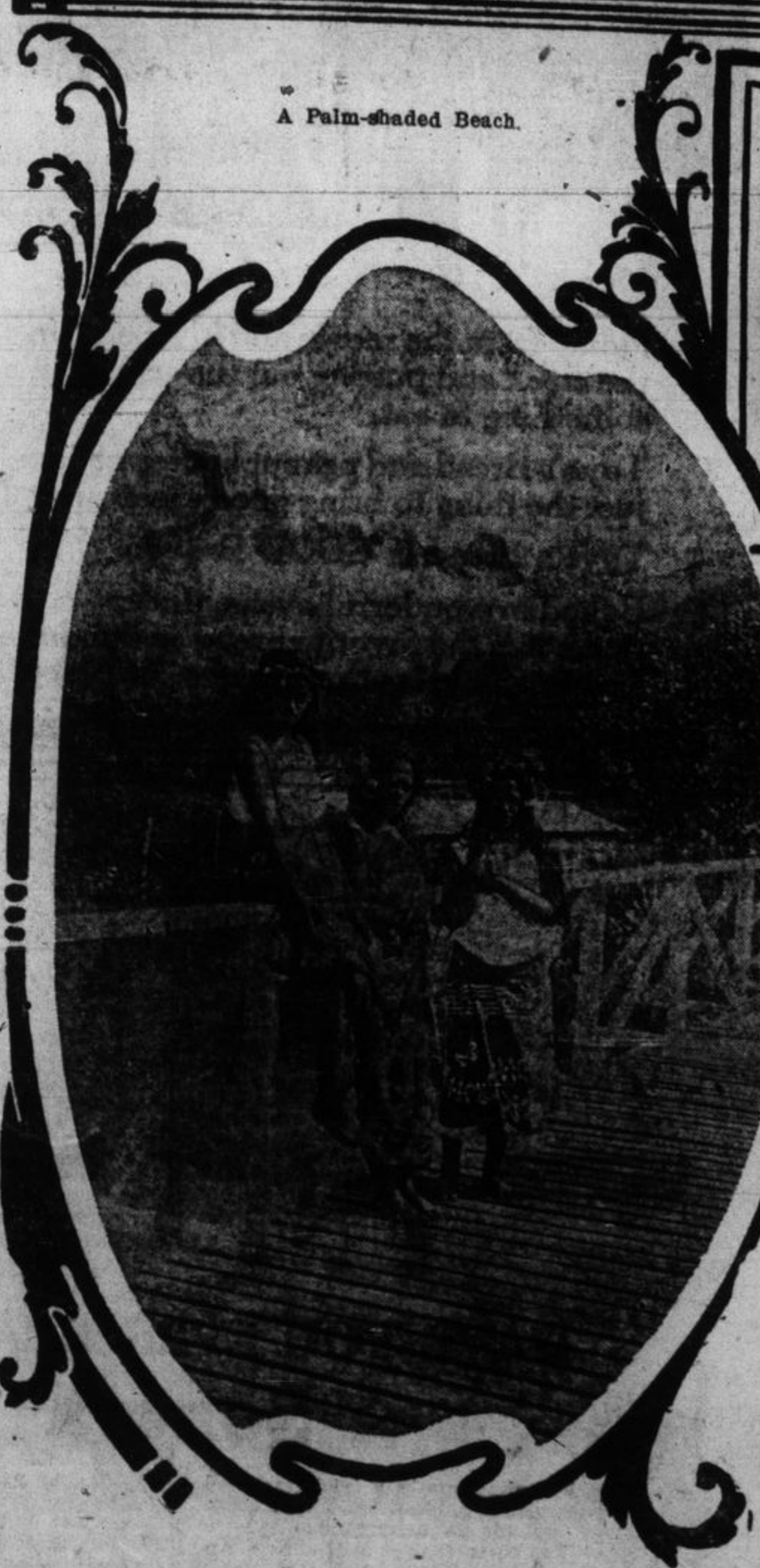
We went down the trail through wind and darkness, the chief blowing a conch-shell for the crew. In the straw shanty where my hosts had spread their mats that I might have full occupancy of their comfortable home, we found Mrs. Seventh Man making tea for me. Vanquished Often sat apart in the shadow, her face averted, but when my coconut-shell was filled with the steaming brew she sprang forward passionately and would let no hand but hers present it to me.

One day it had been raining, and the downpour rushed from the eaves with a melancholy sound as we sat in the lantern-lighted dimness drinking from the shells. Squall followed squall, shaking the hut. At half-past two, in a little lull which Neo guessed might last, we went out to the rain-soaked beach, launched the canoe, and paddled away.

My last sight of Vait-hua was the dim line of surf on the sand, and beyond it the slender figure of Vanquished Often holding aloft a lantern whose rays faintly illumined against the darkness her windblown white tunic and blurred face.



A Palm-shaded Beach.



Doing Nothing Sweetly is an Art in the Marquesas.



Putting the Canoe into the Water.

a thatched schoolhouse and a tiny cabin for the teacher was habitable. Here the single artist of the islands, Monsieur Charles Le Moine, had taught the three "R's" to Vait-hua's adolescents for years. He was away now, Neo said, but we found his cabin open and littered with canvasses, sketches, paint-tubes, and worn household articles.

"He got little broomee, an' sweep paint out litt'ee pipe on thing make shiv's sails," Neo explained. Surely a description of a broad modern style.

On the wall, or leaning against it on the floor were a dozen drawings and oils of a young girl of startling beauty. Laughing, clear-eyed, she seemed almost to speak from the canvases, filling the room with charm. Her hair leaned against a palm-trunk, her bare brown body warm against its gray; there she stood on a white beach, a crimson paru about her loins and hibiscus flowers in her hair.

"That Hinatini," said Seventh Man Who Wallows, speaking always in what he supposed to be English. "She now some pumpkin, eh? Le Moine like more better make tiki like this than say book. She my niece."

Turning from the dingy interior of his cabin, I saw in the sunlight beyond the door his model in the life. Le Moine had not the brush to do her justice. Vanquished Often, a thin, elderly man, with a grace of carriage, a beauty and perfection of features, a rich coloring no canvas could depict. Her skin was of warm olive hue, with tinges of red in the cheeks and the lips cherry-ripe. Her eyes were dark brown, large, melting,

Menke They were very far away, were they not, those islands farther even than Tahiti. How deep beneath the sea could their women dive?

I answered these, and other questions while we walked down the beach and I marveled at the unconscious grace of her movements. The chief wonder of all these Marquesans is the beauty and erectness of their standards of age and walking postures. Their chests are broad and deep, their bosoms, even in girls of Vanquished Often's age, rounded, superb, and their limbs have an ease of motion, an animal-like liveness unknown to our clothed and dress-bound women.

Vanquished Often was the most perfect type of all these physical perfections, a survival of those wondrous Marquesan women who added the wits of the whites a century ago. There was no blemish on her, not any feature one would alter.

Half a dozen of her comrades were lounging upon the sand when we reached the vai puna. Here an iron pipe in the mountain-side tapped subterranean waters, and a hollowed coconut tree gave them exit upon the sand, where salt waves flowed up to meet them. Long lean, and beneath their ribbons of shade lay an old canoe, upon which sat those who waited their turn to bathe, to fill calabashes, or merely to gossip.

For all time, they said, this had been the center of life in Vait-hua. Le Moine's tales had been told here for generations. The whalers filled their casks at this spring, working every hour of the twenty-four because the flow was small. Famous harpooners, steersmen who winked no eye when the wounded whale drew their boat through a smother of foam, shanghai'd gentlemen, sweepings of harbors, Nantucket deacons, pirates, and the whole breed of sailors and

were a tall silk hat and a pair of slippers as his only garments when he obeyed Livingstone's exhortations to clothe himself in the presence of white women.

Vait-hua was all savage; whatever bewilderment the missionaries had brought had faded when a dwindling population left the isle to its own people. In the minds of my happy companions at the vai puna, modesty had no more to do with clothing than among us, it had to do with food. The standards of the individual are everywhere formed by the mass-opinion of those about him; I came from my bath, replaced my garments, and felt myself Marquesan.

The sensation was false. Savage peoples can never understand our philosophy, our complex springs of action. They may ape our manners, wear our ornaments, and seek our company, but their souls remain in different. They laugh when we are stolid. They weep when we are unmoved. Their gods and devils are not ours.

From our side, too, the abyss is impassable. Civilization with its refinements and complexities has stripped us of the power of complete surrender to simple impulses. The white who would become like a natural savage succeeds only in becoming a beast. "Plus sauvage que les Kanakas," is a proverb in the islands. Its implications I had occasion to heed ere the evening was ended.

Wrapped only in a gorgeous red paru, I sat on the paepae of the chief's house, now become mine. I was the special care of Mrs. Seventh Man Who Wallows, who all afternoon long had sat on her haunches over a coconut-husk fire stirring savory foods for me.

Now in the quiet of the evening, empty bowls removed, pandanus-leaf cigarettes lighted, and pipe puffing

Advertisement for Eczema medicine, including text like 'Eczema' and 'You are not alone'.