

White Shadaws In The South Seas

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By FREDERICK O'BRIEN

XVII.—Holding Court in the Marquesas

The Jolly Young Frenchman Who Was Governor, Judge and Doctor All in One, and Who Dispensed Justice and Nostrums with a Generous Hand.

The Marquesan was guaranteed his day in court. There was one judge in the archipelago and one doctor, and they were the same, being united in the august person of M. L'Hermier des Plantes, who was also the pharmacist. The jolly governor, in his twenties, with medical experience in an African army post and in barracks in France, was irked by his judicial and administrative duties, though little troubled by his medical functions, since he had few drugs and knew that unless these were swallowed by the patient in his presence they would be tried upon the pigs or worn as an amulet around the neck. Faithful to his orders, however, the judge sat upon the woolsack Saturdays, unless it was raining or he wished to shoot kukus.

One Saturday morning, being invited to breakfast at the palace, I strolled down to observe the workings of justice. Court was called to order in the archives room of the governor's house. The judge sat at a large table, resplendent in army blue and gold, with cavalry boots and spurs, his whippers shining, his demeanor grave and stern. Bauda, clerk of the court, sat at his right, and Peterano, a native catechist, stood opposite him, attired in blue overalls and a necklace of small green nuts, ready to act as interpreter.

Each defendant, plaintiff, prisoner, and witness was sworn impressively, though no Bible was used; which reminded me that in Hodgson's case a defendant refused to handle a Bible in court, and when the irate English judge demanded his reasons, calmly replied that the witness who had just laid down the book had the plague, and it was so proved.

The first case was that of a Chinese member of the Shan-Shan syndicate which owned a store in Atuona. He was charged with shooting kukus without a license. There were not many of these small green doves left in the islands, and the governor, whose favorite sport and delicacy they were, was rightly angered at the Chinaman's infraction of the law. He fined the culprit twenty dollars, and confiscated to the realm the murderous rifle which had aided the crime.

The Shan-Shan man was stunned, and expostulated so long that he was led out by Flag, the gendarme, after being informed that he might appeal to Tahiti. He was forcibly put off the veranda, struggling to explain that he had not shot the gun, but had merely carried it as a reserve weapon in case he should meet a Chinese with whom he had a feud.

The criminal docket done, civil cases were called. The haremoted balliff, Flag, stole out on the veranda occasionally to take a cigarette from the inhabitants of the valley of Taoua, who crowded the lawn around

the veranda steps. All save Kahuiti, they had come over the mountains to attend in a body a trial in which two of them figured—the case of Santos vs. Tahiaupehe (Daughter of the Pigeon).

Santos was a small man, born in Guano, and had been ten years in Taoua, having deserted from a ship. He and I talked on the veranda in Spanish, and he explained the desperate plight into which love had dragged him. He adored Tahiaupehe, the belle of Taoua. For months he had poured at her feet all his earnings, and faithfully he had labored at copra-making to gain money for her. He had lavished upon her all his material wealth and the fierce passion of his Malay heart, only to find her disdainful, untrue, and, at last, runaway. While he was in the forest, he said, climbing coconut-trees to provide her with luxuries, she had fled his hut, carrying with her a certain "Singsaire" and a trunk. He was in court to regain this property.

"Ben Santos me Tahiaupehe mave! A msi i nei!" cried Flag, pompously. The pair entered the court, but all others were excluded except me. As a distinguished visitor, waiting to breakfast with the judge and the clerk, I had a seat.

The Daughter of the Pigeon, comely and voluptuous, wore an expression of brazen bitterness such as I have seen on the faces of few women. A procuress in White-chapel and a woman in America who had poisoned half a dozen of her kin had that same look; sneering, desperate, contemptuous, altogether evil. I wondered what experiences had written those lines on the handsome face of Daughter of the Pigeon.

Ben Santos was sworn. Through the interpreter he told his sad tale of devotion and desertion and asked for his property. The singsaire had been bought of the German store. He had bought it that Daughter of the Pigeon might mend his garments, since she had refused to do so without it. He had not given it to her at all, but allowed her the use of it in consideration of "love and affection" he swore.

Daughter of the Pigeon glared at the unhappy little man with an intensity of hatred that alarmed me for his life. She took the stammering, malevolently handsome in fery of pink tunic, gold ear-rings, and necklace of red peppers, barefooted, haremoted, barbaric. She spat out her words.

"This man made love to me and lived with me. He gave me the sewing-machine and the trunk. He is a runt and a pig, and I am tired of him. I left his hut and went to the house of my father. I took my Singsaire and my trunk."

"Ben Santos," inquired the judge, with a critical glance at Daughter of

the Pigeon, "what return did you make to this woman for keeping your house?"

"I provided her food and her dresses," stammered the little man. "Food hangs from trees, and dresses are a few yards of stuff," said the surgical Solomon. "The first ones of the Marquesas do not give themselves to men of your plainness for popoi and muslin robes. You are a foreigner. You expect too much. The preponderance of probability, added to the weight of testimony, causes the court to believe that this woman is the real owner of the sewing-machine and the trunk. It is so adjudged."

"La muer es una diabola, pero me gusto mucho," said Santos to me, and sighed deeply. "The woman is a devil, but I like her very much."

The unfortunate Malay got upon his horse and, his soul deep in the swamp of jealousy, departed to resume his copra-making.

Court adjourned. The judge, the clerk, and the interpreter, Daughter of the Pigeon, and I toasted the blind goddess in rum, the sun being very hot on the iron roof. Bauda and I stayed to breakfast at eleven o'clock, and the governor permitted me to look through the dossier of Daughter of the Pigeon. This record is kept of all Marquesans or others resident in the islands; each governor adds his facts and prejudices and each new official finds the history and reputation of each of his charges set down for his perusal. In this record of Daughter of the Pigeon I found the reason for the malevolent character depicted by her face.

The men of the hills have a terrible custom of capturing any woman of another valley who goes alone in their district. Grete's first companion was caught one night by forty, who for punishment built the ten kilometers of road between Haniapa and Atuona. Many Daughters, the beautiful little leper, when thirteen years old was a victim of seven men, some of whom were imprisoned. Daughter of the Pigeon had had a fearful experience of this kind. It had seared her soul, and Santos was paying for his sex.

In few times this custom was a form of retaliation, that the laying of men and eating them. It has become a sport. Last horror should spend itself upon these natives of the islands, I mention that in every state in our history similar records blacken our history. War's pages from the first glimmerings of the last foul moment reek with this devilry. British and French at Bada-joz and Taragona, in Spain, left fearful memories. Occident and Orient alike are guilty. This crime smudges the chronicle of every invasion. It is part of the degradation of slum in all our cities, a sport of hoodlum gangs everywhere. In the Marquesas it is a recognized, though forbidden, game, and has its retaliatory side. Time was when troops of women have revenged it in strange ways. One took a pot-shot at the offending countryman in the village. He urged desperately that the other Chinese still possessed a gun well oiled and loaded. He asserted even with tears that he would respect and admiration for the white man's law. But he wanted his gun, and he wanted it quick.

I calmed him with the twice-convenient namu, and after promising to explain the situation to the governor, I sat for some time on my paepae in the moonlight. Without prompting he divulged to me that my suspicions had been correct; Drink of Beer had himself instigated the raid of the bold Daughter of the Pigeon upon my rum. Drink of Beer, it appeared, was known in the islands for many feats of successful duplicity. One had nearly cost the life of Jean Richard, a young Frenchman who worked for the German trader in Taka-Uka.

"Earth Worm was a man of Taoua," said my guest, sitting cross-legged on my mat; his long-nailed, yellow fingers folded in his lap. "He was nephew of Puhuetoa, eater of many men." Earth Worm was arrested by Drink of Beer and brought before the former governor, Lail-huzene, known as Little Pig. "Drink of Beer said that Earth Worm had made namu enata, the juice of the flower of the palm that makes men mad. Earth Worm swore that he had done no wrong. He swore that Drink of Beer had allowed him, for a price, to make the namu enata, and that Drink of Beer had said this was according to the law. But when he failed to pay again, Drink of Beer arrested him."

"Drink of Beer said this was not true. He wore the red stripes on his sleeve; therefore the governor thought Pig said that Earth Worm lied, and sent him to prison for a year."

"Now Earth Worm was an informed man, a son of many chiefs, and himself resolved in his ways. He said that he would speak before the courts of Tahiti, and he would not go in shame to the prison. At this time that governor was finished with his work here and was departing on a ship to Tahiti, and Earth Worm with hate in his heart, embarked on that ship, saying nothing, but thinking much."

"He lived forward with the crew, and said nothing, but thought. Others spoke to him, saying that he would not profit by the journey to Tahiti, where the word of the governor was powerful, but he did not

reply. The men of the crew wished Earth Worm to kill the governor, for every Marquesan hated him, and he had done a terrible thing for which he deserved death.

"There had been an aged gendarme who fell ill because a curse laid on him by a tahuna. He was dying. This governor took from his box in the house of medicines a sharp small knife, and with it he cut the veins of a Marquesan who had done some small wrong against the law and lay in jail. He bound this man by the arm to the gendarme who was dying, and through the cut the blood ran into the gendarme's veins. His heart sucked the blood from the body of the Marquesan, and he lay bound, feeling the blood go from him. The village knew that this was being done, and could do nothing but hate and fear, for it was the governor who had done it."

"The gendarme died, and you may yet see on the beach sometimes that man who was a strong and brave Marquesan. He trembles now like hotu leaves in the wind, for he never forgets the terrible magic done upon him by that governor. He remembers the hours when he lay bound to that man who was dying, and the dying man sucked his blood from him."

"Now this governor was on the ship going away, and he had not been killed. This made all Marquesans sad, and those in the crew talked to Earth Worm, who had also been wronged, and urged him to rise and strike. But he said nothing."

"The ship came to the Paumotus, and the governor sat all day long on a stool on the deck, watching the islands as they passed. Earth Worm sat in his place, watching the governor. One night at dark he rose, and taking an iron rod laid beside him by one of the crew he crept along the deck and stood behind the man on the stool. He raised the iron rod and brought it down with fury upon the head of that man, who fell covered with blood. Then he leaped into the sea."

"But the governor had gone below, and it was Jean Richard who sat on the stool in the darkness. He was found bleeding upon the deck, and the bones of his head were cut and lifted and patched, so that today he lives, as well as ever. Earth Worm was never found. A boat with a lantern was lowered, but it found nothing but the fins of sharks."

"That was the work of Drink of Beer, who had hated Earth Worm because he was a brave and strong man of Taoua. When this was told to Drink of Beer, he smiled and said, 'Earth Worm is safer where he is.'"

"I have talked too much. Your rum is very good. I thank you for your kindness. You will not forget to design to speak to the governor concerning the matter of the gun?"

I promised that I would not forget, and after a prolonged leave-taking the Shan-Shan man slipped silently down the trail and vanished in the moon-lit forest.

Le Vergose, a Breton planter who lived in Taka-Uka Valley, was full of canard, radiating friendship, a genuine tie, and giving to many friendly impulses. He had a two-room cabin set high on the slope of the river bank, unadorned, but clean, and though his busy, hard-working

"One day, we opened the hatches to get coal for the galley. The smell of gas arose. The coal was making gas. No fire. Just gas. If there was fire we never knew it. We felt no heat. We could find no fire. But every day the gas got worse."

"It filled the ship. The watch below could not sleep because of it. If we went aloft, still we smelled it. The food tasted of gas. Our lungs were pressed down by it. Day after day we sailed, and the gas sailed with us."

"The boat fell in a fit. A man on the t-rallant yard fell to the deck and was killed. Three did not awake over the side. The mate spat blood and called on God as he leaped into the sea. The smell of the gas never left us."

"The captain called us by the poop-rail, and said we must abandon the ship any time."

"We were twenty men all told. We had four whaleboats and a yawl. Plenty for all of us. We provisioned and watered the boats. But we stayed by the Mongol. We were far from any port and we dared not go adrift in open boats."

"Then came a calm. The gas could not lift. It settled down on us. It lay on us like a weight. It never left us for a moment. Men lay in the scuppers and vomited. Food went untouched. No man could walk without staggering. At last we took to the boats. Two thousand miles from the Marquesas. We lit a fuse, and pushed off. Half a mile away the Mongol blew up."

"We suffered. Mon dieu, how we suffered in those boats! But the gas was gone. We struck Vait-hua on the island of Tahuata. It was heaven. Rivers and trees and women. Women! Saer! How I loved them!"

"I came to Taha-Uka with Mathieu Scallamera. We worked for Captain Hart in the cotton, driving the Chinese and natives. Bill Fincher was a boy, and he worked there, too. In the moonlight on the beach there were dances. The women danced naked on the beaches in the moonlight. And there was rum. Mohutu danced. Ah, she was beautiful, beautiful! She was a devil."

"Scallamera and I built a house, and put on the door a lock of wood. It was a big lock, but it had no key. The natives stole everything. We could get nothing. Scallamera was angry. One day he hid in the house while I went to work. When a hand was thrust through the opening to undo the lock, Scallamera took his brush knife and cut it off. He threw it through the hole and said, 'That will steal no more.'"

"The hermit laughed, a laugh like the snarl of a toothless old tiger."

"That was a joke. Scallamera laughed. By gar! But that without a hand lived long. He gave back all that he had taken. He smiled at Scallamera, and laughed, too. He worked without pay for Scallamera. He became a friend to the man who had cut off his hand. A year went by and two years and three and that man gave Scallamera a piece of land by Vait-hua. He helped Scallamera to build a house upon it."

"Land from hell it was, land cursed seven times. Did not Scallamera become a leper and die of it horribly? And all his twelve children by that Henriette? It was the ground. It had been leprous since the Chinese came. Oh, it was a fine return for the cut-off hand!"

"I did not become a leper. I was young and strong. I was never sick. I worked all day, and at night I was with the women. Ah, the beautiful, beautiful women! With souls of fiends from hell. Mohutu is not dead yet. She lives too long. She lives and sits on the path below, and watches. She should be killed, but I have no strength."

"I was young and strong, and loved too many women. How could I know the devil behind her eyes

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