

A UNICORN IN THE BAHAMAS

by
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DEDICATION

FOR this journey of pleasure, in the wake of Columbus, for the opportunity to travel by sea and air among the 'islands of Eden'—which, in their primitive simplicity offer so astonishing a contrast to the diversity of violence recorded in their history—I am deeply indebted to H.E. The Governor of the Bahamas, the Hon. Sir Charles Dundas, and to the Bahama Government Development Board, especially to its President, the Hon. William Taylor, and its London representative, Colonel Thwaites.

To these three men I owe the impetus which started my journey westwards at a moment when I was planning to fly East on the inimitable K.L.M. planes.

To the Colonial Secretary, the Hon. James Jarrett, I am equally indebted for his invaluable assistance, without which, I think, we should never have reached many of the Out-Islands.

But, in the generous fashion of the Bahamas, many others helped me, not only to see as much as possible of and in the adventurous isles discovered by Columbus and cleared of human inhabitants by his successors, but to find the one place in the world where, in perpetual summer, beside a flower-coloured sea, I could build my House of the Unicorn.

Mary Moseley, whose long studies entitle her to be the historian of the Bahamas, contributed lavishly to the interest of my stay in Nassau and it was through her that I made acquaintance with such exciting personages as William Sayle, leader of the Puritan hundred who first colonised Eleuthera, Blackbeard the Pirate and Andrew Deveaux, who achieved the impossible. To her I shall always be grateful for the store of information which gave me a background for my island experiences.

To the Commissioners of Eleuthera, Exuma, Long Island,

Cat Island, San Salvador and Andros, I owe many happy and interesting hours. They took an infinity of trouble on my behalf and so are largely responsible for this book. Mr. Harold Christie, genius of Bahamian development, must also accept a share of the credit, for he found me a house in which to write—the perfect house, scarce removed from the seas which have played so great a part in Bahamian life.

To all the Islanders, therefore, who so warmly and helpfully welcomed me to their incomparable cays, I would dedicate this story of my wanderings where buccaneers, pirates, blockade-runners, Loyalists and Puritans, blazed the first trails.

I would like to pay special tribute not only to his Excellency who first put into my head the idea of settling on Eleuthera, loveliest combination of the possible and the improbable, and subsequently facilitated my purchase of land on this island, but also to Mr. John Hughes, the Chief Commissioner, without whose patience, efficiency and practical knowledge, neither land nor house would have materialised. To Gerald Lacoste, the brilliant young architect, who was kind enough to give shape and proportion to the house of my dreams and to Mr. R. Symonette who first encouraged me to build it and then, to my delight, decided to do so himself, I am equally grateful. My warmest thanks are also due to the Swedish America Line, on whose magnificent *Gripsholm* I made a pleasant voyage in eleven days to Nassau, and also to the Pacific Steam Navigation Company—which runs a comfortable monthly service between Plymouth and Nassau—on whose *Orduna* and *Orbita* I travelled on the steadiest of keels from Jamaica to New Providence and England.

In the Western Atlantic, my pleasure lies. For my friends who helped me to it, I write this book in the hope that, as the Bahamas have served me, so may I, in time, be able to serve these islands of incredible history.

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CHAPTER I

ONLY COLUMBUS IS LEFT TO US

THE world has grown smaller since, at Versailles, three men, ignorant of geography, took it upon themselves to treat frontiers as if they were the seams of ill-fitting garments to be repaired upon a tailor's bench. Europe has gone back to the years of barbarism when mercenaries fought wars in which they had no personal stake, at the bidding of kings and captains who regarded a map as a chessboard and humanity as the pieces in a game.

The Africa, wherein Herodotus wrote of village women speaking with the voices of birds—that desert Africa where I first travelled in search of a secret city—has been closed more effectively by an Italian army than by the superstitious fanaticism of the Senussi, reputed to sacrifice “the eye and the tongue of the unbeliever.”

The roads of Marco Polo, where the seven-tongued dragon conversed with him in “thin sweet tones” of a wisdom unknown to the West, are the battlefields of Japan and China. Closed also is the ancient spice-route, whose caravans left the bitter perfume of frankincense on the winds of Arabia. The tyranny of the last Emirs of Bokhara did not prevent nineteenth-century adventurers, a soldier, a priest, a criminal with imagination, from crossing the Afghan borders into Russia and China. To-day, the Soviet has forbidden the passage of the Oxus river. Its waters, cloven at times by the passage of a Turkoman kayuk, transient, swift as a wheeling gull, are the fortifications of an experimental social system.

The Silk Road from Peking to India and the empires of the West, by which, in freer centuries, travelled the ambassadors of the Chinese court, pilgrims, merchants, and men of learning, bound for the crossways of the world—

that most famous road of the Old World is barred by national and religious discord.

After twenty years of dispute, Clemenceau's summing-up of the treaty to which he was forced by "a man who thought himself Napoleon" and another "who thought himself Jesus Christ" has been justified. "Here is the basis of a just and durable war," said the great Frenchman to a Roumanian princess, in the winter of 1918, and D'Annunzio, troubled because he "owed himself to so many women" and could—at that particular gathering—find only one at a time to listen to him, paused in his calculated seduction of the ear, to retort: "Why do you speak in the singular?"

There were clever men at Versailles who knew exactly what they wanted. Benes, Zaharov, Venezelos, had no difficulty in dealing with the ignorance which confronted them. Mustapha Kemal saved the situation for the Middle East. There was no such rebel to follow his example in Europe, until Hitler treated the brittle fragments of Versailles as Attaturk had done the whole substance of the equally disastrous Treaty of Sèvres. Meanwhile, the world had narrowed until it offered less space than the map which Ptolemy made, ignorant of half the continents.

An Emperor of Ethiopia, Jewish by descent, could send a mission direct to the court of Byzantine Theodosius. Its chronicler relates that, when food failed, the travellers fed on 'dragons' blood.' To-day, Addis Ababa would have insuperable difficulty in communicating with Constantinople. Perhaps the old slave ways find tortuous passage through the thorns of Lasta and the still unconquered mountains of Simyen to the Red Sea. If so, crocodile or hippopotamus, equivalent of mediæval dragons, may yield nourishment in times of famine, but no learned men, "speaking Geze, the language of gods and kings," find their way from one fortified and forbidden land to another.

The eastward roads are closed. Marco Polo can no longer guide through the mountains and the deserts embroidered by his imagination. Vasco da Gama, Cabral and Albuquerque, the discoverers of Cochin and the islands of the Indian Ocean, lack followers this winter because Italy

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demands the right to barricade the Mediterranean between Sicily and Tunis.

When Asoka ruled in India, the Asian ways were open. He was the greatest of conquerors and, according to a Friar Jordanus, who travelled and wrote in 1324, "the last of the civilised dictators." When Cyrus reigned over 'the known world,' "Jews, women and barbers might walk freely from one end of the earth to another, with purses full of gold in their hands." They could not do so to-day. For science which created civilisation, has destroyed it. Weapons out of all proportion to our abilities have been put into our ignorant hands. We are no better in the twentieth century than the Moghuls or the raiding Mahrattas, but land-hunger, still the most primitive of all instincts, is supported to-day by the ultimate science of destruction.

There is little peace between Spain and China. The East is denied to us. Only Christopher Columbus is left to bear us westwards towards the setting sun.

In search of no new world, he sailed. To his mind, as to those of his contemporaries, less than 4,000 miles separated Lisbon from Han-Chau in the neighbourhood of Shanghai, the 'Kinsay' of Marco Polo, that "city of heaven" which was 25 leagues in circumference and so "abounded in gems and gold that the temples and palaces were covered with golden plates."

In between, of course, lay the Atlantic. According to the globe drawn on parchment by Christopher's contemporary and probable friend, the young Nuremburger, Martin Beheim, who travelled to Portugal in 1479, the Azores and the Canaries bounded the Western world.

The fabulous island of Antilia was reported to have been discovered by the last Gothic King of Spain and to have provided refuge for two archbishops and five bishops during the persecution following his defeat by the Moors. This "isle of seven cities" and the equally imaginative rock called 'Brazil,' placed by Beheim west of the coast of Ireland, roused the curiosity of British sailors. In 1480, a master-mariner called Thlyde sailed from Bristol as recorded in the chronicle of William of Worcester. After nine months in the Atlantic, he returned to Ireland, storm-

battered, without having seen 'Brazil,' but with rumours of another legendary island, real enough for Columbus. This was St. Brandon, called after the Abbot of Ailech who, in the sixth century, put to sea with no less than 3,000 monks to pursue a vision which fled always in front of him.

To Colombo di Terrarossa, the young Italian, leaving his native Genoa with his brother and close ally, Bartholomeo, in the autumn of 1473, these and other fabulous isles marked on the planispheres of Fra Mauro and contemporary cosmographers, must have appeared as stepping-stones on the ocean road, westwards to India. As the Lindberghs flew north of the Orient, so the earnest and exceedingly learned young navigator, who was also scientist and astrologer, heir to a great race of sailors, dreamed of as original a journey, but one destined to raid the wealth of India direct from the Atlantic.

Adopting a Spanish version of his original name, he set out for Portugal fourteen years after the death of Prince Henry the Navigator, whose vessels, between 1420 and 1468, had discovered the coasts of Africa. For ten years Cristobal Colon sought to obtain the support of King John II, arguing, to the scandal of conservative churchmen, that as all the earth and water in the world constitute a sphere, it was possible to go round it until men on one side stood foot to foot with those on the other. Two bishops and two physicians, one of them a Jew, were ordered to report on the illustrious Genoese's scheme. Secretly, the Bishop of Ceuta sent out a caravel to test, on the high seas, the correctness of the young stranger's deductions with the astrolabe. The seas were too high. A gale drove the ship back into port. Christopher, sickened at last by treachery on the heels of delay, left Portugal after ten years, the richer only for a voyage to Guinea and a motherless son. But he had acquired a friend in Paolo Toscanelli, the celebrated Florentine astronomer, with whom he corresponded at length.

Between the islands of the Indies, of which the largest, Cipango, appeared on Beheim's globe somewhat in the position of Japan, and the coasts from Ireland to Guinea, there was nothing, there *could* be nothing, insisted the Italian,

except the ocean. His imagination fired that of the disappointed Columbus, for Toscanelli, influenced by Marco Polo, wrote that, in Zailou alone (now Chwan-Chou-Fu between Fuchow and Amoy), there were at one time a hundred ships laden with pepper, as well as countless others burdened with different spices. The great astronomer quoted his conversations with an ambassador of the Grand Khan at the court of Pope Eugenius IV in Rome. Two hundred cities there were in Cathay, with marble bridges all built over the same river. Cristobal Colon could present his venture as a profitable business enterprise when at last he achieved the serious attention of Queen Isabella.

This remarkable woman was then engaged in the siege of Granada. It was 1491, and the Genoese had wasted seven more years, during which, in despair, his brother, Bartolomeo, had appealed to Henry VII of England. The usurper, narrow-minded, unimaginative, shrewd and cautious, had ridiculed the arguments of the two Colum-buses. But the Regent of France, Anne of Beaujeu, ruling on behalf of her young brother, Charles VIII, toyed with the idea until the faithful Bartolomeo was called to Spain.

The twenty-five years old Isabella, opportuned by her erstwhile confessor, Father Juan Perez, displayed again the astonishing force of character which had preserved her from assassination during the reign of her brother, had set her on the throne of Castille after the deposition of her niece, her sole right the will of the people, and subsequently made a success of the difficult marital alliance with Ferdinand, King of Aragon. When the fall of Granada was certain and with it the dominion of the Inquisition, the flight of the Moors, and the destruction, with the great library of Seville, of a civilisation which had no equal, Isabella turned her thoughts to trade. It was she who induced the Royal Council, with a treasury drained by war, not only to finance what seemed to them a ludicrously impossible venture, but to grant to an unknown foreigner titles and privileges which grandees of Spain hardly dared to covet. Eighteen years after he had left Genoa, excited beyond measure by a youth's dream of conquest, Columbus, appointed Admiral of an unknown ocean, Viceroy and Governor-General of lands as yet un-

named, with right to a tenth part of any precious metals discovered, and an eighth of the profit made by his ships, started to prepare for his first western expedition.

His hair was no longer red. His quick temper had learned control. A strong, grey man of forty-six, with a melancholy expression and admirable manners, his powers of speech brought him new friends as soon as he landed in Palos, the little Spanish town which had been ordered to supply him with two caravels, free of payment, as a punishment for some crime committed against autocratic royalty. Without the help of the great merchant family of Pinzon, long respected in Palos, it is doubtful if Columbus would ever have succeeded in getting seamen to sail with him to what they insisted was a certain death.

But the Pinzons had imagination as well as courage. From May to August 1492, the little town was roused to unnatural activity. Then, on a Friday at sunrise, watched by every man, woman and child who could force their way through the narrow streets, crushed between high, white-washed houses, on to the banks of the river, three vessels weighed anchor. The largest was of about 100 tons burden. She was the *Santa Maria*, with a crew of fifty-two, including the Admiral, the Master and owner, Juan de la Cassa, freeman of Santona, two surgeons, an interpreter, a silversmith, a steward, a page, a nobleman described as "a volunteer" and among the sailors one Englishman whose listed name (Tallarte) was probably a version of Alard, from Aethelward, and the Irish William of Galway.

Martin Alonzo Pinzon commanded the second ship, the *Pinta*, a caravel of 50 tons, with his brother as Master and a crew of eighteen. The third vessel, the *Nina*, of 40 tons, with a similar crew, was owned by the Nino family of Palos, three of whom sailed in her, but she was captained by Vicente Pinzon.

As the sun rose over the church of St. George, where the first adventurers to sail 'West-without-limitations' had received Holy Communion and the injunctions of the now very old Father Juan Perez to trust only in God and their Admiral, the standard of Castille was broken at the mast of the *Santa Maria* and her mainsail let fall. On it was

blazoned the sign of the redemption. So, with lateen sails dipping to the breeze and a host of white kerchiefs waving, began the most momentous voyage of history.

According to an exceptionally candid missionary, it resulted in an unbridled lust for wealth, torture in the name of religion, the extermination of an entire race and an immorality which re-peopled with blacks and half-blacks a continent yet unknown.

At the moment when Christopher Columbus sailed as he imagined for the Indies, with the cross on the hilt of his sword, with greed of trade and love of the Church in his heart, his eyes, we can presume, on the new compass—a steel pin fastened to a card painted with thirty-two points, a *fleur de lys* for the North and a cross for the East, the ends of the pin touched with loadstone, the whole mounted on a pyramid of brass, in a circular glass-covered box swinging on metal circles with the ship—at that same moment all the Jews in the Spanish province of Huelva were forcibly loaded on to State vessels. Like cattle they were taken down the river in the wake of Columbus. On the African coast they were landed and left there, in their heavy mediæval clothes, to save themselves from sunstroke and the Moors. Their descendants are still in exile. I saw them south of the Atlas, in the mud-walled city of Bou Denib. On the edge of the scarlet Hamada desert, sprinkled with a fungus which the Legionaries call sand-cauliflowers, these Jews, who speak their own dialect, wear the clothes of Isabella's contemporaries—stiff velvets and winged head-dresses, all the strange, ornate upholstery that we see in the portraits of the Middle Ages. Like rich petalled flowers, they grow out of the desert. They are desolate as other Northern growths carelessly transplanted to the tropics.

CHAPTER II

THERE MUST BE UNICORNS

EIGHTEEN years ago, no more and no less, I completed my first journey which was made in the disguise of an Arab woman. On the last night, sitting up in my sheepskin-lined sleeping-bag with the African stars above me and sand blowing into my eyes, I thought of the long forced marches, the hoarded water and handfuls of rice. I moved my blistered feet and felt the aching exhaustion of my body. The only break in the monotony of the desert—except the cliffs of harder sand—was the humped outline of a camel. It was pitifully thin.

Some day, I thought, I will travel without any purpose at all, or with one so fantastic that it does not matter. I will follow Columbus in search of something which does not exist. Even then, when I was very young—and pompous, I expect, because I wanted so much to learn things and know things—I was fascinated by Columbus. Surely no other man has made so great a mistake, or been so richly rewarded for his error?

Marco Polo was sent by a far-sighted uncle to acquire trade concessions in China. He achieved his purpose. So did the Dutch and Portuguese mariners who fought the Zamorin, Sea-King of Calicut, for a share of the Eastern oceans. But Columbus discovered an Eden pristine in its simplicity. He found himself, as it were, in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis and persisted in believing it a confirmation of Isaiah. For surely the incorruptible Toscanelli, astronomer and scientist, had much in common with the Prophet of Israel?

Eighteen years, the Genoese waited to make the most momentous journey of all time. Its cost can never be calculated, for Lucayan, Arawak, Maya and Aztec have disappeared. New races have taken their place. Peoples

who had no existence inhabit countries then in the womb of time. Incomparable courage and cruelty, faith, greed and labour bore a world to the pangs of life and of that more tragic process provisionally called civilisation.

Eighteen years, I had waited to make the journey of pleasure I had promised myself. Remembering the export of Spanish Jews from Huelva, I wondered if Hitler imagined himself original in his persecution of the citizens whose grandfathers had built the industrial strength of Germany. Five hundred years hence, some wanderer in the mountains of Abyssinia may find the ancient Hebrew kingdom of Falasha re-established, but I could not believe that, like the exiles of Bou Denib, the Israelites developing a land of milk and honey—for part of the Abyssinian plateau is not unlike the highlands of Kenya—would perpetuate the plaids and cyclamen cloths of Berlin.

September, however, was well in the background. I had ceased to worry whether I would be a cook or a lorry-driver, but I was still oppressed by the memory of the woman filling in an application for interpreter's work, just in front of me. "How many languages do you talk?" I had asked. "Not many," she replied with diffidence. "A dozen, I think, but only ten really well."

Decidedly, my journey of pleasure had better be in a direction where only English would be required.

All that speed means to a racing-driver, all that the air meant to Amelia Earhart, who, asked why she planned to fly round the world, replied in the voice of a well-brought-up but puzzled child: "Because I WANT to do it"—so much maps mean to me. The subtle and mysterious drinks offered at the furthest corners of the earth, the paheits with which planters in the Dutch East Indies keep time at bay, the fizzes and slings which put an end to coherent business in British Guiana before the sun is high, the ecstatic rum punches of Jamaica and those pine-apple specials stimulating the ingenuity of the Pacific, all these leave my reason unimpaired. But when I have a new map, I find it impossible to realise physical limitations. Morphine, cocaine or hashish can induce no more Olympian disregard for circumstance. With a map spread conveniently on a table,

all seas are calm, all rivers fordable, and all mountains provided with suitable passes. There are wells in every desert and every goat-track is a *route nationale*.

Columbus's faith in the cartography of Toscanelli is imitated by every traveller in love with a map. There is something hypnotic in the ease with which, by means of a few different-coloured paints, the cartographer eliminates distance. No doubt, the clowns of Versailles, tumbling Europe into disorder, felt this god-like superiority to fact, with which all of us in turn have attempted to navigate uncharted reef with sails splitting under the blows of a gale, or to cross a desert whose only landmarks are skeletons.

In January, there was a political lull. Hitler's charm and his apparent sincerity had prevailed. Since any form of intimate personal experience is far more likely to confuse than to clarify the general issue, Mr. Chamberlain, supremely honest in his own unchanging convictions, could not fail to be influenced by the German Fuehrer. For Hitler is convinced of one belief on Monday and equally sincere in a totally different opinion on Saturday. He is obsessed by his dual mission, to re-create Germanic Europe and to destroy Communism. He is not even Jesuitic in the means he adopts, for at times, talking to me, he has been so choked with physical emotion, that he has not been able to produce from protesting vocal chords more than the one word: "Germany! Germany!" Such a man could not possibly be relied upon to keep any promise, because words to him are never an expression of fact, or even of policy. They are—however reasonably he happens to utter them—the momentary ebullition of an emotion.

No doubt Mr. Chamberlain provided Hitler with a transient vision of Germany as the cement in a stable European building. Consequently, to the Englishman's genius as well as to his courage, most of us owe a few more months or years of life. Who can belittle such a gift? Certainly not I, as I planned to travel idly in the steps of Columbus. Westwards would my pleasure lie and for the months of respite—due to Neville Chamberlain—I would have no serious purpose save to find a unicorn.

For, somewhere, of course, these engaging beasts must

exist. When I was small, I saw over a mantelpiece laden with inherited chaos, a picture of a naked girl riding a unicorn. In the background there was satisfactory forest, the kind in which no tree could be separately distinguished and rendered ordinary by a name. Consequently, the whole remained mysterious. In lost Atlantis, in the fabulous isle which St. Brandon sought, there might be such intricacies of forest. Similar leagues disintegrate into indigo haze where Brazil and Bolivia meet on the Upper Parana. But in front of this particular forest pricked a figure dipped in coffee-gold upon a vast white animal with a horn in the middle of its forehead. Her hair was tangled and it blew wild in the wind. The unicorn's mane and tail were smooth as silk, but they also flew out, pennon-wise, as the great beast lumbered about its purpose. The rider was without reins or spur. In the dark grass there were flowers, moon-white and pointed. They looked like candles and I imagined they would be lit by the stars at night. Years and years it is since I saw that picture and vowed that some day I would find and tame a unicorn.

Everything else I have had to give up, like other people, regretfully sane. The centaurs and the fauns whose images we cherished as long as childhood remained to us have gone with the nightmares and the expectations of our youth. We have ceased to believe, at first, confidently, then hopefully, and at last, with bewildered disappointment, in our own personal importance. Few of us preserve the visions of which the centaurs were a symbol. We are fortunate if one fairytale remains to us. Mine has always been the unicorn. I refuse absolutely to believe that this engaging beast is a fabrication, or that his species is extinct with those monsters, all body and no legs, which a divine sense of humour created in keeping with primeval mud.

There *must* be unicorns, but where should I look for them? In some sufficiently fantastic and deserted country, of course, where the people think in terms of the Old Testament, without the limitation of clocks or calendars. Unicorns, I felt sure, could not live with a Four Years, or a Five Years Plan. They could not be organised or industrialised, disarmed or rearmed. Momentarily, I thought of

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Kenya where herds of zebras wander among the cattle. One of these boldly-striped animals might have mislaid a horn. Or, in the forests of the Congo, where I had seen the largest of all the gorillas, the silver-backed male, whom the natives worship as a god, there might be sufficiently strange shelter for a beast strayed from another century. But I imagine the unicorn fastidious. Like Marie Antoinette, he could not understand the populace clamouring for common bread. For him, no doubt, the world would be as wide as his unbounded imagination, but he would require wind, colour and a timeless simplicity. Kenya would be too sophisticated and the Congo too cluttered with vegetation.

Then I came across an enchanting document, describing the "*Voyage of the Unicorn*," a schooner, whose buccaneer captain made a fortune by nefarious means and buried it somewhere in the Bahamas. There was no need for further consideration. Christopher Columbus first sighted land at what is now San Salvador in those unbelievable islands which are mostly sea and always summer. Thither the good ship *Unicorn* had made her way through the father and mother of storms in search of a fight and a prize at the end of it. I would certainly follow—but in the most comfortable ship I could find—for this was to be pleasure—and when I discovered a unicorn I would buy the land on which it lived. "The soles of my feet would stop itching," which is the Arab way of saying that a nomad has taken to a sedentary life. Where reef and sea combine to produce the incredible colouring of crushed jewels, I would build a house in preparation for old age. In it, of course, there would be—for the convenience of my unicorn—that secret garden cherished by adventurers in thought.

CHAPTER III

“DIDN'T YOU FEEL ANYTHING AT ALL?”

LONG ago, when I had done nothing at all and Benito Mussolini was an editor in Milan, he asked me what I wanted to do with my life. Unthinking, I answered: “I want to live dangerously.”

The future Dictator looked at me with disapproval.

“What a folly!” he said. “I want to live alone.”

There was silence, but Mussolini enjoys speech. He hurried to employ it, affirming in the professorial manner which suits him:

“It is sometimes useful to think dangerously.”

That is one of the chance phrases I have remembered. Another was voiced by a girl in the beginning of her twenties. I met her two years ago on a liner homeward bound from South Africa. She had just achieved a doctorate of philosophy in Capetown. Thin and pale, she had the clearest features I have ever seen. Each one was perfectly proportioned and her head as well shaped. Her hair of bright gold fitted close, like the smoothest silken cap. She had brown eyes and freckles. In several languages, which she spoke equally well, but chiefly in German, because it is the most expressive, she talked to me, and my chief sensation was one of shame. For she said what she felt as well as what she thought. She had no poses of any sort, for she neither exaggerated nor belittled, with contemporary fear of over-statement, the emotions which she enjoyed. I have never met anyone with so clear an idea of value.

Longing for her approval, I extracted from the ship's library the last book I had written. It described a journey from Kabul in Afghanistan to Samarkand¹ and other places in Central Asia, with a passport whose seven days' Soviet visa I extended to several weeks. But of this breach of law,

¹ *Forbidden Road. Kabul to Samarkand* (Dutton).

which might have ended my existence in an Usbeg gaol and which often sickened me with terror, I made no account, because, to my disgrace, I had been influenced by the absurdest of all youthful crazes, familiarly known as 'debunking.' In the latest fashion, I offered a diluted account of a journey forbidden by the Soviet and unwelcome to the Afghans, satisfied because I had eliminated all mention of danger or fear, recording only the difficulties which were obviously amusing.

The young doctor, like Portia a just judge, returned my book without comment. When I insisted on criticism, she said impatiently: "Didn't you feel anything at all? Yes, yes, I know you've said just what you thought. You've described circumstances and people and places. I laughed over some of the conversations and over the absurd adventures you had, but there's no coherence in the book, because you never say what you were feeling. You could not have been so impervious and unafraid unless you have no mind at all. Tell me now, truly, what did you think about, what did you feel, that first night in Bokhara, when you'd had no food and couldn't speak any Russian, and were alone, with a fake passport in a Communist lodging-house and no chance whatsoever of getting away if you were discovered?"

"I felt like cold jelly."

"Well, why didn't you say so? It would've made the book much more real."

I knew better what she meant when I read Anne Morrow Lindbergh's account of a flight across the Southern Atlantic.¹ For she told when she was afraid and when—at most illogical moments—she felt sick. She told when, extraordinarily enough to the hardened land traveller, she bothered about clean beds and towels, and worried herself to exhaustion concerning bugs, or the necessity for using the belongings of a woman she suspected of tuberculosis. Out of all her fears, her dismay and her apprehensive impatience emerges a person as interesting and important as the journey accomplished—with such swift ease, compared to land exploration—in company with the husband whom she insists "never took chances."

¹ *Listen! The Wind.*

‘ ‘ DIDN’ T YOU FEEL ANYTHING AT ALL ? ’ ’

After this preamble, let me confess that I was, last January, more excited about going to the Bahamas, to which delectable isles anyone can purchase a ticket by Cunard or Pacific Steam Navigation or Swedish America line for a reasonable sum well under £50, than about any expedition necessitating months of preparation, the learning, perhaps, of a new language, negotiations with governments erroneously convinced of my connection with a secret service, or escape from such with insufficient material and the certainty that I would regret the omissions. For I have always been convinced that for everyone of us, intimately informed but helpless observers of the bitter events in which we would have given anything to participate, forced, therefore, to live by our brains instead of our hearts, there must be ‘ journey’s end.’ I do not know if Colonel Lawrence found it in the Quartermaster’s store at Wool, where he said he was safe from responsibility. In Printing House Square, Peter Fleming may have discovered a refuge from the over-emphasis he deprecated in China at war, or in Brazil insistent on searching for Colonel Fawcett. Francis Rodd left the Tuaregs for the less stimulating reticences of European banking. Gertrude Bell found the happiest of journey’s ends at the height of her work for Arabia and England. Freya Stark, I hope, will discover some Arab elysium where breezes laden with frankincense will stir the pages of her Pliny and Strabo. As for Ella Maillart, whose genius sees more in Turkestan and Tartary than anyone else can hope to do, she must pitch her final tent in the desert of Kizil Kum. Thither, she will probably have carried it on her back, self-sufficient and self-contained. For Alexandra David Neil, immeasurably the first of this century’s travellers, the only foreigner to have reached Lhasa, lived in it and left it undiscovered, there remains a Thibetan hermitage and the prayer-seat of a Buddhist nun, with both of which she is already familiar. Having settled thus the futures of contemporary travellers, I could set off with justification in search of my own particular unicorn.

For twelve days the *Gripsholm*, a liner of many thousand tons, ignored the storm which began in the channel, strengthened near the invisible Azores, and blew itself out

within sight of the Bahamas. During those days of ease, if also of considerable movement, I found it impossible not to think of Columbus on board the 100-ton *Santa Maria*, blown westwards on such persistent trade-winds that his crew, who seem to have been prime cowards, in constant need of reassurance, were terrified lest they should never be able to sail back to Spain. The magnetic variation affecting the compass was another cause for panic and it took all the Admiral's tact to convince his men that the Pole Star, not the needle, was at fault. A number of remarkable navigators had sailed the Mediterranean and the West Coasts of Africa without noticing the variation which the crews of the Spanish caravels made an excuse for threatening mutiny.

Columbus himself was much disturbed by the phenomenon affecting his compass and still more by the masses of rust-gold weed, known as the Sargasso Sea, floating beyond the Azores. Once again his crew lost their heads and as the sea-growth thickened, they decided they would spend the little of life remaining to them stuck fast in the berry-bearing weed.

Actually, Columbus's outward voyage was uneventful and without difficulties, so far as wind and weather were concerned. But three days before 'landfall,' his seamen gave full vent to their poltroonery and the Admiral had to exert all his powers of persuasion to obtain a short period of grace. The mutiny was reluctantly postponed and seventy-two hours accorded the greatest sailor of all time in which to discover a hemisphere. It was sufficient.

Thirty-five days after leaving the bay of Palmas in the Canary Islands, after several false alarms in which clouds banked on the horizon had been mistaken for land, Columbus himself saw a light. It was probably in some native canoe, but at the time everyone believed it on land. So the reward of 10,000 Maravedis promised by Queen Isabella to the first man sighting shore went eventually to the Admiral, in spite of the counter-claim of the *Pinta's* look-out who reported land four hours later.

On October 12th, 1492, Columbus set foot on the sand and rocks of the Lucayan isle of Guanahani. Clothed in steel armour, with scarlet cloak upon his shoulders, carrying

‘ ‘DIDN’ T YOU FEEL ANYTHING AT ALL?’ ’

the royal standard of Castille and Aragon, he scarcely waited to push a way through the rough, wind-blown grass. Within sound of the sea, he fell upon his knees and according to his journal, with tears pouring out of his eyes, gave thanks to the God in whose name hapless races were to be exterminated.

Before or after this momentous prayer, with the Pinzon brothers, captains of the *Pinta* and the *Nina*, standing on either side carrying banners embroidered with a green cross and the crowns of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Admiral took formal possession of the island which he imagined one of the group of Indies surrounding Japan, and named it San Salvador.

At that time the Bahamas were apparently inhabited by a pleasant and indolent race of Indians, who believed in a beneficent god, from whom came all that was good, including the Spaniards with their gifts of clothes, bells and beads. Columbus, writing to his sovereigns in Spain, describes these Lucayans, so soon to be sacrificed in the mines and on the sugar-plantations of Haiti—

This country excels all others as far as the day surpasses the night in splendour; the natives love their neighbours as themselves; their conversation is the sweetest imaginable; their faces always smiling; and so gentle and affectionate are they, that I swear to your Highness there is not a better people in the world.

Ignorant and credulous, but with a charming simplicity that suggested the young Adam before he found knowledge indigestible, the Lucayans had no weapons except spears tipped with fish-bone. Their wealth consisted of the small pieces of gold worn by headmen or chiefs in their noses. Unfortunately, the journal kept by Columbus during his first voyage was lost, but an abstract written on seventy-six leaves of parchment by Bishop Las Casas, the Admiral’s lifelong friend and chronicler, was found in the archives of the Spanish Duke of Infantado in 1791 and published in 1825. According to the humanitarian Dominican who pleaded in turn for the Indians and for Columbus himself after his unmerited disgrace, who raised no uncertain voice against the slave trade instituted by Portugal after her African discoveries and extended by Spain, the Lucayans

might have supplied the original mould of humanity. Slender and straight, with admirable features, they wore no clothes, unless one of them happened to have woven by way of amusement an apron from the fibres of cotton growing wild. Their dark hair was cut short and square at the nape of the neck. They lived by fishing and were excellent sailors. Some of their dug-out canoes carried forty or fifty men, and in these, or in smaller craft, agile as water spiders, they seem to have swarmed round the little ships of Columbus. Cotton and parrots, they offered, with the fruits and roots of the forest, in exchange for the gauds of glass and metal which the Spaniards had brought.

Columbus describes Guanahani as being very level, bright with green trees, with a huge lagoon in the centre of the island, but he only stayed forty-eight hours, for, misunderstanding the words and gestures of the Lucayans, he imagined they described a great king and a land rich with gold somewhere to the West.

It is strange that a man so honest and austere as Columbus, one vowed to the adventure of learning, who made his four transatlantic voyages for honour rather than profit, should have been fettered from the beginning and at last destroyed by his countrymen's lust of gold. When this Admiral of an uncharted ocean stood for the first time on blinding white Lucayan—or Bahamian—sand, ringed by sea-colours that he can never have imagined, with the peculiarly clear greens and blues of forest tapestry in front of him, he pressed his lips, we are told, to the hilt of his sword. By that cross, he must have sworn to bring faith to the wild, human youth he had discovered, but the desires of the old world defeated him. He could not keep faith with Castille, avid for gold, and with the primitive Indians who would rather die than work.

When Columbus weighed anchor on October 14th (1492) he took with him, by persuasion perhaps, for who would not accompany a god in a winged sea-chariot to heaven, half a dozen Lucayans whom he intended to educate as guides and interpreters. On the morrow he came to Santa Maria de la Concepcion, the Rum Cay of to-day. Then discovery pressed upon him. He could not keep pace with it. There

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were so many islands, and cloudbanks which took the shape of land. Two of his Indians escaped, but the appearance of Fernandina, now Long Island, must have consoled Columbus for their defection. For its harbour could hold a hundred ships—flat-bottomed they would have to be. And other Indians told—by what method, I wonder?—of an island to the south called Samoete, where gold was plentiful. This is Crooked Island to-day.

Scattering his ships, south-east, east, and south-south-east, the Admiral sighted it after three hours’ sail and found it “ the most beautiful land he had yet seen, with a delicious scent of flowers and many natives who brought balls of cotton and small spears to barter.” But there was no gold.

On October 25th, the Ragged Islands saved Columbus from a storm. He called them “ Isles of the sands ” and two days later, he sailed south-south-west from the Bahamas, a crusader blinded by other men’s need of wealth, to discover first Cuba and then Haiti, which he called Espanola.

Except for the few prisoners destined for a magnificent baptism in Seville, with a king and queen for godparents, the Lucayans were then left in peace upon their rocks and in their forests which must have contained fine timber. For seventeen years, the lovely but comparatively unprofitable coral islands, surrounded by protecting reefs, were forgotten by the Spaniards.

When Columbus returned to Seville after his first transatlantic voyage of seven months, he was received as an Alexander, or a Cyrus, by his delighted sovereigns. A second and much larger expedition was immediately planned and lest the King of Portugal should interfere in the new world which all Spain still considered the Eastern fringe of an old and familiar continent, an embassy was immediately sent to the Aragonese Pope, Alexander VI, who had once been a subject of Ferdinand. The wearer of the triple crown in Rome made no difficulties. On May 4, 1493, he drew an arbitrary line in mid-Atlantic from the Arctic to the Antarctic. It ran some hundred leagues west of the Azores. All lands discovered west of this line, and not already in the possession of a Christian power, were to

belong in perpetuity, to the sovereigns of Spain, on the sole condition that the natives should be converted to the Catholic faith.

Another world for his adopted country, other souls for heaven were, no doubt, the ambitions of the Admiral, as, in September, 1493, with seventeen vessels and a flagship, the *Marigalante*, of 400 tons burden, he sailed west once more. But this time, the crews were largely composed of conscienceless adventurers. Other ruffians followed. Haiti and Cuba became the goal of all who had nothing to leave or to lose at home. Thus hordes of wastrels poured into the new Indies. Gold, washed from their rivers, was sent back across the Northern Atlantic, where the prevalent winds were favourable. With it came complaints, lies, rumours of disputes and disorganisation.

At last, Ferdinand of Aragon, conscious of the immensity of the concessions granted to a foreigner, persuaded Isabella to break faith with their Viceroy of the West. Francisco Bobadilla was sent out to supersede Columbus (1499). Arrogant and brutal, his incapacity was only equalled by his avarice. "Make the most of your time," he said to the ruffians who crowded after him, convicts escaped from gaol, outcasts from monastery and court, "there is no knowing how long it will last."

Under his rule, the stream of gold borne eastward became a river. He trebled the revenues of the Crown, but the Indians died in their thousands.

Their sufferings were finally reported to Isabella, and Ovando was despatched to occupy the viceregal throne which Bobadilla had disgraced. By this time, all the scum of Spain seems to have gathered in the Indies. The new Governor, who had precise orders from Castille's queen that the Indians were to be treated as free men and paid for their labours, exceeded the worst atrocities of his predecessor. The missionary bishop, Las Casas, wrote:

I have found many [Indians] dead in the road and others gasping under the trees . . . crying "hunger, hunger!" Many killed themselves and mothers . . . destroyed the infants at their breasts to save them a life of wretchedness.

In those seventeen years of Bahamian peace during which

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the flat, green isles were forgotten, the Spaniards seem to have obliterated by means of torture, starvation and forced labour, the effective populations of Cuba and Haiti. Then Ovando wrote to King Ferdinand asking for permission to transport the Lucayans from their crystalline cays to the hell of the gold-mines. Authorisation was granted in May, 1509.

Once again the Lucayans, unchanged in their simplicity, greeted the visitors from heaven. They were told that, in appreciation of the welcome they had accorded the Spaniards on the occasion of Columbus’s first landing, that great man, kin to their gods and on familiar terms with them, had arranged for the islanders to rejoin in paradise the dead they had mourned, without themselves suffering the pains and the terrors of death. In winged ships, with their heavenly visitors as guides and protectors, the living would be taken across friendly seas, to join those of their kin who were already immortal. So the old story runs. Peter Martyr tells how 40,000 Lucayans were transported from the Bahamas, most of them ready enough to win an easy heaven, the others hunted and captured as if they had been beasts. It is recorded that bloodhounds were used to track the few who would otherwise have escaped.

When Columbus discovered Haiti or Espanola, the population was supposed to number some 1,200,000. To this must be added the 40,000 Lucayans, children of a temperate sun and of the morning of the earth, trapped and betrayed. Yet, fifty years after Spain took possession of the island, there were not more than 200 Indians upon it. Francis Drake, anchoring there in 1585, reported that not a native remained alive and that the Spaniards responsible for the obliteration of a charming, lazy, and unsophisticated race, without the needs which make for ambition, were themselves so poor that they used leather tokens instead of coins.

Once again, in those early days before Western history was written, a Spaniard visited the Bahamas. Ponce de Leon, conqueror of Porto Rico, sailed in search of the legendary Fountain of Youth, reputed well hidden among the deserted islands which had been Eden to the Lucayans.

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The story-tellers say that on a scrap of reef scarcely raised above the sea, he found a woman so old that he could not imagine her human. She told him of a fabulous spring on the island of Bimini and offered her services as a guide. Apparently, it did not occur to the Spanish soldier and sailor that any woman who knew of the Fountain of Youth, would have contrived some means of using it. Month after month, Ponce de Leon sailed about the Bahamas, but he never found Bimini. That is one tale. Another says he discovered the source, bathed in it and became so young that all his troubles were in front of him. A third tells how he transferred the crone to a friend, Juan Perez de Ortubia, it may have been this careless adventurer who found Bimini and the spring. Captain and ship's officers immediately bathed in it. They became cleaner, but not younger. Meanwhile, Ponce de Leon discovered Florida—in 1512.

For more than a hundred years the isles of the Lucayans—flat and green upon a flower-coloured sea—remained without a solitary human inhabitant. But they still belonged to Spain.

THE ISLANDS AS THEY WERE

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST ELEUTHERAN ADVENTURERS

AMAZING were the powers assumed in the Elizabethan era, by the sovereigns of Europe for the disposal of lands "remote, heathen and barbarous, not actually possessed by any Christian prince or people." In such arbitrary fashion, the red-head who was Queen and lover of England, granted to Sir Humphrey Gilbert in 1578, the right to "discover, finde, search out and view . . . countries and territories . . . and to occupy places within the sayd lands or countries of the seas adjoining."

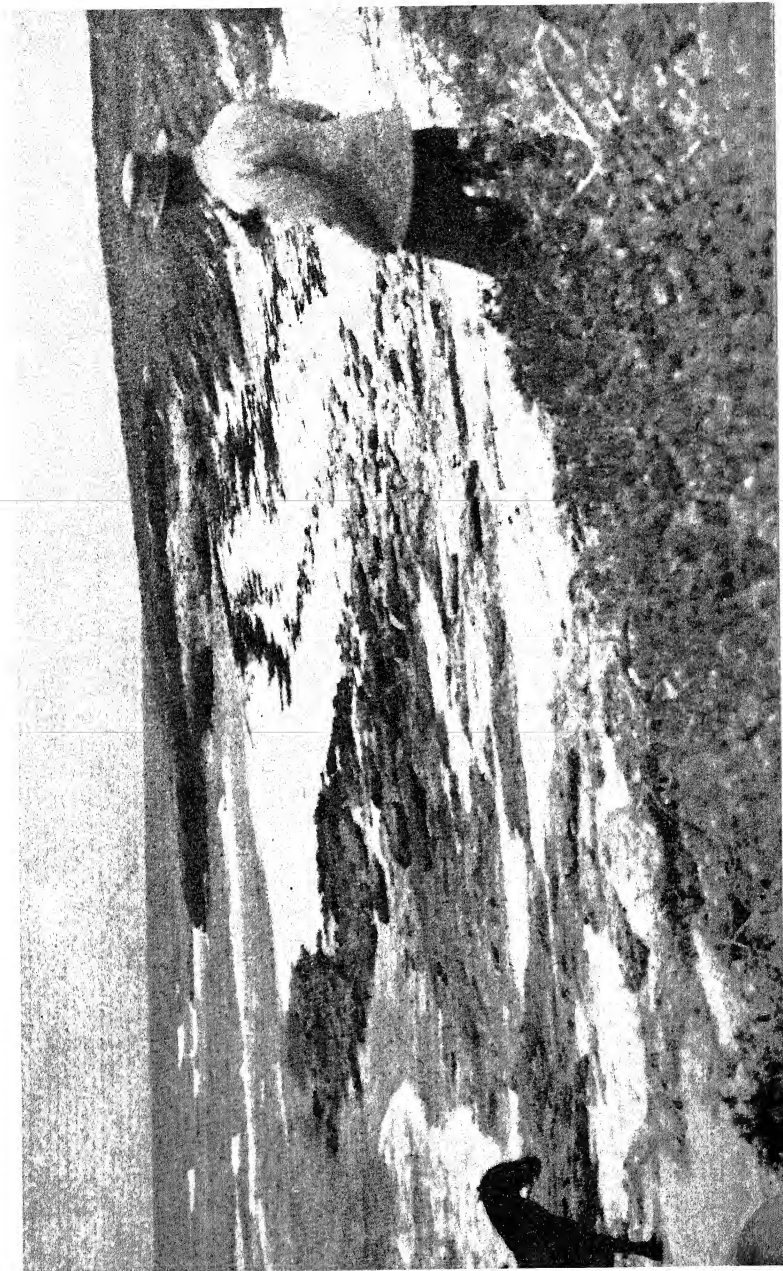
Those were the spacious days, untrammelled by wireless and the necessity for communicating with Whitehall, when Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher and Hawkins sailed as privateers not only to discover and to colonise, but to harry the Spaniards, with whom Protestant England was always more or less at war, to disrupt their trade and prevent them converting to Catholicism the bewildered Indians, far less important to either country than the gold for which they were used as tools. There can have been little difference at that time between the doubtfully legitimate business of the privateer and the illegitimate one of the pirate. Both sailed for gain and the hope of a rich prize. Failure meant disgrace to the former and a hangman's rope to the latter. Under the flag of Elizabeth, but also under the skull and crossbones, the vanguard of English conquest established the sea-roads by which trade and torture spread to the new world. Men of Devonshire and Cornwall, heirs of the Vikings from the weed-gilt bays of Western Scotland, above all men of Bristol, burned with the spirit of adventure. In their inadequate ships, naval frigates, four-decker galleons, hag-boats with narrow sterns and deep waists, two- or three-masted schooners fore and aft rigged, brigantines and roo-ton ketches, they took on anything the sea offered in

the way of commerce or a fight. They accepted mutilation after defeat, or the last Sacrament before boarding an enemy with the same indifference. They sacked a defenceless city, or attacked a fort ringed with cannon, delivered slaves or cotton according to contract, stole, brawled, committed indescribable horrors, died for an idea or a scrap of torn bunting at a masthead, showed prodigious courage, took life and lost it with equal unconcern.

Elizabethan Europe was in much the same turmoil as the Europe of Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler. The modern kingdoms were shaping. England, small, arrogant and interfering as usual, had reluctantly given up her claims to France and Scotland. Moorish rule in Granada had come to an end and with it the last outpost of Islam in Western Europe. But Africans were still employed as mercenaries in Spain and a civil war had left the country impoverished. Not so much difference there three or four centuries ago, but Germany was a confederation of free cities, states, principalities and bishoprics, recognising the Hapsburg Emperor with as much enthusiasm, I imagine, as the modern Germany, that vast, loose, incompatible conglomeration of political and commercial interests, acknowledges the Nazi régime. Then, as now, the eastward ways were closed. Not by the imperial ambitions of dictators, but by the invincibility of Islam epitomised in the fall of Constantinople, were the Eastern Mediterranean and the familiar sea-roads to India barred to the ships of Genoa and Venice.

By 1456, with the Crescent flying free where a Cæsar had victoriously throned the Cross, the most venturesome sailors of Holland, Italy and Portugal, sons and grandsons of the navigators who had discovered Cochin, Indo-China and the Dutch Indies, were forced to turn their round-ribbed flat-bottomed galliots, their shallows, sloops and 'tall ships' short-hulled and English built, westwards in the wake of Columbus.

None of these sea-rovers troubled about the Bahamas. Like great green turtles, round-backed, sleeping idle in the swell of the waves, they lay, deserted among the 'white seas' within their reefs. These are not really 'white' at all, but all the colours of delphiniums, with the velvet of





gentians, deepest of all living blues, streaking the clear brilliance of the clematis which Africa calls 'morning glory' or 'blue sunlight.'

Even Sir Humphrey Gilbert, armed with his Queen's sonorous authority, red-sealed on yards of parchment, did not reach the islands raped of their humanity. He set foot on Newfoundland soil and subsequently died at sea. So while Philip of Spain wrote furiously to Elizabeth complaining of her privateers as violent as her growing company of pirates and the, by this time, somewhat harassed Queen, who never had enough money to satisfy her sailors and her suitors, was instituting summary courts to decorate the Thames and stimulate the imagination of London's burghers with the sight of dead bodies hung in chains, the isles of the lost Lucayans dreamed on the breast of the winds.

Charles I was less expressive, but more practical than the great Elizabeth when he granted to Sir Robert Heath, Attorney-General of England, a strip of American territory, specifically including "the islands of Viejus," possibly a corruption of La Vieja, the habitation of the old woman who misguided Ponce de Leon, "and Bahama and all other islands to the South." A Protestant Prince would not recognise the prior authority of a Pope in Rome to dispose of the earth's surface. Yet Spaniard and Englishman apparently accepted the right of Christianity to steal from the native before painfully converting him and forcing him to labour, or less painfully, because more swiftly, putting him to death. But the Church of St. Peter, founded on rock, had split upon the rocks of the Reformation. Protesting England was still at the throat of Spain. The sea-raiders of both countries were less interested in political or religious heresy than in loot. Forerunners of Germany and Britain, or of France and Italy to-day, the representatives of the two most venturesome powers, each of whom claimed trade dominion and colonies as reservoirs of labour, went for each other whenever circumstances were favourable. There were protests in parliaments and in the speeches of ministers, there were atrocities recorded and denied. News was much the same in quality, if not in detail, 200 and 300

years ago. Where both parties during Spain's last civil war produced photographs which Conservatives or Communists hesitated to accept because the implications would be too destructive to our diverse but equally complacent convictions of civilisation, the mercenaries and the patriots of Tudor or Carolean England, with the Cross of Christ as their justification, made war as mercilessly as their Spanish rivals.

Southey, writing of the capture of the *Blessing* of Boston, by a Spaniard in 1683, tells how the crew were tied naked to mangrove trees in a Bahamian swamp, infested with mosquitoes and left there to die, each man near enough to his neighbour to be fully conscious of his agony.

In the House of Commons, a Captain Jenkyns made a singularly eloquent speech about his own ear, torn off by the Spanish when they captured his vessel. He produced the said ear in a bottle for the delectation of fellow-members. Latin politicians retorted with the tale of an Englishman who sliced both nose and ears from the head of a Spanish prisoner and forced his victim to eat them as an alternative to dying of hunger. Later, the accounts of diplomatic altercations suggest *The Times'* political correspondent of 1938. For one Edward Wortley Montagu assured the House of Commons that the Spanish justly complained of British actions at sea. He added that our Government "pretended ignorance and would order satisfaction when the complaints could be inquired into."

A British Minister in Madrid wrote that

the commanders of our vessels always think they are unjustly taken, even though proofs of their having been loaded in illicit manner be found on board them. And the Spaniards presume that they have a right of seizing, not only the ships that are continually trading in their ports, but likewise of examining and visiting them on the high seas, in order to search for proof of the fraud they have committed.

So the seventeenth century set an example for the twentieth.

At that time it happened that a Captain William Sayle, a Governor of the Bermudas and later of Carolina, was blown out of his course into a Bahamian creek which preserved him from shipwreck. It is supposed that this harbour

was the one discovered by Columbus on Fernandina, subsequently Long Island, but Sayle, unaware of the Olympian's visit, called his refuge by his own name. A second storm, even more violent than the first, forced him back to the Bahamas upon which, being devout after the manner of his contemporaries, he gave thanks to Providence and christened the island after the source of his salvation. Back in England the Captain sang the praises of this New Providence to such good purpose that several adventurers joined him with the intention of colonising the benignant isles.

In 1649, these first 'Elutheran adventurers' obtained by Act of Parliament the right to appropriate and settle the Islands in the West Indies betwixt the degrees of 24 and 29 north latitudes. It is not clear how many of the self-styled adventurers actually sailed with their leader to establish the first British colony in the Bahamas. Some, it seems, were armchair travellers who preferred their parlours to the sea. The others, more stalwart, were shipwrecked within sight of their goal. Religious quarrels had added to the discomforts of the voyage and when it was found that a number of bad characters had stolen a march on Captain Sayle and were already established on New Providence, the adventurers decided they had had enough.

Without law or charter, without even a leader, the villains or the exiles—history is not clear as to the character of these first land-buccaneers who had outwitted the pious Sayle—got on well enough until they were disturbed by other settlers from the Bermudas. These were law-abiding citizens who elected one John Wentworth as Governor and attempted to establish a Parliament.

By 1670, such varied tales, all of them well spiced with violence, had reached the Carolinas, citadel of Conservative Imperialism in the great British colony of America—which exchanged Curaçoa, still Dutch, for the then unimportant Netherlands city of New Amsterdam, now New York—that the Lords Proprietors, all men of position and wealth, appealed to Charles II to regularise the position. Whether it were a woman or a jewel, a charter, a country or somebody's head under the axe, this monarch—bitter, careless,

intelligent and lazy, with the wit and the gloom, later to be the heritage of the Bourbons, so that, of him also it might be said, "he learned nothing and forgot nothing"—was ready enough to give away what he did not want, especially when he did not even own it. So in 1680, he duly made a grant of the Bahamas, still theoretically Spanish, to six of the Lords Proprietors of South Carolina, the Duke of Albemarle, the Earl of Craven, whose English house contained a room for every day of the year and a staircase for every week, the Lord Berkeley whose castle is still haunted by the screams of Edward V, most horribly martyred in a tower, Lord Ashley, Sir George Cartaret and Sir Peter Calleton. By these Letters Patent, the said nobles and gentlemen were authorised "to make, ordeine and enact, under the seals, to publish any lawes and Constitucons whatsoever . . . with the assent and approbacon of the Freemen of the said islands." The ordinances made by the Lords Proprietors or their Magistrates were to be "reasonable and not repugnant," which seems to me a delicious phrase comparable to a bull enacted by one of the more enlightened Popes, asserting that, after consideration, he concluded the Indians of South America were human and must be treated as such.

Without waiting for Charles II's permission, the Imperialists of South Carolina had taken it upon themselves to appoint a Governor, who arriving in 1670 with great expectations "of love, honour, obedience and troops of friends," found none of these delectable perquisites. On the contrary, he was seized by some of the disreputable 500 who, at that time, constituted the population of the island, hustled back on to his ship and told to set sail for Jamaica.

This was the beginning of the most fantastic history that any country has known. For the isles of dawn with their bleached white sands and their air of having been newly washed and hung out to dry, with their legend of a faultless race and their incomparable horizons where sea, shore and sky meet in a pearl-pale diffusion of light, were to know no other prosperity than violence. One after another piracy, the slave-trade, wrecking, blockade-running and boot-

legging were to give them treasure too easily achieved to be hoarded.

Loveliest of all sea-born lands, where water and clouds reflect colours unknown to the rest of the earth, the Bahamas have been, in turn, the headquarters of vices so prodigious that they can only be measured in terms of heroism. Governors and pirates, forced at times into the same way of business, committed the unforgivable sin and paid for it in equally terrible fashion. The punctuation of a history written in blood was supplied by the Spaniards who, on occasions, descended upon the unfortunate islands with no other purpose than the pleasures to be derived from massacre.

In 1680, after seven years of lethargy, the Lords Proprietors, armed now with Charles's charter, bethought them of the duties they had, too hastily, assumed and subsequently neglected. So they despatched as Governor to the contentedly lawless New Providence, a Mr. Clark. His arrival coincided with that of a Spanish expedition. This destroyed the small settlement with customary thoroughness except that a few of the inhabitants, more fortunate or more ingenious than their fellows, contrived to escape to Jamaica. The newly appointed Governor was seized and—again with Spanish consistency—tortured to death. Some accounts say that he was roasted on a spit.

In 1684, there was another attempt to form a settlement, possibly because the King intervened. He required that the Lords Proprietors should immediately put an end to the piracy for which the Bahamas were now famous. Jamaica had repeatedly complained of the refuge given to ships flying the Jolly Roger and of the concessions made by a series of Governors for whom temptations of the flesh, backed by hard cash, were too much. Threatened with forfeiture of the two or three thousand islands so carelessly granted, the Lords Proprietors promised everything that the home Government asked of them, but their performances were limited to the sacrifice of a Mr. Lilburn, under whose governorate the Spaniards again sacked New Providence.

The reign of the Pirates then reached its height. The black flag went from success to success. Under its ominous

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folds, whole fleets sailed the ocean or sheltered in the secret harbours of the Bahamas.

The seas were always populous, for the volume of European trade went west. But the Bahamas remained almost uninhabited.

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE SKULL AND CROSSBONES

ONCE, I understand, an old lady—some say from Bristol, which city has always had a mind of its own—reading of the buccaneers who had reddened the Spanish main with the blood of seamen equally ribald, violent, superstitious and impervious to physical pain, reflected upon these sons of Belial, most of whom came to unpleasant ends, and stated her conclusion—that if we were all as diligent, painstaking and intelligent as the devil, we should greatly further our legitimate businesses.

For some forty years, between 1680 or thereabout and 1718, when a famous pirate, Woodes Rogers, was made Governor of the Bahamas on the despairing principle of 'set a thief to catch a thief,' such ruffians as Teach, Avery, Vane, Hornigold, Burgess, Fife, Rackham and Martell were particularly successful on the Western seas, but their business was not legitimate.

There was one buccaneer called Samuel Speed who struck the black flag when he had acquired sufficient wealth and became a clergyman of the reformed faith. As such he ministered to the crew of a British frigate in a roaring battle with the Dutch. It is said that when the enemy grappled, the pastor reverted to the language of the pirate and with a magnificent variety of oaths, put heart into the seamen of whom he led a boarding-party, cutlass in hand.

The best pirates, as well as many of the best merchant sailors, seem to have come from Bristol. First among these was the infamous Blackbeard, originally Teach, Tench or Thatch. He evidently had no use for a family name. In command of a captured sloop, he sailed with Hornigold from the Bahamas, whose unnumbered and uncharted creeks, salt-water lagoons and reef-protected bays were ideal sanctuary for the lawless, to the American coast, taking a

“billop” from Havana and later a “fine French Guineaman bound for Martinique,” which he armed with forty guns and in her, defeated, after an engagement of several hours, the King’s ship *Scarborough*.

It is extraordinary how helpless contemporary men-of-war seem to have been against the Atlantic pirates and one can understand the sensible criticisms of British merchants — “vermin congregate where there is food and if only His Majesty’s ships would follow the trades West they would be able to put an end to sea-rats.”

Blackbeard, having burned one of his prizes out of spite because she came from Boston where the citizens had witnessed an enjoyable hanging of pirates, lay outside the bar of Charleston “striking great terror into the whole province of Carolina.” In need of medicines for his seamen, the pirate demanded them from the Governor, adding that if a well-equipped chest were not immediately sent out to him, he would slaughter all the prisoners he had on board and send their heads to Government House.

In command of three vessels and with, I presume, the necessary medical supplies, he next sailed for North Carolina where, with twenty men, he coolly surrendered to the Governor in order to obtain the King’s pardon. It is probable that His Excellency shared Teach’s plunder, for he enthusiastically married the villain to a girl of sixteen, in spite of the rumour that there were already a round dozen Mrs. Teaches in the West Indies. In league with this particular Governor, Blackbeard made a business of plundering all the shipping which sailed down the James River. But it was here he was eventually caught by Lieut. Maynard of the sloop *Ranger*. The pirate’s ship had run aground, but Teach was no coward. He fought furiously, boarding the sloop, and was wounded twenty-five times with cutlass and pistol before at last he was killed. The fortunate Lieutenant suffered no more than a cut finger and he received a tremendous welcome from the citizens of Virginia when he returned with Blackbeard’s head hung up to the end of the bolt-spit.

Blackbeard, who is supposed to have buried his gold somewhere in New Providence, appears in a quantity of old

prints hung on blameless cottage walls within sight of the fort, as a terrific personage with hair sprouting all over his face. A contemporary describes him as tall and powerful with a fierce expression. "His beard grew from under his eyes and was plaited into many tails, each one tied with coloured ribbon and turned back over his ears." When going into action, the pirate wore a sling carrying three pairs of pistols and added to his "fearful appearance" by striking "lighted matches under the brim of his hat." He sounds as if he had been artificially constructed from all the terrors of our childhood, those "ghaisties and ghoulies and long-leggitty beasties and things that go bump in the night," which, ceasing to have the familiar shapes of furniture, assume dimensions and activities limited only by the powers of our imagination. Blackbeard must have been abnormal even among pirates, for one day, having drunk a trifle too much, which was unusual, he said to his crew who had been talking of heaven and hell—a customary subject of the period—"Come, let us make a hell of our own and see how long we can bear it." Forthwith he descended into the ship's hold with the more daring of his companions, closed the hatches, and having set fire to several pots of brimstone, choked, gulped and retched to the borders of asphyxiation. We are told that Teach endured the self-inflicted torture longer than any of the others.

On another occasion, he blew out the tallow candle lighting his cabin, fired off his pistols in the dark and having hit one of his officers in the knee, explained that if he didn't shoot one or two of them occasionally, they would not sufficiently understand his authority. A typical entry in Blackbeard's log runs thus:

Rum all out—Our Company somewhat sober—A damn'd confusion amongst us—Rogues a plotting—great Talk of Separation—so I look'd sharp for a Prize. Took one, with a great deal of Liquor on Board, so kept the Company hot, damned hot, then all Things went well again.¹

In 1690, a Governor of the Bahamas, one Cadwallader Jones, as unsuccessful as his predecessors, contrived to quarrel so prodigiously with his subjects that they seized

¹ Quoted in *The Pirates' Who's Who*, by Philip Gosse.

him and locked him in his own gaol. The hot-tempered official, whose tongue outran his wits, had an unnatural but powerful friend in the person of 'the successful pirate,' Captain Avery. This man released the Governor who was doubtless useful to him, represented somewhat forcibly to his subjects that they must treat authority more respectfully in future and sailed off about his business.

Avery seems to have been particularly successful in the matter of bribing governors. "Twenty pieces of eight and two pieces of gold" were sufficient in the case of New Providence. The Quaker autocrat of Boston demanded more and left the pirate, who was a coward, with an uneasy feeling that illicitly acquired diamonds were not as safe as he could have desired. They were the prize of his greatest exploit and the only one in which he fought and won against overwhelming odds. For having done well in the West African slave-trade, he burned, for fun, the town of Meat in Madagascar, sacked some of the Arab ports, joined two English and three American pirates under the guns of Aden, and set off in pursuit of the Mocha fleet. Catching up with them, he singled out the largest vessel and fought her for two hours. She belonged to the Great Mogul and her capture provided 100,000 pieces of eight, a quantity of jewels, some high dignitaries making the pilgrimage to Mecca, and according to unauthenticated legend, a daughter of the Mogul, beautiful of course. In spite of such booty, which made Captain Avery the talk of St. James, where he was credited with royal state and children as a result of his alliance with the captured Moslem princess, the pirate, having purchased a pardon, found himself outwitted in the matter of selling his diamonds, by the astute merchants of Bristol. They paid him a few shillings on account and went off with the jewels. Avery starved in Devonshire without leaving sufficient money to buy a coffin.

Captain Vane, notorious among the pirates of the Western Atlantic, was one of the few who refused to accept the King's Pardon offered by Governor Woodes Rogers in return for the Oath of Allegiance. Declaring that he would only surrender if allowed to dispose of his spoil as he chose, Vane sailed a sloop with a crew of ninety men out of New

Providence harbour while H.M.'s ships of war held the channel on the other side of what is now Hog Island. For some time he rested upon these laurels—and incidentally, an out-island of the Bahamian group, for the local geography was always his best accomplice. When a Government ship sailed into one of the octopus-shaped bays or creeks, any pirate with eyes in his head could always escape by way of another sea-tentacle.

Dutch, Spanish and English ships fell a prey to the invincible Vane, including Captain Thompson's brigantine with a valuable cargo consisting of ninety negro slaves. But his chief officer, Yeates, whom he had placed in command of a captured vessel, mutinied and with the blacks from the Gulf of Guinea on board, sailed over the bar at Charleston, with a defiant broadside at his late commander, to exchange his loot for a pardon.

Vane seems to have suffered from more mutinies than most of his colleagues, for the officer who took the place of Yeates, John Rackham, accused his captain of cowardice because he refused to engage a French man-of-war armed with superior guns and "a greater weight of Mettal."

Vane insisted that the Frenchman was "twice their Force and that their Brigantine might be sunk by her before they could reach on board."

Momentarily he won the argument, but when the man-of-war gave up the chase, Rackham, supported by the crew, who disliked being robbed of a fight after they had "liquored up and confessed their sins in preparation," bundled his captain into an open boat and set him adrift with provisions and ammunition. At the last moment, fifteen men jumped overboard to join Vane and with these the extraordinary devil who had his code of honour, for he would fly no false flag at his mast, succeeded in capturing three ships between the Bahamas and Jamaica. Before he had mustered a fleet of the size he coveted, he was shipwrecked on an uninhabited island. Chance came to his rescue in the person of an old acquaintance, Captain Holford, described as a buccaneer. There seems to have been a nice, if narrow, distinction between that career and

piracy, for, according to Archibald Hurd, who wrote an admirable history of the pirates, Holford told his "friend Charles" that he would only have him aboard his schooner as a prisoner. Otherwise Vane would certainly get "caballing" with his men to knock him on the head and run away with his "ship a-pyrating."

Vane was so surprised that his denials lacked conviction.

"Are there no Fishermen's Dories left upon the beach? Can't you take one?" asked Holford, anxious to help rather than to hang his lawless acquaintance.

Vane expressed horror at the idea of stealing a mere fishing boat, upon which the buccaneer, with more sense of proportion, very properly ridiculed "all this pother." He said:

Do you make it a matter of Conscience to steal a Dory when you have been a common Robber and Pyrate, stealing Ships and Cargoes and plundering all Mankind that fell in your Way. Stay here and be damned if you are so squeamish!

Upon which he sailed away.

Vane escaped a few days later by representing himself as a shipwrecked sailor, to the captain of a Jamaica-bound vessel. Working his passage honestly for the first time in his life and oppressed, perhaps, by an unusual sense of virtue, he happened to be on deck when an old friend of the captain's, sailing the same course, was invited to tranship for dinner. It was no other than Holford.

The buccaneer betrayed the pirate.

Vane finished the voyage in irons on his old acquaintance's vessel. He was tried at Port Royal, convicted and hanged. This fate he accepted with as much calmness as the notorious Gow, who, after hanging for four minutes, proved too heavy for the rope. Falling from the gibbet, he cursed, climbed up the ladder again, and "showing that the matter concerned him very little," was hanged for the second time.

Of the other pirates who made the Bahamas their headquarters, fortress and bank combined, Hornigold was shipwrecked on a reef and drowned.

Burgess, robbed and betrayed by his shipmates, thus forced to accept the position of third mate in a trading ship,

was poisoned by a local chieftain who had excellent cause for the murder.

Fife surrendered to that sturdy combination of old and new broom, Governor Woodes Rogers, received the King's pardon, and was subsequently slaughtered by his own crew.

Martell, who commanded a complete fleet, ran his ship aground when being pursued by H.M.S. *Scarborough*. His crew were either killed or died of hunger on a barren rock. Martell reappeared in command of a sloop, took thirteen vessels in three months and accepted the royal pardon from Woodes Rogers.

In *A General History of the Pirates*, by Captain Charles Johnson, there is an enchanting explanation of why the West Atlantic, centring on the deserted or still undiscovered Bahamas, was such satisfactory ground for piracy.

There are so many uninhabited islands and keys [now spelt 'cays'] with harbours convenient and secure for cleaning their vessels and abounding with what they often want, provisions (I mean water, sea-fowl, turtle, shell and other fish) where, if they carry in but strong liquor, they indulge a time and become ready for new expeditions before any intelligence can reach to hurt them. Another reason why these seas are chosen by Pirates is the great commerce thither by French, Spaniards, Dutch and especially English ships. They are sure in the latitude of these islands¹ to meet with prizes, booties of provision, clothing and naval stores, and sometimes money, there being great sums remitted this way to England—the returns of the *Assiento*—a contract between the King of Spain and certain other powers for furnishing negro slaves to the Spanish colonies of America, of the English agreement, lasting from 1713 to 1750, to deliver annually 4,800 negroes, and of private slave-trade to the Spanish West, in short, all the riches of Potosi,

that hill of silver in Bolivia which provided wealth to Seville on a scale as fabulous as Incan legend.

In the same more or less contemporary account of piracy at the height of its casual violence and ribaldry, a letter from one Captain J. Evans is quoted. Commanding the *Greyhound* galley with 250 slaves on board, bound from Guinea to Jamaica, he was boarded by some of Martell's company who had deposed their leader on account of his

¹ The whole of the West Indies group.

excessive cruelty. Having "made a pincushion" of the carpenter's "breech" because he knew where 190 ounces of gold was hidden on board the *Greyhound*, they threatened to torture the Captain by means of lighted matches fixed between his fingers. When he revealed the amount of money he carried, they sacked the ship and let loose the negroes whom they armed with knives.

Sturdy Captain Evans had a sense of humour. He tells how he could not refrain from laughing when he saw the pirates return to their own ship,

for they had, in rummaging my cabin, met with a leather powder bag and puff, with which they had powdered themselves from head to foot, walked the decks with their hats under their arms, minced their oaths and affected all the airs of a beau, with an awkwardness which would have forced a smile from a cynic.

It is delightful to imagine Captain Evans, himself delicately and suitably powdered, coping, without other arms than handspikes, with the negroes and their knives. He did it to perfection, after "first summoning my people aft and telling them our security depended on our resolution."

I do not think there is any record of the great Welshman, Sir Henry Morgan, arch-pirate and first of the infamous "brethren of the coast," taking refuge *in* or anything else *from* the Bahamas. He sacked the supposedly impregnable city of Panama, captured 200 mule-loads of gold, silver and valuable goods, deserted his loyal, fantastically courageous and comparatively sober companions, and was officially thanked by the Council of Jamaica. Of this island he later became the popular Deputy Governor, in spite of the treaty of 1670 made between Spain and England for the purpose of "restraining depredations and establishing peace" in the Americas to which both powers laid claim.

Rackham, who succeeded Vane in the piracy, by that time as well organized as any other sea-trade, is chiefly famous for his connection with the two women pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny.

The history of these two girls is the most extraordinary of all the tales centring round the Bahamas. Mary's mother, according to a chronicle of the time, "met with an

accident which had often happened to women who are young and do not take great care." The resultant girl-child was brought up as a boy for no clear reason, except that she would thus be more likely to win the affection or inherit the insignificant fortune of her supposed grandmother. As it happens, there was no fortune, so Mary became foot-boy to a Frenchwoman of breeding. This did not suit her at all. She ran away to Flanders and succeeded, her secret still inviolate, in entering a Regiment of Foot as a cadet, which meant that she would have the right to a commission should her services prove of military worth. Being without a penny to buy the rank to which, it is said, her courage continually entitled her, she ran away again and enlisted as a cavalryman. As such, after winning the approval of her officers, for she was bold and strong, she fell in love with a handsome young Flemish trooper. At first it was generously imagined that she was out of her mind, "for she became neglectful of all other duty than to halve his dangers and protect his life." But, sharing a tent, she allowed the youth to discover her sex as if it were by accident.

He was not a little pleased [says Captain Johnson in his diverting history], taking it for granted that he should have a mistress solely to himself which is an unusual thing in a camp, since there is scarce one of these campaign ladies that is even true to a troop or a company. But he found himself strangely mistaken.

Mary insisted on marriage. She won her point and the wedding, "which made a great noise," was celebrated in the presence of curious and amused officers who contributed to buy the young couple's discharge.

For a time they kept an eating-house, which was also "an ordinary" near the Castle of Breda in Brabant, but the profits shrank with the end of the war. The husband died and Mary enlisted again. Wearied by peacetime soldiering, she followed her usual habit of running away. This time she became a sailor, shipping on a vessel bound for the West Indies. Rackham captured the schooner with many others and Mary joined his crew. She was in the Bahamas when Woodes Rogers offered the King's pardon and availed herself of it, so the next time she sailed was on

a privateer with the legitimate purpose of capturing Spanish merchantmen.

Unfortunately the crew mutinied. Why should they plunder for the sake of the government? It would be more profitable to pillage the Dons for their own pockets. Mary proved herself among the most resolute of the newly formed pirate band. First to board a prize, most effective in the shambles of a fighting ship, the only thing she never ran away from was death.

Sailing under Captain Rackham, she attracted the attention of his mistress, Anne Bonny. This girl was the illegitimate daughter of a solicitor who left Ireland, where he had loved altogether too much and without any discretion at all, for Carolina, taking with him the child whom he intended should be his heiress.

When she had grown to "a fine appearance," she proved her possession of a "fierce and courageous temper" by killing her English maid with a knife. Otherwise, says the engaging Captain Johnson, she was a good and dutiful girl. Nevertheless, she fell in love with and secretly married a young sailor. He had neither prospects nor principles. So when he discovered his heiress to be without a penny and her father unwilling to acknowledge the marriage, he sailed on the first ship needing an able-bodied seaman. Anne was left, but not long, lamenting. For she caught the attention of Captain Rackham, known as Calico Jack, the most admired devil of the coast. He courted her in suitably whirlwind fashion, married her in some manner satisfactory to them both, and took her aboard his ship bound for New Providence. That long, lean island with its thousands of satellite reefs and its venial officials, always figures in the romances or dramas of piracy.

Except when she was giving birth to her children in some secret Cuban retreat, Anne, wearing trousers and shirt, with a great number of weapons belted about her and a kerchief tied round her long hair, was as active as any of the men with marline-spike and cutlass. But her affections were apt to wander. She set them on Mary Read, whom she thought a fine young fellow but altogether too modest. Mary "knowing what she would be at and being very sensible

of her incapacity that way," according to the Rabelaisian Captain Johnson, was obliged to acknowledge her sex. Captain Rackham had to be let into the secret because he vowed, in a fury of jealousy, to cut the throat of Anne's new lover. After that, the three sailed peacefully about their terrible business and both women proved themselves adequate butchers when they boarded a prize which had taken toll of the attacking pirates.

One more astounding incident is related of Mary, for she fell in love again, this time with a fellow-sailor, whom, in spite of her rigid virtue, she deliberately seduced. Yet she was generous in her passion, for her lover quarrelled with another pirate and as they were anchored near one of the smaller islands, it was arranged that the two of them should go ashore and fight according to the custom of their profession. The survivor would return.

Mary did not try to persuade her lover to refuse the challenge. Cowardice she abhorred. But, knowing the strength and experience of the other sailor, she contrived to pick a quarrel with him. To protect the youth she desired and cherished, she then arranged to fight their mutual enemy, two hours before the combat previously arranged. As a man, she was able to meet the enormous pirate on equal terms. Fighting with sword and pistol she killed him on the spot.

If the fair youth, surprised by the sex of his comrade in an iniquitous trade, had no particular regard for Mary before the battle which possibly saved his skin, "this action," says Captain Johnson, "bound him to her for life. . . . They applied their troth to each other, which Mary Read looked upon to be "as good a marriage in conscience as if it had been done by a Minister in church."

Their union did not last long. For in October of the same year, 1720, an armed sloop, dispatched by the Jamaican Government for the express purpose of capturing Rackham, engaged this pirate's ship. The crew of ruffians behaved with cowardice and folly. Their lives were at stake, yet they would not fight. Easily driven below decks, they sought hiding-places among their ill-gotten cargo while alone in the clear sunlight under the flag they had well

served and would not strike, Anne and Mary fought fiercely until they were taken prisoner.

At Port Royal, the ancient capital of Jamaica, they were tried with the men for piracy. In spite of some sympathy, for they must have been striking figures and Anne's father "was known to a great many gentlemen, planters of Jamaica, among whom he had a good reputation," they were condemned. The Judges seem to have been more antagonised by Anne's separation from her legal spouse, whom some say she deserted at New Providence in favour of Rackham, than by her piracy, but they allowed her a last interview with the unreliable Captain. From it Rackham can have obtained little comfort, for Anne told him—with reason—that if he had fought his ship like a man, he need not have been hanged like a dog.

At the foot of the gallows she acknowledged, with reluctance, according to local legend, her impending maternity. In another account, she is said to have pleaded the fact at her trial. Reprieved, she passed out of the history of piracy.

Mary Read, who had once said that "as to hanging, she thought it no great Hardship, for were it not for that, every cowardly Fellow would turn Pirate and so unfit the Seas that Men of Courage must starve," died of a fever in prison before she could be executed.

Pregnant, she denied the paternity of the young sailor whom she insisted at their common trial was an honest man unknown to her. For want of evidence against him, he was set free.

Mary also might have found favour, but she would not belittle the robust faith according to which she had lived. Asked what pleasure she could have in such enterprises where her life was continually in danger by fire or sword, she replied that if it was put to the choice of the pirates, they would have no punishment less than death, the fear of which kept many dastardly rogues honest. Without it, she insisted, the ocean would be as crowded with such rogues as the land and no merchant would venture out, so that the trade of piracy would in a little time not be worth following.

CHAPTER VI

“LIONS LED BY ASSES”

WHILE piracy recruited more apprentices than any other trade in the Western Atlantic, it was natural that the ‘Brethren of the Coast,’ Labour Union and Masonic order parodied, should refuse to countenance any Governor of the Bahamas who would not support or at least connive at their activities. The position must have been highly undesirable, and it is surprising that any man of sense accepted the appointment. By this time trade was so hazardous that no English ship would venture near the Bahamas without an escort. With some justification, the Spaniards made their repeated descents on New Providence. The Protestant heretics, they considered, were fair game. They could not keep any form of law and order in the possessions they had filched from Spain, and they had no right to be in the Western Atlantic at all. Pope Alexander’s Bull was still authoritative to the subjects of the most Catholic King.

Mr. Cadwallader-Jones appears to have realised the impossibility of his task after Captain Avery released him to the further mercies of his subjects. He left New Providence. A Mr. Trot succeeded him in the last decade of the seventeenth century. I imagine him an amiable little man disposed to the good things of life and the easiest ways of obtaining them. For he did not quarrel with the curious people he had been sent to rule. Accepting their habits since he could not change them, he asked only to be left alone. Piracy flourished, the new commerce of wrecking was instituted, and the Lords Proprietors in Carolina were satisfied that their islands were at least ‘governed.’

During Mr. Trot’s term of office, New Providence was fortified. In 1695, under instructions from the Lords Proprietors, the island Legislature, which, since the days of

the first Proprietary Governor, John Wentworth (1671), had nominally consisted of a Parliament with an elected Lower House, passed Acts for the construction of a fort and a city to be named after William of Orange, hereditary Stadtholder of Nassau. So came into being the town which Villon, in the mood of his visit to the Hague, might well have similarly named "the most beautiful village in the world," or, at least, the most enchanting. For Nassau, pink, white and yellow as a stick of candy, is like no other place in the world.

In the days of Mr. Trot, the innocent appearance of the hamlet, trimmed as it were with the masts and yards of schooners, must have provided an engaging contrast to the fort. The tapestry of shipping, bleached grey against the brilliant seas and the delicately pale skies from which all colour seems to have been wrung into the water below, was in danger from everything except the twenty pieces of cannon on the hill. For wrecking was now nearly as profitable as piracy. Indeed, the fortunes of the house of Normanby were laid by one Phips, who had served his apprenticeship as a marine carpenter in New England. Spurred by a taste for adventure, he served before the mast on a schooner bound for the Bahamas. The town of Nassau was momentarily thriving. Wrecks were numerous—and fortunately situated. Phips, who had imagination, heard of a Spanish treasure-ship, sunk fathoms deep, North of St. Domingo, possibly where "Phip's plate" is now charted. Calculating the cost of purchase and recovery, the ship's carpenter came to the conclusion that the fortune he had already made by judicious although startling means, would be insufficient. Undaunted, he sailed for England. The second Duke of Albemarle lent the required sum. Phips, bold, clever and sufficiently honest, returned to the Bahamas, recruited a "pestilential company" whose only idea was to plunder the wreck and their employer for their own benefit, kept them in order without the aid of Nassau's twenty pieces of cannon, and returned to the court of St. James with £300,000 worth of silver salvaged from the wreck. The rest of the treasure was divided among the evil characters of New Providence, who had helped in

a process with which, from beginning to end, they were familiar.

James II bestowed a knighthood upon Phips and there was some talk of his being appointed Governor of the Bahamas. Probably, he was too wise to accept an honour which could only be successfully held by the dishonest. For a Mr. Webb succeeded in 1697 to the task invariably shirked by his patrons, the Lords Proprietors. He must have been an astounding person, for, outdoing all his predecessors, he absconded with any property he could lay hands on, having sold his privileges and commission to a mulatto.

Without the knowledge of the Tory Lords in Carolina, whose conviction of superiority to the coloured races might have been rudely shattered, the half-caste succeeded in balancing upon his theoretically august but in fact precarious seat, until 1701, when a Puritan called Elias Hascott was hurried out to New Providence.

Armed with the Testament and an unrivalled command of Biblical language, he proposed to restore the prestige of his King, his noble patrons, and his race—the three more accurately represented his religion, perhaps, than the complications of the Old Testament. But he failed to impress the people of Nassau. The town had grown. It now comprised some 180 houses. Their owners were of all colours and fiercely partisan. When Mr. Hascott seized the enterprising mulatto and clapped him into irons, the usurper's friends, with admirable promptitude, did likewise with the new Governor. The situation deserved a historian with the gall-steeped humour of Boccaccio.

Eventually, Elias Hascott and his authorities, biblical and mundane, were thrust on to a ketch and shipped, much against his wishes, to the furthest spot of which the rebels had cognisance. This happened to be England. The mulatto, regretted, it is said, by the privateers, pirates and wreckers who had prospered under his rule, retired into the sort of life which would give him opportunity to enjoy his gains.

The minority of law-abiding citizens chose to assert themselves. They selected from among their own number, a

Mr. Lightwood to act as Governor. Their settlement was small because of the extraordinary mishaps which continuously befell the islands. But, no doubt, they intended administering it in a manner no longer discreditable to the Proprietors, setting a fashion for generations of absentee landlords, and to the harassed Imperial Government. But Mr. Lightwood proved himself unbelievably careless.

For 200 years the Spaniards had made a habit of pillaging the Bahamas, so His new Excellency should have been prepared for their next arrival. Three times at least, they had taken Nassau and held it, if not for as long as it pleased them, for a sufficient period to incommode the British buccaneers who made it their headquarters. In July, 1703, French and Spaniards descended together upon the now fortified town. Of Mr. Lightwood's feelings there is no available account, but the island was so much surprised that it failed even to garrison the fort. The enemy blew up everything of a military nature, spiked the guns, sacked the town, enjoyed themselves vastly with such young women as were available, and sailed off to Havana with the Governor and the principal inhabitants as prisoners and the general feeling that 'a good time had been had by all.'

Intent on completing so agreeable a revenge upon the nation which had wrested from them the discoveries of their greatest Admiral, the Spaniards returned three months later. This time they carried off every human being on whom they could lay hands. A few succeeded in escaping into the bush with which New Providence was then covered. Fugitive and destitute, these eventually reached the coasts of Carolina or Virginia. But once again Spain had obliterated the seed of Adam upon the Bahamas.

When the Lords Proprietors, disturbed by lack of news, which in those days travelled slowly, even under the spur of disaster, sent out another Governor, several years had passed. Imagine the amazement of this Mr. Birch when he landed upon a completely deserted island. Being a man of sanguine and cheerful disposition, he caused the servants he had brought with him to build him a hut, not among the ruins of Nassau, but in the surrounding woods. There he waited, with patience, for someone black, white or brown,

to appear. But he had no chance even of reading his commission. There may have been birds. There were certainly lizards. But there was not a single human being on New Providence. When Mr. Birch could stand the solitude no longer, he set sail, sadly, for Carolina.

He was the last person with a respectable errand to visit the island for many years. For it was the pirates who rebuilt the fortifications of Nassau. Blackbeard even instituted a Court of Justice—or maybe injustice. It was held in the open air under a fig tree, and summary executions were carried out under the supervision of the Judge, seated comfortably in the shade.

Blackbeard's treasure is still supposed to be buried among the islands. A fellow pirate, who died a crossing-sweeper in London, is said to have asked his redoubtable captain whether any of his fourteen spouses, scattered about the Indies, knew where the gold had been hidden. Blackbeard replied that only he and the devil shared this knowledge. Whichever of them lived longest would make use of it. So far, Lucifer has kept the secret.

By 1718, the whole Western world was protesting at the negligence of the Lords Proprietors. For this purpose, the Spanish Governor of Havana used as much ink and paper, or was it still parchment, as his British colleague in Jamaica. The merchants of Bristol, seeing the whole of their Atlantic trade at the mercy of an iniquitous confederation with a fortress, a constitution and a parliament of their own, gave the Imperial Government no peace at all, until they had extracted a promise to deal with the rogues of New Providence.

The Lords Proprietors may have been glad to cede so complicated a responsibility. They had appointed thirteen Governors, each of them a failure, and some so spectacularly deficient that the manner of their exit from Nassau must have startled the Americas, if it did not rouse them to ribald laughter. So, after forty-seven years of misrule, or no rule, the Bahamas returned to the Crown. George I sent out Captain Woodes Rogers, a celebrated navigator from Bristol who had rescued Alexander Selkirk, the original of Robinson Crusoe, from the South American isle on which he had

been shipwrecked. This man was of a different calibre from the other Governors, and he brought with him a disciplined and well-paid troop numbering 100 fighting-men.

In his time, Rogers had dealt effectively with a number of mutinous crews, none of whom repeated the offence. He had knocked into valuable shape the scourings of press-gangs. He had been wrecked with a crew which he described as "A third were foreigners, while of Her Majesty's¹ subjects many were taylors, tinkers, peddlars, fiddlers and haymakers, with ten boys and one negro."

In Brazil, he had made such firm friends with the Portuguese Governor—after an exchange of shots between ships and coastal guards—that he and his "musick" were invited to take part in a Catholic religious ceremony. With two trumpets and an hautboy playing "Hey boys, up we go!", the British captain and his half-drunk sailors marched at the end of a procession—

Fryars carrying lamps of incense, an image dressed with flowers and wax candles, then about 40 priests, followed by the Governor of the town, myself and Capt. Courtney with each of us a long, wax candle lighted.

After the ceremony they were "splendidly entertained by the fathers of the Convent." Not to be outdone, Rogers next day dined and wined the Portuguese on board *The Duke of Bristol*. "They were very merry and in their cups proposed the Pope's health to us. But we were quits with 'em by toasting the Archbishop of Canterbury." The guests were so overcome that they had to sleep on board, being unable "to keep their feet, and their heads having already gone from them." Rogers put them ashore next morning with a cheer "from each ship because we were not overstocked with powder."²

The Captain must have been blessed with a peculiar gift for making friends, for in Guam while Spain and England were at war, he exchanged entertainments and "musick" with the Catholic Governor and having partaken of "60

¹ Queen Anne.

² *A Cruising Voyage round the World*, by Captain Woodes Rogers, 1711.

“LIONS LED BY ASSES”

dishes of various sorts,” he repaid such indulgent hospitality with the gift of “two negro boys dressed in livery.”

When this surprising and resourceful man was announced as future Governor of the Bahamas, the pirates held a last session of their parliament. Resistance was suggested. The subsequent debate was violent. But prudence or cowardice prevailed. The rogues’ assembly was dissolved with the constitution that had never been written. The most persistently lawless fled to Bermuda. Of the 2,000 ruffians who had exploited the islands, ruling during the last years with despotic authority and no fear of reprisals, about half were prepared to accept the King’s pardon. This was the chief weapon in the new Governor’s armoury, but he had others.

The landing of Woodes Rogers must have been a remarkable sight. The notorious Captain Vane had sailed out of Nassau harbour as the King’s representative arrived. The rest of the pirates decided to supply a guard of honour. Between two lines of sea-murderers, firing salutes from their muskets, the amused Rogers marched ashore. He granted 1,000 pardons and hanged every man who subsequently recanted from respectability. But the “port of lost men” which had known such diverse forms of infamy can have seen nothing stranger than a representative of law and order, who had sailed on many a lawless venture, inducted into his office by men without any form of law but their own. Some of them may have been his shipmates on merciless voyages. Perhaps they paid tribute to the old relationship with an extra salvo as the Captain, undisturbed, marched up the street at the mercy of their muskets and pistols.

Nine of the unrepentant he hanged at once upon trees that still flourish in the gardens of the new Colonial Hotel. The ghosts of these may attend upon the cocktail-drinkers in the discreetly lit ‘Coco-nut Grove,’ but they would, no doubt, be depressed by the dilution of rum with fruit-juice. On the other hand, duly confessed and absolved, they may sleep soundly in their graves. For Woodes Rogers, realising the need of repentance as a key to agreeable location in the next world, kept his victims waiting for forty-five

minutes under the fresh-foliaged gallows, so that pastors or priests should not be disappointed.

One of the condemned was rescued at the last minute by the ardour of his friends, now sworn officers of the Crown. They pledged him to a future so innocent that it must have made him shudder, and as a result reft him from the tree of death.

One stalwart rover regretted aloud that he had been "too easy-going as a pirate" and another kicked off his tasselled shoes at the last moment because he had sworn never to die with his boots on.

In the King's House upon the hill, the new Governor, drinking port, not rum, smoking perhaps a long-stemmed clay pipe, was busy with his plans. The era of summary courts-martial, of drum-head executions, of citizens turned into civic police, of a curfew at sunset and a hastily recruited local militia under officers drawn from the imported hundred patrolling a disillusioned town, was to be succeeded by one of sewerage and sanitation. Husbandry, less profitable but more wholesome than piracy, was to occupy the attention of seamen who had no use for the land except as a hiding-place for treasure, or as the setting for an orgy of women instead of drink. Yet, in the eleven years before he died, at Nassau, Rogers succeeded, in two separate terms of office, in reducing the turbulent colony to a state of surprised and sullen acquiescence. He created a representative House of Assembly and adopted for his charge the coat of arms which appears on the Great Seal of the Bahamas and also on the Bahamian halfpenny of George III. He forced the infamous Brethren of the Coast to grow pine-apples, coconuts and castor-oil. Their spirit must have been broken until they realized that wrecking could be made to look accidental.

The islanders pursued their new, well-ordered ways in an odour of sanctity with the additional smell of fleece, for I suppose no wolves trouble to wash their sheep's clothing. Would they risk its ill-fitting appearance in an official dip? Simultaneously, unexplained lights began to appear in places convenient for the new traffic. False channels were marked. Beacons that led only to destruction were seen

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all over the islands, at Abaco in the extreme north, at Bimini, a thorn, or more literally a rock, in the path of navigation, at Eleuthera with its repeated call to adventurers, even at Harbour Island, too lavishly beautiful to be virtuous. With the connivance of treacherous pilots and lights changing to will-o'-the-wisps, wrecking became a prosperous and well-organised business. Receivers of ships' merchandise waxed as rich on shore as the fiends who did their work admirably on the reef.

“I'm not out for humanity. I'm out for wrecking. It pays better,” said a villager with more sense than heart.

There is also the story of the minister and congregation, devoutly upon their knees when news of a wreck was brought to the church. Every man leapt to his feet and made for the door. Women and children crowded after them. It was a race for who could first reach the shore. Only the pastor was left at the altar. “Here you! Stop!” he shouted. “Wait for me! Let's all start fair!”

At the very moment when the Bahamians were supplementing the agriculture enforced by Woodes Rogers with tentative wrecking, the Imperial Government were considering, with new interest, the importance of these islands to the Crown. Then, *as to-day*, their “situation in time of peace was capable of great improvement in trade.”

Spain was in command of the early eighteenth-century markets, with France and Holland as competitors. To-day, America and to a lesser extent, Germany and Japan supply the stores of Columbus's Indies. “In time of war,” decided the early Georgian politicians, the Bahamas would be “of the greatest consequence, cruisers and privateers from there being better able to obstruct and annoy the homeward bound ‘enemy trade’ than a much greater force could do from any other parts of the British colonies.”

The Bahamas are still a key to Panama and the Pacific.

The same prophetic document commended Captain Woodes Rogers for recovering the islands which had been a “nest of pyrates,” plundered thirty times by the Spaniards. It refers to his defeat of the same aggressors, who “after three several preparations at more than £100,000 expense, attacked him with 2,000 men, though he

had no manner of assistance, but what he engaged on his own personal credit." At that time England had actually declared war against Spain (1719) and Woodes Rogers, unlike his predecessors, was prepared for attack. He had taken the precaution of removing to less vulnerable abodes the eleven inhabitants of Cat Island, lying directly in the Spaniards' passage, who might be captured by the enemy and forced to act as pilots. News of an expedition consisting of two galleys, two brigantines and two sloops with 1,500 men, having reached the Governor's ears, he instituted martial law, provisioned the fort, rationed the remaining food, put an embargo on shipping, and ordered Harbour Island and Eleuthera to send all but ten able-bodied men to the defence of the capital. Not till 1720 did the threatened invasion materialise and this time the Spaniards, attempting to land on the east coast of New Providence, were frustrated by the determined defence of Woodes Rogers' guard.

No wonder that Whitehall, unusually grateful, recommended the addition of another company to the garrison of Nassau, the erection of more fortifications under the supervision of a government engineer, the loan of two ships of war, a salary for the Governor on a military establishment, and permission for everyone "to trade equally in order to draw more inhabitants to the place."

With such encouragement, it was supposed that the islanders, growing more than was necessary for them to eat, would become respectably self-supporting. "If they should not effectively be secured, they must sooner or later inevitably fall into the hands of a foreign power . . . which would be very dangerous to British trade. . . ."

The last paragraph might have been written to-day, with Germany or America specified instead of Catholic Spain.

CHAPTER VII

BOMBAZINE INSTEAD OF BLACK BUNTING

THE reign of respectability having been established, and bombazine made fashionable instead of black bunting, settlers of good character began to arrive, among them a number of Germans escaping from the religious difficulties of the Palatinate.

After Woodes Rogers's death, the Bahamian House of Assembly started to take its powers with portentous solemnity. Considering that it had every right to criticise the King's representative, if it disapproved of his conduct of the Government, it presaged the independence of later centuries by declining to continue the salary of £200 a year voted to Governor Tinker upon his arrival. As a result, the House was dissolved.

This was the first of many disputes between a succession of British Governors and the independent if sometimes ignorant islanders, growing more and more insular in spite of trickles of immigration, swelling into considerable streams after the American War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War between the North and the South. There were times also, when the tide turned the other way and everybody who could raise the passage money left the ill-fated islands for the mainland of America. Of such was the Governorate of Richard Fitzwilliam in 1733. This personage was, it seems, as arrogant in his superior way as the tyrants of the skull and crossbones era. It could be said of him that, like Lord Chesterfield, he was never rude without intention. But the effect of his intelligent persecution was greater than he can have intended, for the colonists left in a body, and when, too late, he was recalled to England for trial, the islands once again were exceedingly sparsely inhabited.

Internal dissension came to an end when Turk's Island

was seized by the French in 1764. The islanders swore vengeance, but they had not time to carry it out, for the British Ambassador in Paris threatened more effective reprisals. Coral reef with sand spread thin under ragged bush was not worth an international war. Turk's Island went back to the Bahamas, and by 1760 they were regarded as of sufficient importance to warrant the appointment of what the Colonial Office would to-day describe as "one of their own picked men."

This General William Seely, formerly Governor of Massachusetts, found his charge even more important than he had been led to expect. For the American War of Independence, to the Loyalists a revolution, began in 1775. New Providence became the objective of the young American navy. The first fleet, sailing proudly under the new flag of America, descended upon Nassau with the object of capturing the stores of ammunition believed to be in the fort.

The incomparable Mary Moseley, historian of the Bahamas, to whom all Bristol sent messages when I sailed in the wake of West-country mariners, recounts in her excellent *Handbook of the Bahamas*, how the newly-hatched fleet, under Admiral Ezekial Hopkins, was intended to intercept the famous Lord Dunmore, harrying the coast of Virginia. But the two narrow-minded patriots, sharing the same blood, the same language, and the same faith, inspired by identical principles, urging their men into action, no doubt, with the same appeal, 'For God and country,' the one fighting for unity and the other for liberty, were not destined to meet. The pious Ezekial's ships were held up by ice and they could not leave the Bay of Delaware for several weeks. Making for Abaco, the nearest island, still conscious of its hardy inheritance, stiffened by the winds of the north, the squadron, consisting of eight ships, with 102 guns, arrived off Nassau on March 3rd, 1776. "A party of 200 marines under Captain Nicholas, and fifty sailors under Lieutenant Weaver, landed near East End Point" and marched to the colour-washed town which always looks as if the gay, inconsequent houses were so many delicate prints hung on a line after very careful scrubbing. Both Fort

Montague, where there is an enormous pink sugar cake of a hotel to-day, delectable inside and out, and Fort Nassau (where Blackbeard's treasure may still be buried, since workmen digging at the foot of the hill discovered quicksilver which, originally buried in casks or skins, escaped as liquid ore when these decayed) surrendered without resistance. One can only imagine there must have been some sympathy on the part of townsfolk and garrison for the rebel colonists. The links between island and mainland had been constant, the spirit was the same. Pioneers, breaking ground on new frontiers, the Bahamians may have had a certain understanding of the political and social philosophy which, in centuries to come, strove to transform a despotic empire into a liberal commonwealth of nations.

An undertaking was given by Admiral Hopkins that the town would not be plundered.

The Grand Union Flag (bearing the Union Jack in the corner and thirteen red and white stripes in the field representing the thirteen colonies) adopted as a standard for the army and navy by the rebellious 'American' colonists, was hoisted over Nassau.

It flew for one day only. For the invaders had no intention of holding the town, nor, to the immense surprise of the inhabitants, who by this time must have been accustomed to less chivalrous warfare, did they interfere with civilian business. "Most of the powder," says Mary Moseley, "had been shipped to Boston"—still loyal—"the day before their arrival, but they took over 100 guns besides a large quantity of shells and fifteen barrels of gunpowder." They also took the Governor and the Inspector-General of Customs as hostages. But this can have startled nobody, for it was not so long since Bahamian Governors must have looked upon it as an appurtenance of office to be captured, exiled, imprisoned, or tormented to death, unless, of course, they were sufficiently careful and clever to escape with the first signs of trouble.

On this occasion New Providence inflicted swift revenge, for the infant American fleet had to report 200 cases of small-pox contracted at Nassau. In addition to such calamity, the good Admiral Ezekial failed, on his return voyage, to capture that contemporary British hornet, *Glasgow*, which

continued to trouble the coast. So he received not only the congratulations, but also the censure of his country's newly elected Congress.

Apart from this naval episode, in no way an event, the Bahamas were not much concerned with the War of American Independence until it came to an end. But in 1782 the much-tried island of New Providence was captured by the Spanish for the last time. Don Juan de Cagigol, Governor-General of Cuba and Havana, who had a lordly manner of fighting and as spacious a conception of his country's privileges, descended upon Nassau with no less than 5,000 men. Colonel Maxwell, hardy Scottish borderer and heir to centuries of 'reiving,' wherein no man or his cattle was safe from a neighbour, could not oppose him with 170 invalids, recovering, I presume, from the same pox. He capitulated upon the honourable terms suggested by the Spanish nobleman and the Bahamas remained—nominally—under the suzerainty of the most Catholic crown till 1783, when the Treaty of Versailles, signed by Great Britain and Spain, restored them to Protestant ownership.

Meanwhile, as usual, the unexpected had happened. Colonel Andrew Deveaux, young, brilliant and audacious, left St. Augustine "with a handful of ragged militia and two privateers," making for Harbour Island, where his gay, quick tongue as much as his handsome appearance in the uniform of the loyal South Carolina Militia, gained support for his extraordinary purpose. For, at his own expense and with no more than sixty-five men, he planned to recapture New Providence. In his subsequent official report to Sir Guy Carleton, he has the pleasure to inform His Excellency that on April 1st—so suitable a day for so splendid and successful a folly—he formed the intention of restoring "to the blessings of a free government" the inhabitants of an island which surely could no longer be startled by any occurrences.

Nobody has attempted to explain the success of Deveaux's venture. With a cheerful set of recruits from Harbour Island, expecting nothing if they had any remnants of common sense, or hoping, perhaps, for the best while gallantly prepared to accept the worst, Colonel Andrew

sailed for New Providence. A philosopher once defined courage as "continuing to attempt the impossible without any chance of success." The phrase might be applied to the infinitesimal expedition bound—logically—for defeat. Yet the first thing it did was to carry the Eastern Fort of Nassau and summon the citadel to surrender. Two days later, Deveaux was, miraculously, it would seem, in possession of the "two commanding hills," which no mountaineer has ever been able to distinguish—so flat is the heedless island, steeped in sunshine. Erecting a twelve-pounder battery on each inconspicuous rise, the adventurers, justified by success, hoisted the English colours and "within musket shot of the grand fortress" again demanded its capitulation. His Spanish Excellency can never have guessed the inadequacy of the force opposed to him. Some say that Deveaux had adopted the old expedient practised by Cortez, Pizarro and Sir Henry Morgan, of landing obvious boat-loads, withdrawing the men secretly and relanding again and again the same details, so that the enemy would imagine vastly superior numbers making ready for attack.

To a force which at no time, even when Harbour Island had generously contributed most of its male population, ranging in years from sixteen to sixty, numbered more than 220, a third of them armed with farm implements, Antonio Claraco y Sanz surrendered four batteries with seventy pieces of cannon, four large galleys (brigs and snows) and several forts, defended by as many as thirteen twenty-four pounders.

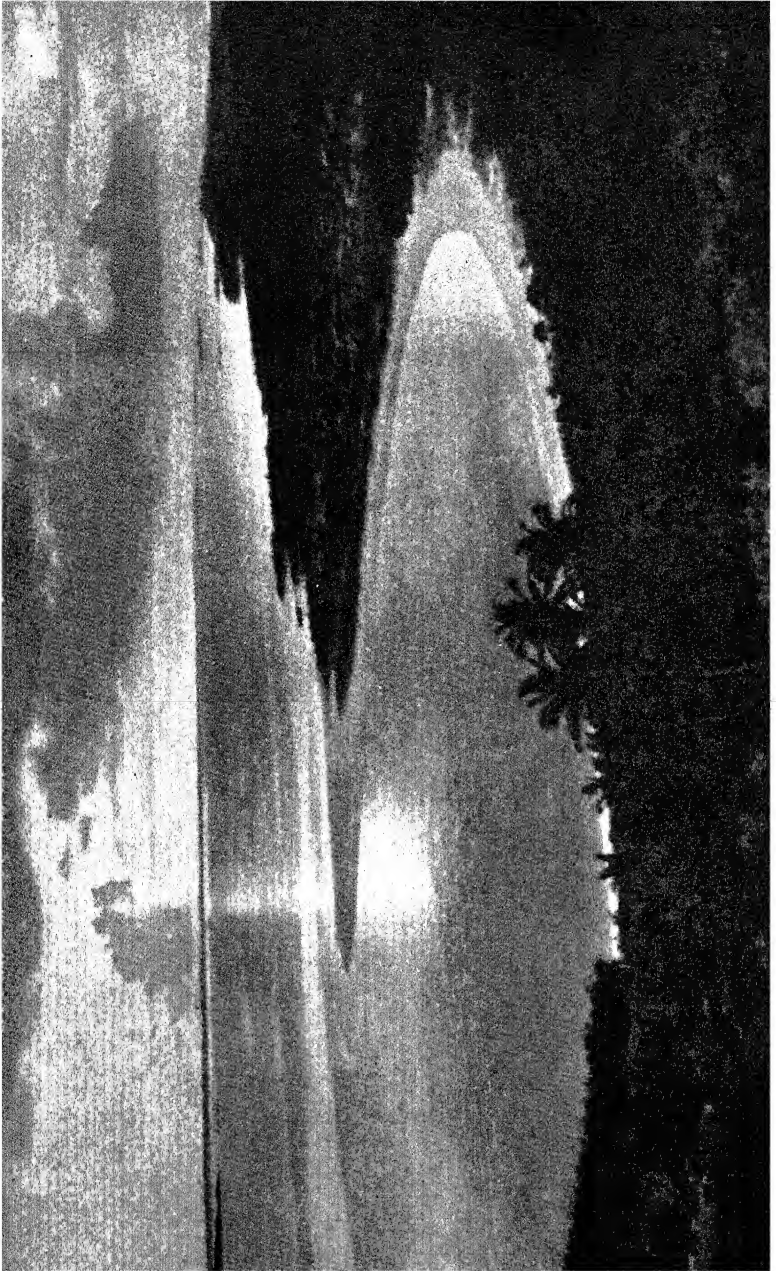
It is said that the Spaniards made no attempt to conceal their mortification when they discovered the ludicrous size and equipment of Deveaux's force. Their Governor, prudently refusing to return to Havana, insisted on being provided with a suitable ship to take him to a less censorious Europe. The whole episode was "of a gentlemanly character." Nobody could have been more generous than Deveaux, or, oddly enough, more honest than the Spaniards, who kept their bargain, even when apprised that it was unnecessarily bad. In no account, Latin or Anglo-Saxon, is there any mention of casualties. These were, perhaps, inconsiderable and the light-heartedly gallant Deveaux,

having won an impossible fight, may—in the days without purpose which followed his victory—have agreed with the Arabs who say: “Achievement is the price we pay for the right to venture.”

The Treaty of Versailles, officially ceding the Bahamas to His Britannic Majesty, gave Florida to Spain. This was mightily disturbing to the Tory Loyalists, who refused to become American citizens after the thirteen colonies had won their freedom from Great Britain. With the end of the War of Independence, there was an exodus from Carolina and Georgia and even from New York, similar in scale to that of the Boer Voortrekkers, tramping beside their wagons, with their families and negroes, in search of freedom, even though it were accompanied by poverty. The stalwart, sullen and fiercely independent Afrikaners went north to break ground virgin to the white. The Loyalists of America, more fortunate, went south to islands partially cultivated. For once, the British Government gave whole-hearted support to the refugees, who, having lost their first choice of a retreat in Florida, were determined at all costs to remain British subjects.

In September, 1784, Lieutenant-Governor Powell was ordered to grant unoccupied lands in the Bahamas—“To every head of a family 40 acres and to every white or black man, woman or child in a family 20 acres at an annual quit rent of 2s. per hundred acres.” But, in the case of Loyalist refugees from America, “such lands were to be delivered free of charges and were to be exempted from the burden of the quit rents for ten years.” Simultaneously, Governor Patrick Tomin of East Florida gave public notice that the last transport vessel would depart on March 1st, 1785, and advised all persons of English blood to leave for the Bahamas, before Spain took possession of their present homes.

Large numbers of loyal fugitives, men of means, slave-owners and cotton-planters, sailed from the rich, leisurely Southern States, where, for generations, they had lived with dignity and ease and some regard for intellect, upon ships provided by the British Crown. They took with them all the property they could save from their embittered com-





patriots, struggling, under a new flag, with a host of difficulties previously ignored. Silver and pictures, furniture, slaves and implements, together with the best of the live-stock, were hurried on board the transports which sailed continuously—but not without considerable foreboding—from the mainland. Fourteen hundred Loyalist refugees came from New York. The garrison and military stores were hastily shipped from St. Augustine. Eight companies of Militia volunteered for service under a familiar flag in islands of which they must have heard both the best and the worst. At that time, there were about 800 whites on the Bahamas and three times as many negroes.

It is surprising that the great host of Loyalists, escaping the result of a campaign wherein the British army earned the description of "Lions led by Asses," could find food, or any form of lodging immediately after their arrival. They must have been particularly adaptable, even though they were never without money. For, so far as it is known, it was only 'substantial households' who migrated with a satisfactory store of goods and black chattels. The most prominent, particularly those who had fought for the mother country against her rebellious offspring, were lavishly compensated for the loss of their American land. If this money was invested in the Bahamas, it explains the growth of a seigneurial manner of life. The 'great houses' of the plantations on the mainland were duplicated on the islands in simpler style perhaps, but still adequately furnished with the needs of a contemporary gentleman, horses, cattle and slaves, with good food at table and sufficient land to satisfy his deepest sense of being in that position to which the Conservative God of peerage and squirearchy had seen sensibly fit to call him.

Altogether, six or seven thousand persons are supposed to have migrated from the new American Republic and their advent changed the whole social and political structure of the Bahamas. The islands, idyllic to Columbus, infernal to the harassed and dubious official Administrators during the reign of piracy, now became prosperous as well as virtuous. They even achieved an aristocracy, for, with Lord Dunmore, last Royal Governor of Virginia and formerly

Governor of New York at the helm, peers and squires were tempted by the supposed possibility of emulating the fortunes made by their friends in Jamaica. They came, however, to exploit the islands, not to serve them. The richest and least responsible became absentee landlords, leaving overseers in charge of their estates and slaves. The second generation numbered men of great name, familiar to St. James's, who never lived on their Bahamian properties. These, of course, depended for survival on two things, slaves and cotton. The cultivation of the latter was attempted on a scale sufficient to disturb the Western markets. On Long Island, deliciously idle to-day, with a dreaming air of peace, such as one finds after midday in sun-steeped streets of Provence, 4,000 acres of thin soil, needing faithful attention, were served by some 800 slaves. There were forty plantations on Crooked Island, as many and more on the other isles as far south as San Salvador. Mahogany trees, not as red as the magnificent Californian giants, and various other hardwoods, supplied the deficiencies of families who wanted only to be comfortable until they had made the fortunes necessary for spendthrift England. The forests disappeared under the ruthless axes of the new Colonists. With them went the rainfall upon which the coral islands had thrived and the birds and wild animals. Except for the flamingoes on Inagua, that magnificent pageant of winged tulips, rose-red or flame-coloured, standing close and stiff as the heavy-headed bulbs in the fields of Holland, the Bahamas give an impression of silence and immobility. At first I did not understand the reason. Then I realised there were very few birds. The early mornings are soundless. Moon and sun have no winged worshippers, ecstatic in their praise.

There are lizards and there are also a moderate number of insects. The chenille and the red bug destroyed the cotton plantations wholesale in 1788 and again six years later. By the end of the century, the plantations had ceased to thrive. The slaves, overworked in the fields, should have been as grateful for the depredations as the owners were indignant. With the gradual disappearance of a great acreage white with cotton fluff, they had less to do,

while the Colonists found occupation for their spare time in quarrelling with the Governor or supporting him against the Legislative Assembly. At this time, in England, King, Lords and Commons were involved in acrimonious struggles. In the colonies, governors and governed followed suit. The Bahamas had produced a new type of settler, with his financial interests rooted in the soil. Unlike his lawless predecessors, he had nothing to fear from the Government and he was determined that its form and activities should suit his own convenience.

The Loyalists, of course, were the strongest party in the island, and they were as patriotic, self-willed, intelligent, intolerant, at times outrageous and at others merely far-sighted, as the extravagantly independent settlers by whom officials are bewildered or exasperated in Kenya to-day. On one occasion the Loyalists pleaded, with spirit, for the dissolution of the Assembly, because it would not do what they wanted against the advice of Governor Maxwell. The House promptly ordered the offending document to be buried by the common hangman outside the front door.

Divers such battles were doubtless enjoyed by all parties, for the unequalled climate of the Bahamas induced in its children by adoption or grace of birth, the justifiably Philistinian feeling: "I am not as these others." But gradually, a number of the more substantial colonists immigrated. There were new disputes as to whether they could or could not take their slaves with them. Then came the great battle of Abolition, in which the Bahamas had unwittingly been engaged since the first protests were lodged by idealists speaking with the confused tongues of ministers, reformers, liberals intoxicated by their own eloquence, and impractical tub-thumpers ignorant of the conditions they criticised.

In 1834 Lord Wilberforce, backed by the Nonconformist conscience, as active a hundred years ago as when it recently enforced the abdication of a surprised and ill-informed King, had the last word. On paper, slavery came to an end.

CHAPTER VIII

SLAVERY AND BLOCKADE-RUNNING

AS in all the West Indian colonies, negro slaves in the Bahamas vastly outnumbered the white population. Enterprising merchants from the seaports of Britain had been quick to follow the example of Portugal and Spain. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the barbaric trade supplying what was known as 'black ivory,' hunted in African village and forest, to the plantations of the Western Atlantic, provided English county families with the comforts they were beginning to appreciate. In those days, the Nonconformist conscience was lulled by the reputed improved conditions which free African savages would find in their civilised captivity, and by the conviction that conversion to Christianity would ensure them heavenly reward for the disagreeable things which would inevitably happen to them on earth.

At the close of the Napoleonic era, most of Europe had begun to be influenced by the new liberalism which induced a reformation of ideas so far as black peoples were concerned. The British Empire officially abolished the slave trade in 1807, but the law was not effective because so many political fortunes were involved in the business. As much English capital was then invested in this human transport as is lost to us now in the railways of South America. So it was not surprising that the merchants of Bristol, always deeply concerned in West Indian affairs, should petition the British Government not to interfere further with the local institutions of the colonies.

While Abolitionists in the British Parliament fought for the individual rights of man, whatever his colour, the Bahamian House of Assembly worked itself into a fever of apprehension. It was even feared there would be a rising among the negroes. For it was impossible to convince the

slaves that they desired no improvement or change. While Bahamian planters and politicians frantically assured the Imperial Government that the whole situation was grossly exaggerated and misunderstood, their negroes began to demand what must have seemed no less impossible to concede than the moon itself. Englishmen love words of many syllables. In this they are encouraged by editors of *The Times*. Outraged by the criticisms and still more by the obvious intentions of Westminster, the Bahamian slave-owners armed themselves with such verbal missiles as 'unprecedented,' 'unwarranted' and 'intolerable.' They reminded each other and the 'pestiferous meddlers in Whitehall' that, in comparison with other countries, they had always treated their slaves quite well. Indeed, a master was required, by island law, to furnish each of his blacks over ten years of age with a peck of unground corn each week, two suits of suitable and sufficient clothing every year, and a small quantity of land for his house and garden.

The law of 1824 forbade the manumission of aged and infirm slaves, that of 1827 required the master to maintain his freedman until death, which meant that, like an old horse turned out to pasture in all weathers, the negro too old to work could be sure of food. Slaves were allowed to "purchase, hold, alienate or inherit property" and they could lose it for debt. The Bahama slave code professed to encourage marriage among the negroes, and discreet if not devout plantation owners were in principle opposed to polygamy and concubinage. Families might not be divided. Husbands and wives could not be sold separately, and children were not allowed to be taken from their parents till they were over fourteen. Special slave courts, consisting of two Justices and five Jurors, were supposed to try all cases in which negroes were concerned, but it was exceedingly difficult for any slave to get justice, because negro evidence remained inadmissible until Abolition was in sight. This meant that no slave could testify against a white person, even when a life might be at stake. Nor could he ever bear witness against his owner, nor in any case involving the right of a master to a slave. At the end of an era which had produced considerable evils, the courts

were still allowed to dismiss the testimony of slaves if they chose, even if such were not impugned or contradicted.

Bahamian planters seem to have recognised one predominating duty towards their negroes. They had to make some kind of Christian out of these 'black cattle.'

To be free, of course, was the goal of every slave, but up till 1827 this cost £90 and depended on the amiability of a master, so the registries in Nassau record few such manumissions. Seven years before Abolition ruined the planters and the Western cotton trade, it was admitted that slaves, being human and Christian, should not work on Sundays. They had three other holidays a year.

In the Bahamas there are no records of ferocious torture such as Jamaica can provide. Mistress Palmer of Rose Hall, with a Chinese fecundity of invention where mutilation was concerned, who kept the head of an executed slave-girl in a jar of spirits, and was in the end trodden to death under a mattress by the negroes she had ill-treated beyond the borders of reason, had no prototype in New Providence or the surrounding isles. Nevertheless, there were many cases of runaways, and it was the duty of every free person, white or coloured, to return these unfortunate individuals to their masters. If as many as five fugitives together were reported, free negroes were armed and sent as bloodhounds in pursuit of their own kin. It was permissible to kill an escaped slave if he were deemed dangerous. The loss of a negro was advertised and a reward offered as in the case of any other valuable property. Workhouse keepers were ordered to apprehend any blacks suspected of being runaways and to supply lists of such, embellished with intimate personal descriptions. At the end of a year, the workhouse keeper might sell at auction any slave still unclaimed.

Owners had, in effect, the right to punish their slaves as they chose, for the whole of the white population, with political and social power in their hands, would be on the side of the master. It is recorded that one Governor, Sir James Smythe, attempted in three test cases to prosecute slave-owners for cruelty, but on each occasion the Grand Jury refused to accept as evidence the stories of the wretched negroes involved. There was much excitement over the

Governor's action and local opinion hardened on the side of the conscienceless owners.

While all punishments involving mutilation or causing permanent injury were forbidden, the masters could administer at any moment as many lashes as they liked, until that fearful year of 1827 when the planters became uneasy as to the continuance of a system under which the vast majority of their fellows worked longer if not harder than oxen, and received few of the privileges accorded to cherished pedigree cattle. After that no more than thirty-nine lashes could be laid on in one day and no further punishment applied until the slave had recovered from the wounds of a previous beating.

Offences of violence against a white were punishable by death, and for the establishment of such guilt only the testimony of the supposed victim was required.

During the difficult and sometimes dangerous years in which the Bahamian House of Assembly resisted the determined efforts of the Home Government, reinforced by that effective if peculiarly shaped weapon, the British conscience, to improve the status of slaves as a preliminary to freeing them, the Colonists, fighting for their ease and wealth, for the Olympian security which had been theirs while they could dispose of men and women with all else that belonged to them, were forced to make concessions. They were obliged to register their slaves, so that only by breeding could an increase in number be justifiably explained. The old slave mariners were all out of work. Fishing must have seemed to them intolerably dull after hunting resolute blacks on the borders of virgin forest.

Governor Sir James Smythe, conscientious and sentimental, with no preconceived colour-bar in his mind, attempted to rescue the legitimate executive powers of the King's representative from the House of Assembly which had always displayed an octopus ability for absorbing any functions that could unobtrusively be filched from the Crown. With a generous hatred of slavery and no sympathy for the Colonists who would enforce it in the most primitive fashion, he used his regained prerogatives to force an issue which the Assembly refused to face. Appealing

for the abolition of flogging as a punishment for girls and women, after iniquitous suffering had been imposed on a negress belonging to one John Wildgoos, Member for Western New Providence, he found himself faced with the traditional jealousy of the Colonists. This exists to-day when Imperial interference is suspected.

The House of Assembly determined to force the recall of so vexatious a Governor and for this purpose insisted on its own dissolution, refusing to do further business while Sir James remained in the colony. The Governor must have been possessed of strong character and a sense of humour, for, after another session of the House had finished with equal turbulence, he boldly demanded of the Secretary of State the right to govern without 'the assistance' of the elected legislative body. Whitehall, in the throes of another English Reformation, wearied by the intransigence of a handful of islanders, retrogressive in mind and action, agreed to Sir James's proposal. Until 1833, therefore, the autocratic Governor ruled for what he imagined was the benefit of all his subjects, but he was continuously obstructed by the whites with money, influence and established custom at their command. Without sufficient force to implement the humanitarian laws he made, he succeeded in educating a few of the negroes and introducing further uncertainty and discontent among the others.

The slave-trade was so prodigiously profitable, now that it was limited by its illicit nature, that reckless adventurers, forerunners of American bootleggers and racketeers, could always be found to attempt the smuggling of captured blacks into colonies prepared to pay high prices. It must have been the most exciting business the Bahamas had yet known. Navigation was always difficult among the rocks and reefs of treacherous seas. Charts were incomplete. H.M.'s ships of war patrolled the navigable channels and incited by the rewards offered for the apprehension of slavers, pursued likely schooners with as much zest as the sloops *Clematis* and *Cornflower* used to chase any dhow suspected of carrying a fuzzy-headed cargo from Abyssinia to the Red Sea ports of Arabia. Wreckers found they could make more money out of reporting a slave galley than

salvaging a misled crew. So the perils of the colourful seas were trebled and yet the slavers prospered. For like the liquor-trade after Prohibition in America, the business appealed to the old-established instincts of a people who refused to relinquish their right to do wrong in their own chosen way.

Sir James's departure in 1833 was made dramatic by the impending trial of an officer, Major Nicholls, who, though he did not belong to the powerful opposition party, had flagrantly criticised the Crown. For sixteen months he had been in prison while his partisans contrived to delay his trial, with the result that the islands were divided as never before. "Every feeling of civil or military society" was roused to fury on one side or the other. The next Governor, a Mr. Balfour, succeeded by a combination of masterly inactivity and Jesuitical casuistry in securing an apology from Major Nicholls. The abusive letter which had caused all the trouble was burned; but the House of Assembly, and the near-sighted people it represented, had learned how easily they could stalemate the policy of the Crown.

Abolition became law in England in 1834, but for four more years the Bahamas refused to acknowledge it. Through a decade and a half the Legislature had bitterly opposed any change for the improvement of slave conditions. When they found it impossible to fight longer for a cause already lost, since world thought was veering towards the ideals which constituted the strength and weakness of Victorianism, their indignation was not assuaged by the price of £128,296 paid for the "10,086 head of slaves," thus valued at a little over twelve guineas apiece, the modern value of a prime steer.

By that time labour in the Bahamas showed no very profitable return and the majority of wealthy colonists promptly emigrated. The 'great houses' fell into disrepair. In many cases the estates were handed over, as valueless without free labour, to the slaves who had nowhere else to live. These had previously been content with the Christian names provided at their baptisms. Now they added, one and all, the surnames of their masters. So that Rolltown, once the property of a Lord Roll, became solely

inhabited by black men called Roll. Other plantations followed this original fashion in nomenclature. But if there happened to be a white Johnson or Pender or Carteret on the cay, all the coloured people with the same name looked upon him with much the same combination of regard and greed as Highland clansmen of an earlier era devoted to a chief particularly successful in the arts of reiving and robbery.

The abolition of slavery was naturally followed by the complete decline of agriculture. For the blacks imagined they could live without working. Political rights were denied to them. At the bottom of the social scale and without any hope of rising because they had neither education, tools, nor any form of fortune, it is doubtful if, after the exodus of planters, enough paid work could have been found for them, had they been willing to accept it. A period of so-called 'apprenticeship,' suggested but not ordered by the Imperial Government, proved generally unpractical. Unlike the family slaves of Abyssinia, suddenly freed by the last Emperor, upon the deaths of their masters, they were not faced by the grim alternatives of starvation or brigandage, because there was sufficient land to go round and the most ignorant cultivation provided a few roots or 'hominy-grits,' the Indian corn on which the negro population has since contrived to live. But the earth which had been cleared—too thoroughly cleared, for there had been no attempt at afforestation to replace the timber sacrificed for furniture—was allowed to lie fallow. Soon it returned to the monotonous bush more primitive than jungle.

The people of the Bahamas took to the sea for a living and for the luxuries to be had from wrecking, now controlled and justified by licences. This old commerce with a new impetus flourished until the Imperial Board of Trade discouraged it by the erection of light-houses. The huge beacons, immutable and impervious, limited legitimate shipping disasters and put an end to the efficacy of the will-o'-the-wisp lights destined for the destruction of small vessels. The islanders were forced to employ their sea-genius for the purpose of fishing, sponging, turtle-catching and transport in channels too dangerous for the merchant ships of Europe.

SLAVERY AND BLOCKADE-RUNNING

Without light, chart or compass, they sailed, as they sail to-day, in frail craft with patched sails, indifferent to the gales which blow five days a week, navigating "by the bottom" so that the shoals and rocks with which they have intimate acquaintance take the place of the stars.

So might the tale of their lives have continued, simple, dangerous and satisfactory, but for the American Civil War. Immediately Nassau became one of the chief bases of supplies for the Confederate blockade runners. The interest of the American world concentrated on the group of islands, recently derelict and idle. Bahamian harbours were sufficiently secret, the population consisted of sailors with a genius for difficult ventures. As soon as the Federal North proclaimed the blockade of Southern ports, the islands whose coloured population had struggled with bitter passivity for their own freedom, took up the cudgels of the glamorous States who were fighting against the abolition of slavery introduced as a hostile political measure by their opponents. The children of freed slaves risked life and limb upon the stormiest seas of the West to succour the American plantation-owners with their soft speech and hardy courage, for whom their own slaves fought against the freedom offered by the North.

As a result, rich prosperity came to Nassau. The town, surprised, found herself able to pay for the extravagant and admirable improvements instituted by the delighted administration. The sympathy of gentlemen was, illogically, with the South. And the Bahamian has both the vices and virtues of a gentleman. Until General Lee, admired by all who could appreciate the magnificent and hopeless struggle of the South's 'first families,' surrendered his sword to Grant, the Bahamians enjoyed great days. They were able to satisfy their natural inclination to get rich quickly, for the Federal Navy had to patrol what must have seemed to them an unending coastline. Seven hundred ships they had altogether, of which 150 were devoted to the blockade. Obsessed by the 3,000 miles they were obliged to watch, they kept too close to shore. So, if a blockade runner, sailing, or steaming an exciting ten knots an hour, without lights or the arms which would have turned him into a

pirate, succeeded during the night in arriving within a dozen miles of the American coast, he had a good chance of slipping in before dawn. If he succeeded, he was a hero, rewarded, feasted and adored by lovely women to whom the war was a crusade. If he failed, he saw the inside of a Federal gaol, but this did not deter his fellows.

The descendants of men who had sailed the same seas on more desperate ventures, followed retired naval officers and merchant captains into an adventure which filled their pockets with gold and put a swagger into their walk. Nassau lived again in the spacious splendid days of buccaneering, with barrels of money to spend. The smell of tar pervaded the cays. The prevailing winds whistled through new rigging. The greyhounds of the ocean belched smoke, while their coloured crews, waiting for the signal which would send them out to evade a fleet, prayed with fervour to the God of sailors not always on the side of the big fist.

Meanwhile, a new social life sprang up in the town. Leaders of fashion cheered the efforts of the blockade runners. A hearty seaman who had bluffed the signals of a man-of-war, might receive a kiss from a Governor's wife. The Southern agent making contracts for contraband was apt to meet the Federal Secret Service man in the bar of a popular hotel. Money spoke loudly. So did sentiment. Between the institution of the blockade in April, 1861, and May four years later, when the last cargo of cotton arrived from Galveston, 400 vessels triumphantly achieved the crossing from the beleaguered Southern ports to the sympathetic islands. Even more, 432 to be exact, cleared Nassau for St. John's, New Brunswick, which was the official cover for a voyage with destination unknown. Trade swelled to enormous proportions. The imports which, in 1860, did not reach a quarter of a million sterling, had risen by 1864 to within sight of five and a half millions. As Nassau was only a clearing-house for cargoes going east and west, her exports showed as remarkable an increase. About thirty times as much value in cargo left her wharves in 1864 as had done four years previously.

In the first flood of enthusiasm, every ship which could

put to sea, schooners, sloops, ketches, even a 2-ton open boat, took part in the great game. Then, as the Federal patrols became more active, the adventure was limited to steamers. The little *Banshee*, the first iron ship to cross a portion of the Atlantic, made several voyages before she was captured. Altogether, the Federals took forty-two ships, most of them flying the British flag, and there was far less protest than over Potato Jones's attempt to land his cargo in republican Spain.

Twenty-two venturesome ships were wrecked off the American coast, while they sought suitable privacy for their chivalrous, profitable and doubtfully licit purposes. The expense must have been gigantic, and when the Federals took to firing on sight and to sink, the hazards enormous. According to Major Bagot,¹ the cost of the round trip for a steamer carrying 800 bales of cotton, including the high wages, coal, provisions, dock labour, repairs, agents' commissions and a perquisite for a successful captain, was about £3,000. By 1864 the costs had increased with the dangers. A captain's salary had risen from £600 to £1,000 for the one voyage, and he was entitled to carry ten bales for his own profit. The pilot also received £1,000 for a run from Charleston or Wilmington to Nassau which, if successful, took forty-eight hours, and as many to return.

In a day and a night, with the stevedores working in shifts, schooners or steamships were unloaded and in three days they were off again with the cargoes that were the life-blood of the hard-pressed Southern States.

The Northerners threatened to come "and shovel the pestiferous little sandbanks" of the Bahamas into the sea, but the elegant South was grateful. So were the merchants of Nassau, who lived in a whirl of excitement, profit, waste and extravagance. So were the negroes, working far harder than their slave ancestors and earning enough to drink themselves first gay and then sick. It takes a mighty lot of alcohol, over-proof, to effect the latter. So were the negresses, satisfactorily ruined by sailors proficient in the art of temptation. So were the undertakers who harvested a fairly good crop as disease increased. So was the Govern-

¹ *The Bahamas: a Sketch.*

A UNICORN IN THE BAHAMAS

ment, which, having considered the matter and found it both popular and profitable, voiced through the mouth of the Governor the opinion that it was also legal. They paid off their land debt, built a new hotel, a new prison and a new cemetery, thus providing for all the vagaries of the people they ruled. But when the Civil War ended, it took no time at all for New Providence to dissipate the fortunes she had made. Within a few years the islands were as poor as the monasteries of the Franciscans. But they were not so content.

CHAPTER IX

LAST OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVENTURE

TWENTY-FOUR hurricanes ravaged the resilient Bahamas between 1780 and 1865. New Providence suffered again in 1866, but not so severely as New York a year ago. In fact, the Bahamas take their hurricanes far more placidly than their politics. Everyone remembers those of 1929 and 1932, but more from a Puckish sense of amusement at the antics forced upon the most respectable citizens—such as he who was blown head downwards into the top branches of a tree, and she who, deprived of nether garments, was elevated to where there had once been a roof but was now only a solitary rocking crossbeam for support—than from any sense of fear. “We gits out o’ de way,” say the islanders, and the phrase represents their philosophy of life. They never face trouble. They get out of its way and they apply the same attitude to agriculture and its earnest, efficient exponents. Seasick, if they are not on the sea, they sail into unbelievable storms to get out of the way of having to do an hour’s work on shore.

There is only one thing to which they object even more strongly than to the idea of wielding a farming implement upon its natural business, and that is the implication of death by accident or illness. “Nobody gwan’ die on these islands. Dey’s all too healthy. No opportunity to gwan die,” say the villagers, who generally can’t muster more than two or three coins among the whole community, so that the sight of real money is as unusual as that of the dark angel, whom nobody fears because “You’s e can’ die till de Lord wan’s you.”

One more opportunity Nassau has had of making a great fortune, and as usual it has been on the borders of illegitimacy. After years of peace, when the establishment

of a new agricultural crop, such as sisal for hemp, or the ruin of the pineapple industry by competition in the real West Indies and the Southern American States, were events satisfactorily spectacular, the islands went back to their old sport of harrying the Governor.

During the era of the Civil War, there had been five King's Representatives in five years, and they all seem to have been men of definite though diverse opinions. Their reports were expressed in picturesque language, coloured by their sympathies. But during the sober years which followed, when loans were floated for cable and telegraphic communication, the building of hotels and for that most disturbing pursuit—needing intellect, humour, understanding, and patience—the snaring of tourists, the islanders found relief from the monotonous virtue imposed on them by circumstance, in arguing through the mouths of their elected members, with whatever Governor was doing his best to serve Nassau, the out-islands and the Empire. The interests of the three are not always synonymous. Indeed, it is rare that a single altar can serve a trinity of idols.

The merchants of Bay Street are singularly averse to recognising what they owe for the absolute security and the considerable prosperity they enjoy as a result of Britain's position. They are equally oblivious of what they themselves could profitably concede to the islanders who—in an open ballot—return to power the representatives of commerce rather than agriculture. Yet it is on farming and farming alone that the Bahamas can securely depend.

The war of 1914 to 1918—which so soon may no longer be suitably characterised either as the Great War or the European War—showed the unreliability of the tourist industry. For four years Nassau, a tentative playground for the original, was left desolate. Shops and hotels were closed, houses shuttered. The cost of living at all was so prodigious, with butter, for instance, at eight shillings a pound, that the islanders must have begun to wonder if 'de Lord did not want dem' all at once!

The islands which look so fantastically serene, must be blessed by some power with a perverse sense of humour, for when again, in 1921, they were overwhelmed with pros-

perity, it was because America had—in the face of strong public opinion—passed Prohibition. In the gloriously eventful years which followed, the Bahamas were able to forget failures of crops, insect plagues and the yellow fever which put an end to the most stalwart between a hearty breakfast and an uneaten dinner. They need not even regret the completion of the Panama Canal which had given work to thousands of islanders, immigrating with their families, nor look, with prophetic vision, twenty years ahead to the construction of its duplicate in Nicaragua. There was still sponging, of course, and in a two months' voyage, a crew of five might in fortunate days, share a profit of £40 or £50. To-day, a man is lucky if he makes five shillings a week after he has paid for his stores.

Into the morgue of history, dustiest of repositories, slipped imperceptibly the lean years when Nassau's garrison was withdrawn, when rising tariffs closed the U.S.A. fruit market and the Cuban insurrection raised unfulfilled hopes of easy money to be made in blockade-running. In those tedious years there had been no sport but politics and no occupation save a new version of the Christian religion. The negroes changed sects with the seasons. Only the sea endured and for those who still had boats or could build them, the rotting warehouses once crowded with cotton or the oil imperative to the beleaguered South, were less important or less ominous than the condition of the sponges on mud flats.

Then the U.S.A. decided she must and could and would be saved if she passed legislation to that effect. There were already two million statutes registered in Washington. By an unrepealed Blue Law of Massachusetts, no man might kiss his own wife on a Sunday, nor might he use any form of wheeled transport, not even a barrow or a perambulator. But this was not enough. Cigarettes were banned in one state and firearms in another. Women were not allowed to smoke in restaurants or trains. Cinema companies warned their scenario-writers that heroines, and above all mothers, must not be shown using make-up or crossing their legs. The sugar-sweet sentimentality which sheds easy tears over shibboleths and covers the savagery of innumerable rackets,

triumphed briefly in Prohibition. But America soon found it not only inconvenient and absurd, but also very depressing to be forcibly redeemed. Andrew Volstead, visualising his Act as the first page of new Puritan history, condemned America to a rule of violence from which she may take a century to recover. For bootlegging was the foster-parent of racketeering, kidnapping, blackmail, strikes armed with rifles, and industrial retaliation with machine-guns. But bootlegging saved the Bahamas.

Inertia fled. Drake's drum had last sounded for the gallant, even chivalrous business of blockade-running. Prohibition put an end to its silence. Major Bell,¹ in his irresistible tale of Gertrude, Queen of Scotch, in the Nassau of 1920,

whose imperious temper . . . resembled that of Queen Bess of England . . . as, with high-heeled scarlet shoes, she trod the decks of rum-runners, fox-trotted at . . . the Bootleggers' Ball . . . and tamed the two gun-toughs of the Bowery,

gives the best description of the islands stirred to astonishment and gratified by a series of unbelievable excitements. Alcohol reigned supreme, but American 'leggers meeting on the high seas the Bahamian captains, who once again had cleared for such innocent destinations as Brunswick and Newfoundland, were surprised to find a limit set to their outlawry. They could not bribe the island police or dispose of justice as they chose. When they took to piracy, they could not force one British-born Captain to put up his hands, although they stuck a couple of pistols into his ribs. "I've never done it," he said, "and I won't change my habits now. I'm too old."

That man is now plain Mr. Kemp, working in the Government Development Board alongside a dreamy but amiable individual with a good heart and the exasperating habit of addressing one as 'Friend,' while next door an American stenographer substitutes the formula of her country's underworld, 'Say, Sister——'. I expected her to talk of her employer as 'a dame' or 'a skirt' and wondered if she knew that in Chicago her 'typewriter' would have signified a sawn-off shotgun throwing slugs instead of bills.

¹ *The Bahamas, Isles of June.*

The erstwhile Captain, clearing with legitimate papers, for any cargo may sail the high seas and American coast-guards could not legally pursue a foreign flag outside the three-mile limit, handled close on two million dollars' worth of drink in 1925. His cabin was shot to pieces and he was ringed with bullets, when high-handed 'leggers decided they would make more money by theft than by smuggling. They got away with a few hundred pounds out of the ship's safe, but the real money was wisely hidden under bunks and floor-boards. The old saying: "You can't lick the Bahamas. The harder they drop, the higher they'll bounce," could well be applied to such stalwarts as Captain Kemp, of the breed of the privateers, buccaneers and blockade-runners who shipped for adventure as well as profit, who stood their losses with equanimity and accepted all the hazards of the game in which they might as easily lose a limb as make a fortune.

The coastguard front-line of U.S.A. was no more successful than the Federal Navy in the Civil War. The history of the eighteen-sixties was repeated, but the odds were greater on both sides. For the cases of liquor, for which in the end there was no warehouse space left in Nassau, so that when the wharves also were full, they had to be piled upon respectable sidewalks in front of the dry goods stores which indirectly benefited, these substitutes for the cotton, turpentine and salt of the last century had to be handed over not to patriots defending the existing order, but to outlaws for whom a shot came as easy as an oath.

Men of the hardier north, with the resistant qualities that Abaco's pine forests seem to induce, were foremost in the trade, hard-pressed by the fine seamen of Harbour Island, wizards in a storm, and the sailor-farmers of the Berry Isles, delighted to escape their fields for their first love, the sea.

The American Consul, bewildered by this legal war upon his country's new determination to be—at all costs—sober, reported, not the rum-running which, supposedly, had nothing to do with America, but the growing exports of the Bahamas. As these increased with the years, Nassau 'bounced high' upon the growing thirst of America. It is extraordinary how Prohibition increased a rational nation's

desire to drink and her capacity for swallowing the crudest forms of alcohol. I remember a girl of seventeen, belonging to the most cherished of New York's first families, offering me neat gin out of a scent-flask in her vanity bag at ten in the morning, while we were driving out of the metropolis for a country week-end.

I remember a sexagenarian philanthropist, for whose favourite charity I had lectured, forcing a bottle of the same liquor into my hands as he put me on board the night train for New York. "You'll maybe need a mouthful before breakfast," he suggested.

With more disastrous effect, the Mayor of a city where I had spoken at some civic function, invited me to supper in the cellar of his admirably equipped house. On the hospitable board appeared bottles of whisky, gin and rum, but nothing with which to dilute them. "I'll say you're English," laughed my host. "You like your liquor mixed." And where I thought to receive a long drink, since nobody would believe I preferred pump-water or bath-water, I was given a throat-peeling combination of neat alcohol which I could have swallowed about as easily as a live coal.

No wonder the accomplice islands prospered. New banks were built. According to Major Bell, whose style is reminiscent of Highland ballads, recording the adventures of a Montrose with the scaffold as the penalty of his heroism, the

managers carried their jobs in their hands, risking millions on cargoes destined for Rum Row, or for shore deliveries that might easily fail. . . . Their staffs quit and went into the more golden rum trade, the managers carried on and in one way or another, replaced the deserters; and constantly the business grew.

The real story of credit, says Major Bell, is yet to be written. The risks were carried not by the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street backing outland adventure, and not by the financiers of Montreal, but by the local managers. On their meagre salaries, jeopardised from the inception of the vast pyramidal structure, its point precariously balanced on credit, its broad base supporting a trade as paradoxical as it was uncertain, they juggled with millions. If their ventures failed

and the notes remained unpaid, they lost their positions and their pensions.

Outside the compliant banks, cash ruled supreme. New churches were built, others were repaired, and within a stone's throw of the only buildings unlikely to be called upon to house the tidal wave of cases containing solace for Americans no longer Puritan, bootleggers paid cash on the barrel. The dealer, handling the thousands of dollars paid for liquor which might have been made in America and shipped for storage outside the States when Prohibition became inevitable, cared not at all where the cargo went. Buyers swarmed on to any pier, into any office or warehouse where liquor was to be bought. The sellers did not have to move from their seats, on chairs, railings, or casks. They made cash fortunes, selling American alcohol at many times its original cost to Uncle Sam's citizens parched by Prohibition.

Naturally, the Bahamas, but especially New Providence, lost all sense of the difference between price and value. There was an inevitable boom in real estate. Rents rocketed, coloured labourers earned more than the cherished artisans of Henry Ford who prided himself on paying the highest wages in the States, and land was sold by the foot for figures astronomical in dimension.

Tourists poured into Nassau. Everybody drank champagne, at the wrong moments and with the wrong concomitants. The whites bought cars and the coloured people shoes. The sale of silk socks and silk stockings was—as usual—the thermometer of prosperity. Electricity flooded scenes of inapposite gaiety, for Nassau might have been an outpost of the wild North-West in the days of the gold rush, where a frame hotel once proffered the request that guests should remove their spurs before going to bed.

There were plenty of guns, but no killings. Crooks rubbed shoulders with unsuspecting tourists. British law, visualised by America as an old lady upholstered in black satin with a large bosom and many buttons, the keys of precedent hanging from her ample waist and an innocuous weapon hidden in her stocking, had no objection to guns unless they were drawn. Fisticuffs and free speech were allowed.

Nassau still treasures the tale of the human embodiment of the housekeeperly old lady known as the Law. She wore spectacles and a shawl. She kept a hotel. It was comfortable and patronised by ruffians who had already put enterprising rivals on the spot. Murderous and contented, they allowed themselves to be treated like schoolboys by the little old Englishwoman, very gentle and faded, in between shooting each other up in their home towns.

The trade of those years has left its mark on Nassau. On the credit side is the modern port, the improvement of the harbour, the public buildings and hotels, all the money that was spent on developing the little town's resources in order to attract visitors and settlers. 'In the red,' as the gangsters describe the debit side of their infernal ledger, is the greed of money, which such fantastic and illogical prosperity roused in the receptive minds of the islanders. Subsequently, there was only one standard in Nassau, that of wealth. If the Bahamians were of a tougher breed, they might be able to distinguish between easy money, unsatisfactory as the fabulous Spanish gold still said to be buried among the cays, and the productive wealth, "hard come by and so, hard to lose."

During the first years of excitement, in which epics were written upon sea-water, storms, coast-guard patrols and the guns of treacherous bootleggers were faced in the same conquering spirit of adventure. But later on, emphasis was transferred from the sailor taking every kind of risk in the 600-odd miles he had to cross under the outraged noses of coast-guards, who treated the whole Western Atlantic as their own territorial waters, to the shopkeepers, merchants and warehousemen who had no glamour at all. The atmosphere of secrecy departed. Codes were forgotten. What had once been exhilarating adventure became a business, doomed like any other to competition, undercutting and seasonal fluctuations.

Repeal put an end to it, but long before that the bootleggers, villainous, humorous, or elegant as Spike O'Donnel, beer baron of Chicago's wrong side, had gone their way. Major Bell quotes in his *Isles of June*, a most satisfying book, the opinion of Tom, hotel man and philosopher.

LAST OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVENTURE

“As he mixes a ‘coast-to-coast flip,’ one hears: ‘Boys, those days are done. We’ve got to go to work now.’”

He may be wrong. Seven times a preposterous fate opened the door of adventure. Columbus, the Elizabethan privateers, Blackbeard and the fearful ‘Brethren of the Coast,’ the wreckers, the Loyalist slave-owners, imperial in their conception of their rights as well as of their obligations to a familiar flag, blockade-runners and bootleggers, each turned the limelight of the period on to islands which should be thrifty and hard-working as the Breton rocks, for they have the same air of delighted isolation. Their climate, their seas which are the colours of old-fashioned cottage flowers, the simplicity of natural design which provides no spectacular growth or superabundance of texture, the austerity of the land and the pale, newly washed clarity of the atmosphere, should induce a hardier conception of living.

Nassau has endured and withstood the worst effects of a tidal prosperity, but as refuse on her unrivalled beaches, there is still an altogether undue proportion of empty bottles. And in the minds of her people, there lingers the stagnant feeling of what is due to them—in increment unearned or earned with as little labour as possible, rather than what they owe to the commonwealth, imperial or human.

It is not their fault. Americans, to whom the disposal of dollars is easier than the expression of original thought, good-natured, generous holiday-makers for whom eager black hands are not much more important than waste-paper baskets, give out of all proportion to the services rendered. A diver gathering 50-cent pieces from the ocean bed when a cruising ship arrives, a porter from pier-head to street, fortunate in his choice of a patron, a boatman or a beggar inspired by gin to take down his pants and—ignoring the police whose eyes are credited with telescopic powers—pose for a famous artist, may gain in a few active minutes or a couple of idle hours, as much as the labourer or the out-island mason can earn in a week.

Parasites on the neighbouring continent’s prosperity, coloured bodies lean negligently and with utterly unconscious grace, upon anything which will support them. The

accompanying minds are not wholly freed from the spell of their boats, where, in the wildest weather, they "was all safe, praise Gawd," and of their homes where they were brought up to the rhythm of: "I wish de Satan would be quiet, so I could get de Lord's work done." Between profit and religion they are still—rather charmingly—divided.

The Government, on the other hand, is decided. Following the example of Woodes Rogers, it rightly connects a prosperity secure from the assaults of international circumstance with what comes out of the earth. The Bahamians would rather it came out of the sea. But the sponges, suffering perhaps like all other natural growths in different parts of the world—cocoa, coffee, bananas and so on—from the modern imposition of what must appear to them as overcrowded tenement conditions, are dying in their hundreds of thousands. So, having no use for swords, the delectable Bahamians may turn their oars, instead, into plough-shares.

THE ISLANDS AS THEY ARE

CHAPTER X

THE WHARVES OF NASSAU

WHEN, at last, I landed in Nassau, from the *Gripsholm*, after twelve days of unconsidered storm, it seemed to me that I was only repeating what I had already done a dozen or more times. History had gone to my head. Columbus, I believe, never saw New Providence, but, in my imagination, I had been shipwrecked with William Sayle, sought refuge in the convenient channel between Hog Island and the mainland with Blackbeard or Captain Vane, and disembarked with hope or fear, a strong sense of duty or an interest in perquisites, with one after another of the unfortunate thirteen who misruled on behalf of the Lords Proprietors.

After all that I had read, there could be nothing new about Nassau. I was wrong, of course. Only for the dead is there nothing new upon earth. Even about this I would not be too certain, for I once lived in an old Forbes Castle, where a fourteenth-century ancestress had been crucified by her husband and for 600 years the dead girl continuously expressed her personality to the dismay of harrowed successors.

First of all, Nassau is an entirely delicious village. As such, it is unique. If it ever becomes a town it will have no more appeal than a hundred ports, jetsam of the sea, characterless as the races which lose individuality among the slabs of masonry, divided like greenish or brownish bar-soap into so many gross of houses. At present, Nassau consists chiefly of Bay Street, the wharf, and a patchwork quilt of lanes which would be insulted by the appellative, but which are altogether too charming with their delicately coloured walls and hoary giants of trees, to have anything to do with a city.

The wharf is completely unsophisticated. It is straight

but otherwise without particular plan. The surface is uneven and at times it is so crowded that one imagines a worn carpet laid half in sunlight, half in shadow. The dark places, especially threadbare, are represented by the negroes. They drift about with their dusky balloons of faces tilted a little backwards so that these seem to be insecurely attached to the bodies which are always in two pieces. The negro torso is superb. Because he or she carries everything on the head, whether that head be fashionably hatted or not, the resultant carriage puts to shame the confidence with which an Empress such as Maria Theresa must have faced her court. But at the waist, the negro body takes a sudden extraordinary turn, so that it looks disjointed. All along the wharf there are magnificent strong-breasted figures moving with the ease of galleons in a propitious wind. Like the figureheads of old romantic ships, presenting stalwart curves to the shock of the sea's embrace, they face the elements and the thrusting of the crowd, but their posteriors are less dignified. For these are balanced, as if they were trays, with the dipping, wheeling movements of a waiter uncertain as to his objective. The light places in the carpet on the wharf are the white faces, delicately cut and the crisp, pale dresses fresh from the wash. It is ill-laid, this carpet, for, as a draught blowing through worm-eaten boards, an impetus suddenly stirs it into movement. The values change. The white people drift away, to their houses, their boats, their multiple engagements, but the coloured ones remain. Some of them have the blue-black bloom of grapes upon their backs and loins. Their skins are oiled with sweat. Where the muscles ripple lazily under the wine-dark flesh there is a sudden high-light. Others look as if they had been dipped in coffee or tea. By this means they achieve delicious half-shades as tantalising as those new stuffs which the great houses in Paris put forth each spring and autumn for the delectation and bewilderment of women. But all the coloured people have the same half-moon or quarter-moon smile. The simile of the fruit suffices, for each of the black or brown or earth-coloured faces, tilted saucer-wise so that the eyes rest upon the upturned surface, gives an impression

THE WHARVES OF NASSAU

of split rind. Any of the jungle fruits, over-ripe and broken, would show the same richness of seed. So is there something prolific and emphatic in the teeth of this people, brown-painted by æons of familiarity with the sun and the earth. Their voices and expressions are often diffident, their gentle drawl is heart-breaking because it explains the impossibility of their ever being able to compete with the robot-tongued sons of the North-West. But their smiles are reassuring, for they presuppose knowledge, acquiescence and content.

The wharf at Nassau is a treasure-house for the simple-minded. On it, in the middle of the night, when the stars were pale jonquils planted in mist, and the ships' rigging threads which darned a sky without colour or division from the sea, I bought the grandfather of all sponges. I am not at all sure that I paid the right person. Intoxicated not at all by the delicately adjusted rum punches, bitter with lime and sweet with brown sugar, but by the rhythmic incoherence of the crooners, sweet-tongued vagabonds with an ache in their throats, I wandered along the wharf. The air and the sky and the sea were all of the same transparent crystal. I dared hardly breathe for fear of breaking it. Such ecstasy of loveliness should be impermanent. It hurts too much when it endures. I remember one ship warped out from among its fellows, breaking the pattern of masts so delicately embroidered on the night. There was no sound. As if I looked into the depths of a crystal, I saw the sail go up. Patched and stained, it hung upon a breath of wind. Then the boat—unsubstantial as the most satisfying dreams—moved without sound or wake over the grey glass of the harbour.

Only the sponges were left. There were hundreds of them piled on long trays in a shed opening on to the unreality of the wharf. I picked out one shaped like an arrogant chrysanthemum. Almost it had petals.

“What you'se doin'? You'se can' take that crittur —” drawled a muddled voice from the shadows.

“Here's a much better one,” said my American companion, his arms full of what looked like a young sea bush. At the same time he produced a coin. The voice in the

darkness became gently acquiescent. To whom it belonged I do not know. Perhaps we stole the sponge. It was magnificent, a labyrinth of gulleys wherein the black flesh lingered, and a whole range of sharply serrated peaks, as any other skeleton structure from which all living material has been dried.

In the daytime, I went back to see the spongers idling boneless on their boats which generally need paint and new sails. One of them had just brought in a cargo of 'velvets,' 'hardheads' and 'yellows,' or perhaps they were 'wool' or 'grass' sponges. I always found it difficult to recognise the various varieties, but there they all were, packed close in the hold which was divided into several slotted bins. Nobody minded my walking on board into a confusion of torn and dirty clothing, cooking implements, a pan containing charcoal, some food, chiefly grits and a little rice, a hurricane lantern, a sprawling straw doll, some rope and half a dozen bodies satisfactorily relaxed. So complete was their repose that they looked as if nothing more could ever be asked of them, but one rose—with that effortless ease of movement always suggestive of the only perfect form we know which is a circle. With shambling grace, as if his feet were friends, but certainly not slaves of his body, he went forward and collected a glass-bottomed bucket.

"You'se look through this," he said. "Den you see de sponge and you grain him. Oh yes, he bin alive like any odder animal and he make plenty smell when he die."

Negro English to me—when it is comprehensible at all, for, in such independent republics as the Maroon country in Jamaica, it sounds like a foreign language—seems to be a stew with many interesting and unexpected ingredients. The drawl gives delicious emphasis to the most ordinary remarks. Nobody can agree so fervently as a negro by just deepening the inflection of his always expressive voice. Only the Russian can mean so many things by one over-worked word. The lavish introduction of *s* and *w* take the place of sugar in the dish. They add a lingering sweetness, while the substitution of a hard *d* for *th* takes the place of spice. I don't know how negroes spell, but their words are like juice crushed slowly out of full-bodied fruit. Music

and wine, if you like, or an inconsequential irritation since they express no fact, only the feelings of the speaker.

It is difficult, when you are sitting on a pile of nameless objects on the gently swaying and very much cumbered deck of a sponger, alongside Nassau wharf, to consider the trade as M. Gustave Renouard visualised it when, wrecked in the Bahamas in 1841, he began exporting sponges to Paris. But, on the Great Bahama Bank, West of Andros, known as "the Mud," 200 miles long by 64 wide, and on another bank West of Abaco, measuring 38 miles by 10, as well as in the Exuma Sound and on various banks round Caicos and Bimini, in the good days which seem always to entail also the sad reflection that they are 'old,' as many as 600 schooners and ten times as many men were employed in gathering the impotent sea-animals. Beyond clinging closely to the rock on which, with limpet persistence, they had grown from uneventful youth to a maturity limited and unsatisfactory, the sponges 'grained' by means of a two-pronged metal trident fixed to an immensely long pole, could do nothing to prevent their capture. But, in the manner of their dying, they made up for such passivity. What we use is only the skeleton of the living organism which reproduces itself by exuding a variety of pollen or semen carried by the tide into the welcoming orifices of the female sponge, who thereupon sets herself to the task of laying thousands and thousands of eggs. These drift with the current, till they find a pleasing surface upon which to settle, grow up and develop their own unsensational individuality. When they are wrenched from the bottom of the sea or—if, more adventurous, they are rollers wandering with every movement of the ocean—speared in the middle of a voyage of discovery, they suffocate when exposed to the air. There are no gasps, or cries, no shuddering movements by which the sponge protests against being turned into a bathroom utensil. But there is a stench such as all the dogs of Constantinople, sacrificed to religious principle upon an island without water or food, would find it difficult to imitate. The spongers are indifferent. The more smell, the more profit.

Voyages last for six or eight weeks and even in the good

seasons before last winter's disease slew both natural and artificial growths as effectively as an outbreak of plague laying waste an Indian bazaar, the results were uncertain. They depended on the skill and diligence of the man with the grain and the glass-bottomed bucket through which, breaking the surface commotion, he looks down into still, clear depths and sights his prey.

Such voyages are provisioned by middlemen who sell on credit to the not altogether guileless negroes at treble the market prices. The spongers have to leave sufficient food for their families and for all of it they are, as a matter of course, in debt. They can, if it is not too stormy, catch fish. If they can sight a turtle waddling along under water with all the fuss of an ancient paddle-steamer, they do not stop to think. In shirt, generally without buttons, and those obligatory 'pants,' approved by the law, they go overboard to 'wrestle' with a week's income. Often the turtle gets the better of it, for he is hard to hold and he can swim like a spaniel, all four paws working together, but if he can be hauled on board and kept alive, he may fetch two or three pounds in the Nassau market. At the worst, he makes chowder, or glutinous, grey-green turtle steak, like sea-water and mud solidified into jelly.

Of the profits of a sponging voyage, the boat's owner takes a third and the remainder is divided between captain and crew. The sponges which look so completely self-sufficient and satisfied, sitting each on his own rock at the bottom of the sea, are piled into wooden kraals erected in shallow water, so that the dead flesh can rot without being too much of an infliction to human senses. Then they are sold in the Sponge Exchange at Nassau. It was one of these defenceless warehouses which I raided—conscienceless in the starlight—after a Lucullan dinner given by the world-known 'Jane'¹ who may be anywhere at any time with her legion of friends, her lovely red hair, her inimitable smile, her Olympian 'Armie,' who has never been defeated by household, or indeed houseless difficulties, and her inability to go to bed for more than two hours in any twenty-four.

¹ Mrs. O'Malley-Keyes.

Greek buyers represent the wholesale houses of America and Europe. The sponges, skeletons now, dryly indifferent to their destination, are sold by tender. As a final preparation for their great purpose of washing the heirs to kingdoms or the unwanted progeny of ladies who knew too little or cared too much, of lightening the labours of charwomen and lengthening those of lovers, they are cleaned, clipped and compressed into bales. In 1917, the trade reached its zenith with an export of £152,000 worth of sponges. To-day, it has shrunk to the dimensions of a spectre which terrifies the sea-loving Bahamians.

The Government had tried to help a healthy but difficult commerce, by encouraging the planting of artificial sponges, of which they created a huge official nursery. For this purpose it is only necessary to amputate a portion of a living growth, impale it on a post or tie it to a rock, and place it on a suitable under-sea bank. In a few years, it has grown into a fine natural sponge, unconscious of its cultured origin. But all over the world, cities crowded with refugees, lands over-settled and institutions over-stocked, have been scoured by their fevers or plagues. So perhaps the bottom of the sea, objecting, like Palestine, to immigrants of familiar appearance but alien stock, made use of its own means for changing the slum conditions.

No scientist can tell what has caused the sponge plague. It may be a germ defiantly free in the ocean, but you cannot analyse all the water of the Atlantic. Townships of sponges are dying. Deep-sea countrysides are as cemeteries. For the stricken sponges cannot propagate. An industry which provided a living for 6,000, is passing with so many other trades that fed a simpler world.

Still the syncopated rhythm of the spongers fills the yards of Nassau, where to the clip, clip, clop of heavy scissors, used with a leisurely calm suggesting the illimitability of time, men and women earn one shilling or two shillings a day, preparing the cleanliness of worlds beyond their knowledge. Children coloured like sweets, toffee, barley-sugar, chocolate, or caramels, linger in the coolness of the sheds. Some of them crunch scraps of sugar-cane. The faces of

others are buried in huge half-moons of water-melon, dripping red juice.

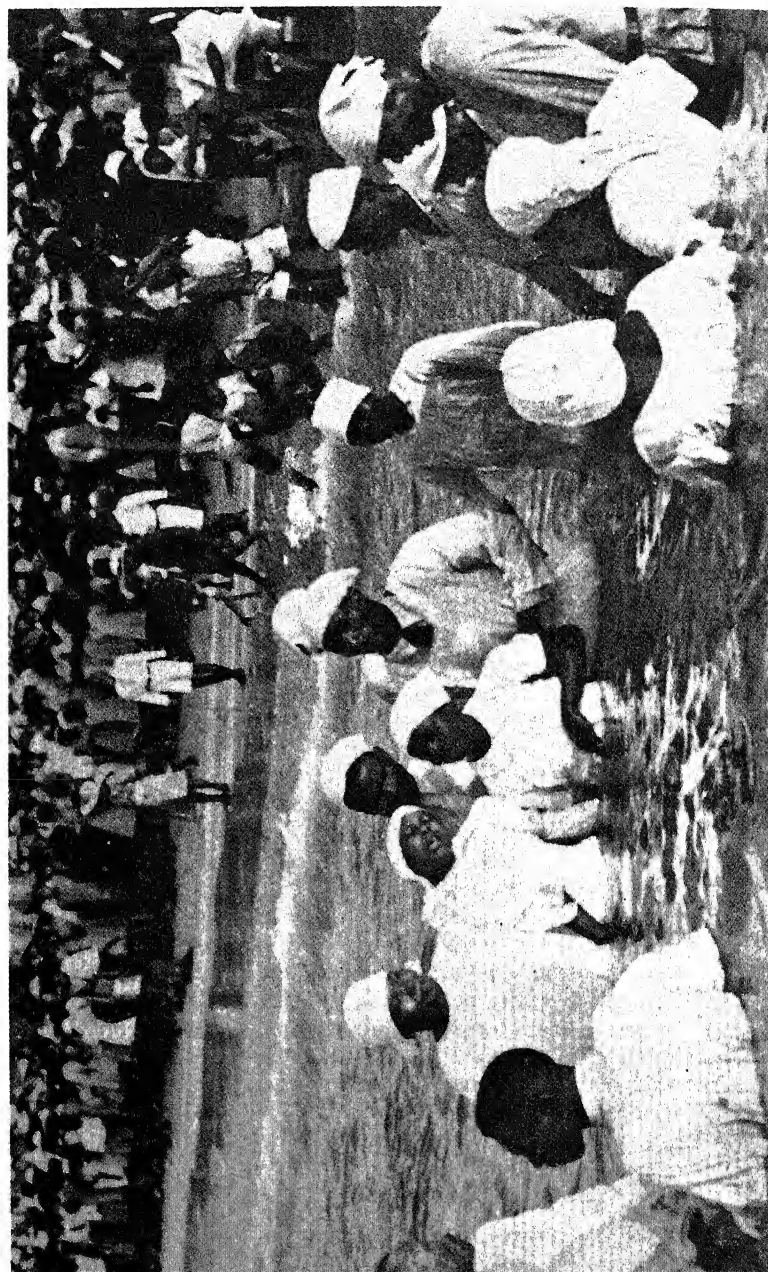
Amelia Defries, who lived among the negroes of the out-islands, collecting their songs and sailing upon the most fearsome occasions, with pigs, cows, chickens, mothers and children, into storms which justified the general feeling: "We's safe, sure, till de time comes, an' when dat day come, not'ing can save us," says that the names of the sponge clippers in her day were "Blooming, Tryphena and Galilee" with brothers and husbands called "Bristol Ash, Liverpool Minns, Jolly Bean and London de Weymouth Toot."

I only met a Napoleon Theophilus Alexander, but he was very engaging. He wanted to be my butler and he said that all he had got to do to learn the art was to go to "de Ladyship's school where dey can teach you mos' anythin' 'cep' to make a coloured skin white and only de Lawd can do dat in heaven, where, ob course, we'se all be white." He said he had been married for three years and his eldest child was five. His wife would be my cook. "No, ma'am, she can' cook nothin' yet 'cep' corn, but she's a smart gal and she'll learn same as me in de Ladyship's school."

As Lady Dufferin's nurses were to the India hidden behind purdah walls, so Lady Dundas's school is to New Providence. For it makes the neatest and most effective cooks, housemaids, butlers and laundresses out of islanders with superb grace of movement and five metaphorical thumbs on each willing but unfortunate hand. Before the school began, in the dark ages of housekeeping, years ago, it was necessary to import arrogant domestic salvation from the States.

If sailors and spongers can be made into those household deities on whom our comfort and content, our appearance, our sleep, and the success of our marriages depend, I am sure Lady Dundas's Domestic School will achieve the transformation. Meanwhile, these obstinate sea-creatures go further afield each voyage. No sponge is safe from them on the most isolated rock. They face elemental perils in keeping with their own undaunted spirits. "When the





thunder roars in the midst of the sea " and " the great ocean heaves against the boundaries of the world," ¹ they sail out nor'-nor'-west, putting the helm over so that the masts dip to the embrace of the waves and a mountain of water is hurled across the deck with the noise of a battery firing.

Nor'-west by west. Squall ahead. Staggering, they haul in the mains'l and face the gale with bare masts. They leave only the fores'l screaming, straining, to steer the boat and carry her over the ranges of the waves.

"What is going to happen?" asked the undefeated Amelia,² who was frightened of black men but never acknowledged the impossible.

"Happen, marm? No man can tell you that."

"Are we in danger?"

"Yes, marm, great danger orlright, marm."

"What will you do?"

"Can't do no more, marm. Us all must trust in de Lord. Dat's de onliest thing we can do."

Could such a squall wreck the boat, asked Amelia, who seems to have been accustomed to lying on deck, starved, drenched and shaken, with part of a tarpaulin and more of the sea on top of her.

"Yes, marm, plenty does turn bottom up in less bad wind dan dis coming."

"What about the lightning?"

"When we's struck, we'se struck. Lightning does go frough more'n one cabin. Dat's so! Trust in Gawd."

While the little ships go out on any wind, frail as hazelnuts, with rags of sails and no compass, the sponge-clippers in the yards of Nassau continue their songs. Their coarse straw hats are thrust on to the backs of their heads. Their feet are bare, or encased in lamentable shoes. Their shilling-a-yard prints, home-made, are of sober pattern. The original colour or shape of trousers is lost in the hundredth chapter of their history. It is an established custom that the men should earn more than the women on the nebulous supposition that they trim more sponges.

I saw a grandmother smoking the stub end of a cigar.

¹ *Jataka Birth Series.*

² *The Fortunate Islands, by Amelia Defries.*

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She could not remember her age, but with the aid of her fingers, she computed the number of her descendants. Thirty-seven there were, but some of them "wid de Lawd." Her neighbour, who looked as if she had a violent temper, started a funeral hymn. With enjoyment, a dozen or twenty of them with no other accompaniment than their scissors, sang to jazz rhythm, of the feelings they expected in a coffin.

CHAPTER XI

THEY FLOURISH LIKE A GREEN BAY TREE

ON the north side of Bay Street, among the big businesses and the complacent buildings supplying comfort to sophisticated winter migrants, is the old Vendue House. Here, in the eighteenth century, slaves were auctioned. So were cattle and other imported goods. Now, the ancient structure, which should be impregnated with the sorrows and the fears of other days, houses the city's electrical plant. Some cynic must have planned the adaptation. It reminded me of Bokhara, where the late Emir's executioner is now a registrar in the Soviet marriage bureau.

Bay Street I find enchanting. It sells so much that you want, but do not need. It has its own ideas and these are often perverse. Nothing will induce it to recognise an exigency. One day I tried to buy some combs to save the waves in my hair from the ravages of the far more effective waves in the sea. Six shops in Bay Street looked at me with surprise. "No, we don't stock them." The seventh said, with an American accent; "I guess you'd better not swim unless you can go to the hairdressing parlour every day." On the other hand you can buy English-made flannel of a kind which England does not know. It is called doeskin. In grey or blue, it makes elegant trousers. In other less appropriate shades it looks agreeably dissolute. Huddersfield, capital of Yorkshire's woollen empire, must make certain stuffs for export only, for in Bay Street, at a reasonable price, you can acquire friezes in those pale and lovely colours unsuited to the rigours of an English summer. You can also buy a great quantity of luxuries, but rarely enough of any one kind. I mean, if you want to furnish the new toy house you have built with conscienceless pride and no regard at all for your bank balance, you can secure

an irresistible brown dining-room chair and one equally enchanting, but of an entirely different shape in green. You could indulge in an odd number of cocktail glasses with entrancing fishes sprawling about the rims, but if you wanted to have a larger party, the less cherished guests would have to be content with another pattern. The only exception seems to be in the matter of scent. If a town is to be judged by its merchandise, Nassau is deliberately set on seduction. "My Sin" and "Scandal" were best sellers at several engaging stores which, by the way, keep open till ten o'clock on Saturdays. The implication eludes me.

In Bay Street, or just off it, you can buy, according to the notices, insistent as Chinatown's banners, French perfumes, English woollens and American sports-clothes, after which orgy of cosmopolitanism, you may lose the Geneva feeling by drinking at Dirty Dick's or Sloppy Joe's. In either of these, the barman still imitates the League of Nations, for he uses a vast number of words to say nothing new. The cocktail, with an appellative suggesting the solution of a much-tried world's entire problems, has no original ingredient. Yet each artist with his shaker or swizzle-stick is as portentous as the politician, although the effect of his liquid palliative lasts no longer than the other's intentions.

Whenever a cruising-steamer anchors in the outer harbour, Bay Street does good business. One of the shipping companies computed that their passengers spent an average of £200 in an afternoon. Another put the figure three times as high. Certain it is that when the street that might well be "called straight," except for a sudden, unexpected twist at the end and a mentality engagingly divided between caution and the love of a good gamble, is crowded with 'foreigners,' the shops are making money.

Everybody is a 'foreigner' who does not live on one of the islands. Even then he is a 'foreigner' if he happens to have an official position. For the Bahamians naturally suppose that their islands were created—about the second day of Genesis, while water and land were still confused—for the benefit of those who were subsequently born upon the sparse dry soil and have fought its droughts and its winds. 'Foreigners' serve a set purpose, which is to buy

Bahamian labour and the surprising selection of goods the Bahamas choose to import.

Yet Bay Street is far from impersonal. When I sought to purchase material for discreet trousering, the merchant, who must have had the blood of a wilder island in his veins, advised me: "You've years ahead of you to wear that dull colour. Let yourself go a bit. Here's a nice red. You'd turn a few heads, I'll say, in that."

George Street Market, the cathedral of every overworked housekeeper, for it provides—with scrupulous honesty of intention but sometimes with curious results—everything for which its devotees pray, is not above delivering also the pills you want from the chemist. Having made friends with one of the charming beef-tea-coloured drivers belonging to this enterprising store, I was not unduly surprised when he called to me through the window-walls of my sitting-room: "Marm, are you there? Your Delphine says you surelee need to wash your hair, mebbe this afternoon. Marm, will I bring you some soap? The onliest you got is for de kitchen."

The Island book-shop sells heavenly pink and blue and primrose-yellow sheets and all sorts of other things not usually connected with literary entertainment.

Near the Colonial Hotel there is a tailor called Lunn. He is berry-brown with a manner combining confidence and respect and he makes an excellent pair of trousers for five dollars. Reluctantly, he may concede you the same faultless garments, on which Sackville and Albemarle Streets could not improve, for the equivalent in English money, but he thinks in American. He works also after the hectic manner of the States which refuse nothing, least of all an order. "Twenty-five pairs ahead of you, but I kin do them by the end of the week," he says in a matter-of-fact voice.

"What hours d'you work?" I asked.

"From daylight till the middle of the night, sometimes longer. I kin get as good a rest at my bench as in my bed."

With a vision of somnambulists mechanically constructing the elegant proportions of my trousers, I asked: "Do you ever sleep?"

“ Eight months of the year, when the tourists are gone.”

All his workers seemed to be happy. Their brains were in their fingers. They rarely looked at what they were doing. With their eyes fixed on the street outside, they stitched with such swift and ordered energy that I imagined garments growing like those fabulous mango trees which Indian conjurers induce out of baskets supposed to be empty.

The Bahamas *are* English, even though a large part of England does not know where they are. I have just received a letter from a very beautiful lady. I regret to say she is a princess as well. Referring to the return O.H.M.S. in the buff-coloured envelope which is our Post Office's confession of failure, of her first attempt to communicate with me, she says: “ I do think somebody ought to know where you are, even though I've forgotten the town and the actual island, but I *did* put Bahamaland, Africa.”

The Bahamas *are* English, although their inhabitants are apt to think of us as worrying altogether too much about our “ own little islands.” They have nearly 3,000 to the couple about which we make such a fuss, so the sentiment has some justification. The importance of population is no doubt over-estimated and who knows but these cays may prove to be a Western Heligoland, guardian or gaoler of the Atlantic. Yet in spite of being—at times with pride and at others with annoyance—English, the Bahamians think and express themselves more easily in the forcible language of America. The hotels and stores calculate their bills in dollars unless reminded of the unaccountable English preference for the more complicated system of shillings and pence. Taxi-drivers talk—through their noses—of dollars and cents. They drive on the right side of the road by preference and ‘ jink ’ when they see anything approaching. It is a great game this ‘ jinking ’ and it adds to the excitement of a drive, for unless the two cars do it simultaneously, the consequences are apt to be troublesome. But the local Jehus are skilled and the local police amiable. “ Take it easy,” they say on every occasion, whether it be an argument between marketing housewives, each clutching one wing of a chicken, simultaneously plucked from a feathered heap, or

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the complicated embrace of mudguards after a failure to 'jink.'

The traffic in Bay Street runs soberly. It is composed of deliciously diverse elements, motors, of course, nine-tenths of them American roadsters, with an occasional Humber Snipe or Hillman insufferably Philistian on account of its superior line; scurrying, small carts with scarlet curtains, the thin horses held together by the harness, and the drivers heaped negligently in a slumber which nothing disturbs; a man leading a goat or two goats—they might be hippopotamuses judging by the disorder they contrive to create, for their idea is to wander, each in a different direction, as far as possible from their owner while a still better idea is to eat anything in sight, from a straw bag hanging on a stall to a bale of flannel similarly exposed, the hem of a coat which tastes like sheepskin or, if nothing else offers, a shoe that has recently trodden vegetable matter. In the middle of the road there is generally a lovely young thing painted the most careful brown with the new petunia lips and nails, pink or blue sharkskin moulded to her person and yards of local hat blown over her eyes so that she cannot see anything at all. If the hat by chance blows backwards she seems to be suspended from it by satisfactorily shaped arms.

As in the out-islands, everyone, however dressed or undressed, seems to be carrying a posy of fish, so in Nassau everyone bears an intriguingly shaped paper bag. There are no parcels. Perhaps this is a concession to island indolence. Whatever you buy, whether it be marmalade at four times the English price, meat at a figure so staggering that one is tempted or driven to vegetarianism, one of those irresponsible garments called play-suits, tribute to the fervent determination of every temporary Bahamian to have a good time for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, or an outsize in umbrella-hats from among the amusing products of Home Industries, into a bag it goes. Even such delectable 'stores'—there are no 'shops' in Nassau—as Mrs. Stuart's or Meg's on whose thresholds everyone immediately becomes impetuous because the sea-garments and land-ones, irresistibly displayed, suggest youth, fortune,

and a string of beaux, entrust their treasures to the ubiquitous paper bag.

There is a masculine atmosphere about such shopping and none of the intimacy cherished by London and Paris. "What's your size? You don't know?" The attractively sunburned or sunbleached assistant looks as if you could not tell your own name. "Well, what number d'you want? We carry several ranges."

Shamed, you confess that, in whatever European country you—at the moment, regretfully—claim, you are accustomed to asking for 'navy-blue shorts' without further explanation.

"I guess you mean pants. Size sixteen perhaps. We can do . . ." and here follows an algebraical problem in figures and letters of the alphabet. The solution, which takes time because neither understands the other's arithmetic, seems to be much the same as in London. With another paper bag you go out to seek solace in the Coco-nut Grove, where everyone meets as a matter of course.

It is the most attractive 'bar' I know, perhaps because it is not really a bar at all. Tables are scattered in a grove of coco-nut palms. In pleasant shade you can drink anything of which—in any country—you have ever heard. The barman is somewhere at hand, inside the vast building which is all things to all men and nearly as many to women. His imagination is fertile. His hands are capable. He is also endowed with the persuasive powers of doctors and preachers. If you ask for a medicine and are given a sermon, it is your own fault. At the Colonial, it is the barman who is always right.

If you can persuade the manager, or is it the head waiter, at the Prince George, to let you dine outside where his restaurant steps delicately out on to the wharf, the impression, providing there is no wind, should be unforgettable. There are no lights except the stars. Small boats alongside the quay, their sails furled as if they were petals, rock so gently that the movement is almost imperceptible. Beyond them, painted as it were on the grey glass of sea and sky, a few schooners are anchored. I think you can just see Hog Island as a cloud tumbled into the sea. I know that a

THEY FLOURISH LIKE A GREEN BAY TREE

solitary beacon flashes at long intervals far out in the ocean. A round table is set, with a great iced bowl of something delectable among dimly-perceived flowers. You cannot see very clearly. You eat a creamy soup, silken soft. It is followed by one of the island fishes, grouppa for choice, superlatively cooked, which has the semblance of fruit, and a pepper-pot if you are sensible, for, as the Roumanian Foreign Minister, Titulesco, once said to me in an ecstasy of admiration for Queen Marie: "That and that alone is royalty." Leave the ingredients of the dish to the Prince George, eat it in moonlight on a calm night upon the harbour edge, and your pepper-pot will certainly be royal.

Slowly then, there will wander up the quay, their feet bare or ill-shod, shuffling in the sand, a company of waifs with musical instruments. Tattered ragamuffins, half-blacks and quarter-blacks, they achieve a brief divinity when they play. If you can persuade them from their American jazz, they will sing, in soft aching voices, the doggerels of their childhood. They will have forgotten most of the words. They will have learned that white folk enjoy a ribaldry based on sex and drink. It takes more persuasion to make them shed the uncomprehended years spent in the gutters of civilisation. But at last, one, younger or braver than the rest, may begin to strum an old village tune. The absurd phrases follow, hesitating at first: "I wish I had a needle, so fast as I can sew, I'd sew my baby to my side, and down the road we'd go," or "Oh come along Moses, don't get lost, Somebody's dying every day."

In your imagination, surely, you will sail away, every one of you, to the islands of the lost Lucăyans, with the dreams you cannot share.

The oldest stores on Bay Street—how the word 'stores' implies treasure, silks, ivories, jewels and trash, rich harvest of ignorance and wisdom—are built of old, pleasantly coloured stone, with small windows easily barred or shuttered and the cellar openings that gave passage to centuries of contraband. The overhanging balconies of the houses, where still the merchants live above their goods, suggest the habits of Spain. Otherwise, Nassau, brilliantly

white and rose and yellow, or delicately green, is Nordic in the simplicity of its architecture. Bay Street gives the impression of being fresh-built in wood, especially at the further end where, with the harbour pressing close on one side, it wanders across an expanse of grass. A gigantic silk-cotton tree, the kind which always has a ghost or 'duppie' in it in Jamaica, spreads magnificently over the turf. It is said to be 200 years old. It is also said to be the parent of all other such trees on the island. Like an image of the enormous grey elephant god Ganesh, its hide gnarled and worn, its legs set solidly together, its hundred trunks moving lazily, imperturbable even in a hurricane, the tree dominates that part of the city where business suddenly comes to an end and leisure begins.

For beyond the Law Courts and the Library, the fire and police stations, the public buildings which every town must have and on whose bulk or shape or cost it invariably prides itself, away beyond the Royal Victoria Hotel, a very pleasant place with the glamour of the past and the plumbing of the present, the houses which every nation has built according to its own conception of a home, rise out of hibiscus and bougainvillæa.

I used to think, indeed I still think, that no one who has not seen the red of Rhodesian poinsettias, a red which has the violence of flame and the warmth of blood, blazing like huge vermilion stars high up—for they are very tall—against the cloudless, clear blue of the African sky, can understand the terrible intensity of the colour. After driving along the crowded reaches of Bay Street, with the harbour pushing its way to the end of every alley, insistently blue against the delicate spring painting of the houses, I remembered the reds of Rhodesia and longed to set them up against the Bahamian sea. All that is needed here, I thought, is a contrast. There are no other such blues in the world. Flower-sellers' markets in autumn, the windows of jewellers in the luxury streets of capitals, offer no comparison, because sapphires, aquamarines and amethysts are not sufficiently alive. The petals of delphiniums and lupins are not transparent. If wine could be made out of flowers and scent distilled from the hearts of jewels, perhaps the

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combination might compare with the changing brilliance of the seas from which the Bahamas were born. But there must be some red.

So I thought as I drove out of the small town, so quaint a combination of bustle and idleness. The last freshly laundered figures, hurrying to do nothing of the slightest importance, disappeared into the last of the streets. Then the gardens began. The perfection of blue and green and the brownish purples of the vintage were roughly challenged. A riot of copper bougainvillæa clambered over the walls. Heads of hibiscus, boldly crimson, rocked like fishing-boats at anchor, each tearing away from its stem as if at any moment it might set sail. There is an independence about hibiscus which I greatly appreciate. The sleeping variety which furls itself after sunset into a red-night-capped umbrella, represents my own feelings about the night.

So, passionately grateful for the reds which splintered the unbearable beauty of pure blue, as if a revolution had spattered with blood the cloak of Mary the Mother of God, I was delighted that such fierce iconoclasm should have been effected by my favourite hibiscus.

There were more gardens and another scramble of flowers, then, orderly and precise, a hedge of heavy-headed red bloom. Beyond rose the immense pink Fort Montague Hotel, to me suggestive of something very expensive made out of the best possible sugar for an important birthday. It really does look edible. If one broke off bits of the charmingly arched and pillared porches, surely they would be marshmallow or marzipan? Sweets are conducive to good temper. I do not believe in the American physical instructor who is supposed to have told his exquisite compatriots they had million-dollar bodies and—because they ate too much candy—ten cent skins. I like candy. So I like the Fort Montague Hotel. It is unpretentious, in spite of its synthetic appearance. It has a garden wherein there is everything that can be expected of a garden, and a night-club as well. Before I left London, Lord Bearsted told me that in Nassau I should find the most delightful night-club in the world. "It has the sea on one side and a lake on

the other and a tropical garden all round." It seemed to me then that he was getting rather muddled, but I was wrong. For the Jungle Club is quaintly shaped, so it has enough sides for all that Lord Bearsted described and an amusing encampment of green tables as well. Each of these has a thatched umbrella over its head. Inside the deliberately primitive building, the lights shine out of great sea ferns and there are as many palms as guests. Both grow wild. Towards 4 a.m. the jungle is more human than vegetable. A Balkan Queen, now dead, once said to me with the loveliest smile: "You know it really is the greatest possible fun being royal. One can give such a lot of pleasure to all the people who want to know one." That is just what the Fort Montague Hotel thinks. It knows it is unique. It steps across the road on to its own beach. This is almost too much to expect after a garden, a lake and a night-club. But the hotel, like the Queen, finds it all "the greatest possible fun," and by way of pleasing its guests still more, it lets them lunch under sunflower yellow umbrellas at toy tables in the garden. The waiters go gently to sleep. The guests bustle about like goods trains between the loaded buffet—crab, lobster, creamed vegetables, obvious things on dishes, mysterious things in pots—and the chairs where, because they are in the sun or out of the sun, they choose to sit. A crooner with a fat-bellied guitar plays havoc with what feelings remain to the replete. Everyone is content.

CHAPTER XII

THE ISLAND OF NEW PROVIDENCE

THE Bahamas have nothing to do with the tropics. They are—so far as climate and natural growths are concerned—decidedly temperate. I cannot think of any place in the world where the light is so clear. The law of gravity should not exist in an atmosphere of sea, sky and land all miraculously filtered, so that only the primal colours remain. At times the clarity is so accentuated that rocks and trees appear to have form without bulk. Substances are impalpable and sensation limited to sight. It is natural that such painted and improbable beauty should affect the characters of the islanders. Nobody can escape the stimulus of the unexpected and incomprehensible. So the Bahamas have upon their visitors the effect of a Post-Impressionist exhibition. Sense of proportion vanishes. Everything is equally important and nothing fully understood.

The foreign atmosphere of haste and pressure impinging on the lassitude of the islanders may be a suitable incubator for genius but it is no foster-mother for the talent which consists of an 'infinite capacity for taking pains.' At the moment, the Bahamas have at least two geniuses to their credit, one of them indigenous and the other imported. It is interesting to speculate on what—in Napoleonic fashion—these two men will do for the islands and to the islands for which they have considerable feeling. Harold Christie is a Bahamian born. He is comparatively short and burned to the golden colour of seaweed on a Scottish beach. I rather think his eyes are hazel, the colour of streams. He is good-looking in the way of a faun and when he has time to talk of treasure and full-rigged ships and the small lost cays which few have seen, a woodland creature peers out of his eyes. It is wise and shy and very young. It has a

fund of island lore. It has learned by heart, without any help from an original and enterprising brain, a great deal about the islands and the seas of which they are always a part. But Harold Christie is a man of business. He has imagination. Perhaps he prides himself on his theoretically effective organisation. In fact, he pays the price of most genius by having no power of attending to detail. But it seems that he can choose and train his men. He has the best secretary out of America. She is the only woman I have ever met who can end a telephone conversation when it has ceased to be effective. I am told that this man who speculates in real estate and dreams in terms of creation, has made his own fortune in order to risk it again in larger enterprises. No doubt, when the faun is safely in hiding, the man of business would suggest that, being a product of twentieth-century civilisation, he wants to exploit land and settlers, each for the benefit of the other. But his projects cover at least five days out of the first chapter of a modernised Book of Genesis. For, lover of the sun and the sea, with a knowledge of island history, he wants to put the clock back to the days when a carefully fertilised soil produced all that the Bahamas needed to eat, and stocked foreign fruit markets as well. Undaunted by sand, rock and bush, by the perpetual wind, by centuries of indolent confusion in the matter of sale of titles and deeds, he has bought land on the scale of an Alexander determined to refashion the world. While the young Macedonian dreamed of breeding a flawless race upon the roof of the known world, the Bahamian intends to convince all those "dreamers, dreaming greatly in the man-stifed towns" of journey's end in the Bahamas. For his settlers there will be no "bones about the wayside." There will be no question of "first the wood failed, then the food failed, then the last water dried." They will come into their own, not in the way of Kipling's empire builders following "where the strange roads go down," but by seaplane landing at Lyford Cay on New Providence, or on the calm water of Half Sound, in Eleuthera.

General Balbo's scheme for the settlement of his ten thousand (more fortunate than Xenophon's) in Tripolitania

—once the granary of the Roman Empire—lacks the breadth and colour supplied by the bewildering Bahamian. For Harold Christie is transforming many thousands of acres of land, within 16 miles by excellent road of Nassau—at Lyford Cay—or on the larger neighbouring island of Eleuthera with its repeated call to adventurers, into homesteads with gardens and farms, wireless telephones and all the privileges of plumbing, those perquisites of civilisation for which we pay a high price in the nerve strain of ‘keeping up with the Smiths.’ There will be no Smiths on Eleuthera, or else everybody will be a Smith. “For,” said Harold Christie firmly, “settlers want an awful lot nowadays and their wives want more. I’m going to give it to them.”

On his fingers, broad, capable, not at all representative of the fecund originality of the man’s brain, or the force and turbulence of his ideas, he listed “milk, eggs, meat, decent roads, good water—I’ll have to have it analysed and bottled, Americans are suspicious of water—hundreds and thousands of palms—the English will like those; I’ll have to import them—a golf course—people want exercise—a cinema and a club—they’ll like a bit of amusement. A doctor of course, but nobody’s ever ill on these islands. I’ll have to build a hotel. It won’t pay, but it’s got to be there.” For want of breath, he paused. “There’ll be plots,” he said, with added decision, for he knows that I have never been able to acquire the plot mind.

“Some people don’t want to be bothered with land,” continued Mr. Christie, “when they’ve got the whole of the sea in front of them. All they need is a few hundred feet between the beach and the nearest road with every convenience thrown in.”

Under the stern gaze of a business man I visualised the disappearance of Eleutheran bush and the development of a modern garden settlement, with everything except space, silence, individuality and the right to be—defiantly—alone, provided by means of a row of buttons. I should probably press the wrong one. But there are many who need such rest. They have earned an effortless ease, and Half Sound, developed with genius and common sense, will certainly give it to them.

The faun peered out of pebble-brown eyes. The corners of the business man's mouth relaxed. "There's so much land available. It's not all going to be developed. There'll be room for any number of hermits. You can go and bury yourself, if you like, with not a house or a human being in sight. And I tell you what! I'll supply you with milk, grade A—and eggs, meat too——" His enthusiasm rose. It is a tide which never ebbs. Exhaustion cannot stem it. The Canutes of whom most of us are apprehensive, have as little effect as this Danish Solomon on the flood of Harold Christie's energy. Parties roll off his back. Engagements and undertakings appear to be hopelessly confused. They straighten out. Things get done.

One quality this island artist, shaping the clay of foreign lives, shares with a more rugged genius tested in the crucible of success. Neither will ever grow up. Yet Harry Oakes who, roughly speaking, has bought all of New Providence with which his fellow Peter Pan is not concerned, has watched the growth of a nation. To that process, by his own efforts and the strength of his character, he has largely contributed. Sir Harry Oakes is a Canadian and, by repute, a millionaire. He owns a gold mine. Perhaps this is an understatement. He may own several and they may not even be particularly important among his manifold interests. The thing he desires to own, the thing he loves and holds, is land. He has the same feeling for it as my own Lincolnshire forbears, who have held the same acres since they were registered in the Domesday Book. As those squires and thrifty yeomen farmers, the line punctuated on occasions by a better brain such as must have been possessed by the judge who, in fourteenth-century England, seized and tried in the precincts of Lincoln Cathedral the murderers of little St. Hugh, as these hard-working unimportant men laid the foundations of a great property, setting by each year, acre after acre, newly acquired as a result of cattle sales and crops, so Sir Harry, with an equal genius for the land and far greater power at his disposal, takes unto himself, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, until death do them part, the harsh, unresponsive earth to which he is bound by some strange conception of service inherited from men

of his name "who bought as many acres as they could see, but never sold one of them."

Iliad and Odyssey combined could be written about Harry Oakes's adventures in the North-West, when the Gold Rush burst into Alaska and the Yukon. He talks of them casually. "One thing I'd like to see. That's a winter's ice breaking on ——— River. They tell me it's like cannon. Nothing can stand against it. A forest may disappear in its path and with it any number of sourdough concessions. The water makes a new channel when the ice goes and you can hear the noise for miles, right down to the coast." He rarely mentions what he has seen or done, but, like Harold Christie, he is ready to talk of the future. This means the roads his tractors are making, the swamps which he is turning into dry land, the islands that appear and disappear in the vast lake, which he shapes as he chooses. One evening, he drove us through the bush over newly sown tracks. To his mind, as to a Brazilian cattleman's, "a road is anywhere a car can go. "But I'm making lots of good ones. You come back next year and you'll see a change." He might have said next week or to-morrow, for his extraordinary tractors tear up the bush and devour it as they go along. To ride on one of them is like being transported backwards to the first days of Genesis, when form was reft from chaos.

A secretary of the New York Treasury, in the most experimental phase of Roosevelt's first Presidency, told me that he felt like God when, every day, at precisely ten o'clock, he fixed the price of gold. The same sensation must belong to the tractor-driver who, mounted upon invincible force, can mutter to himself above the noise of the earthquake he creates: "Let there be land. Let there be water."

I do not know why this Harry Oakes, hard-working visionary with his immense interests and limited speech, for he rates words unimportant unless he happens to be describing something which caught and held his always receptive imagination, has chosen to identify himself with the interests of New Providence. But it is very evident that his treasure is the earth. He must possess all of it that he

can see. And when he has got it safe in his capable hands, he must cherish it, not after the manner of Christie who develops the land to good purpose, seeing himself as its master, but serving it because of its hold on his affections.

Sir Harry would understand that desire for shabby spaciousness which I have always pleaded when any bull of real estate presses upon me a desirable plot.

From the many, many windows of his charming pink house, satisfactorily irregular and indefinite, so that it continually offers new and unexpected pleasure, there is no other dwelling to be seen, unless it be a solitary Naboth's vineyard upon a distant rise. There is the Lake, called Killarney, with an occasional flight of duck and the changing shape of the waters spreading into sycophant lagoons. There is the 'pine barren,' a great sweep of land, very flat, with rank after rank of dark forest growing close and stiff like the trees out of a Noah's Ark which, as children, we arranged in the primmest possible formation. Some of them were broken and the whole had to support the halt and the maimed. In the forefront of the Oakes's view, regretted, perhaps, but acknowledged inevitable by Lady Oakes, who has beauty, wit, and a generous measure of understanding, there is generally a tractor.

"What is it doing?" I ask, fascinated by this monstrous devouring of the earth. The answer is always the same. It is making a road, but not necessarily on land. The lake has had to give up some of its own. Like one of those appalling leviathans which Greek and Roman writers, intoxicated by imagination, describe as seizing the keel of a ship between their teeth and shaking the dismayed crew overboard, the tractor plunges about its business. Force prevails. A mechanical Dictator disposes of the earth's surface according to personal choice.

When I began to write about New Providence, I had intended some geographical description, but, outside Nassau, "the rest" does really consist of two men's activities. For Sir Charles Dundas, a Governor whose providential vision reaches to the furthest out-island under his care, and Mr. Jarrett, the ubiquitous Colonial Secretary whose day and night are inextricably confused, so that he

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may be signing the contract for a vital steamship service on a beach in moonlight, or plotting the loan of implements to primitive agricultural associations as the last fiddler packs up his instrument at the Bahamian Club—these men belong, not to New Providence, but to the whole of the Bahamas. To them, even more than to my two geniuses, both of them impatient, with so many irons in the fire that some will surely melt—but that is much better than rusting—the islands will owe a solid scaffolding of progress, on which appreciative successors will be able to build.

I once asked an American for a description of New Providence. He gave me a list of bars, mentioned some of their familiars, and the drinks they preferred. As an afterthought, he spoke of the Porcupine Club. It is a charming place upon Hog Island. It owns some hundred feet of sand, bordered by sea, which is part of the famous Paradise Beach, public and crowded. Occasionally tourists leave their portion of heaven, shaded with hollyhock-coloured umbrellas, and wander along the shore. This causes immense perturbation to the Porcupine. All its prickles go out, for it has set itself a standard ethnographical rather than moral. Jews are not admitted. Nor are blacks, browns, yellows, toffee-coloured, or any shade of cinnamon which might possibly indicate a coloured ancestor. The English are sometimes admitted. Hitler, I feel, would be excluded. Very awkward it is then for the Porcupine, most exclusive of animals, chuff-chuffing about with a great crackle of spines, when the doubtfully white or the doubtfully Aryan, conscious that the foreshore, between full tide and low, is the inalienable property of the Crown, walk as they have every right to do, across frontiers for which they have as little regard as Henlein or Ribbentrop.

It is all very amusing, except to the members of the Club, who—by the way—have imposed upon themselves strict rules of dress. I have forgotten just how much they must wear for lunch—unless they are content to eat it within sight of the beach—but it is quite a lot. The Sultan of Djock-jakarta in Java has established a contrasting precedent. No man may appear in his presence wearing anything above his sword-belt, and no woman with her breasts covered.

East and West, shall they ever meet? Not under the Stars and Stripes.

When I asked an Englishman about New Providence, he mentioned racing, polo, and golf, omitting the long-legged palms which shelter the greens and the sea in which polo ponies and racehorses bathe more regularly than their owners. He did add that there was "a decent night-club." By this he meant the Bahamian, that place of enchantment, where, in a queer synthetic moonlight, blue walls closing in, a band from New York, with wizard fingers and the hearts of outlaws, play grand opera or jazz as the mood moves them. In the hall of this most perfect place—for it is very small, there are only a handful of tables, the food is excellent, and the bar leans intimately towards a fountain—I found a unicorn. It was woven into a panel of tapestry hanging on the wall. The colours were faded, so the lion, if there was one, escaped my notice. But there was my unicorn, diffident and at the same time defiant. I was immensely pleased to meet him, even in effigy, and as a result I beamed upon the crooner, whose golf handicap was six. So, for my particular pleasure, he sang the saddest songs he knew, including one about "Oh, Jacob's ladder mus' be long. It stole my mudder away—" But I thought of the good ship *Unicorn*, clearing without lights or chart, for a beleaguered confederate port, or had this somewhat legendary vessel belonged to a buccaneer, exchanging his Queen's colours for the skull and crossbones? As if in sympathy, the crooner sang: "All I wan' is a tall ship and a star to guide her by." I was very happy.

The Bahamas induce this irresponsible sensation of happiness, that is when one can get away from charming and convenient dwellings in which one is assured: "We don't figure to keep house at all while we're here," but there is a different coloured bath for every room and a cocktail for every hour.

Fortunately, the American is gregarious by inclination and habit. He feels lonesome out of sight and sound of his fellows. So the amiable and hospitable invaders who have taken possession of Nassau, build their expensive houses, neo-Georgian, neo-colonial, or realistically modern, cheek

by jowl along the popular beaches. Between some of them, there is no space to encourage sea-grape or the airy grace of casuarines. The American is, above all things, sociable. There is no moment when he wants to be alone. The epitome of his social genius, I imagine, was the invention of twin beds.

The Emerald Beach Club, Canadian sponsored, I believe, as a retort to Porcupine insularity, has established itself upon a more isolated shore, where the land curves gently to embrace a sea indescribably brilliant. A very clever lady, Mrs. Dennison, whose husband created the Club, has decorated one great room in the colours of the reef, pale coral, the green of sea-ferns, primrose and brown like the insides of shells, treasure trove littered over the shore. At Emerald Beach, due to Dennison genius, without which I cannot imagine the Club existing, you can hire a cabana, roofed with thatch, paint it any colour you please—some have heavenly ripe orange doors—furnish it to suit your character or what you hope will happen to you in the responsive isles, and fry in oil, bake, burn or gently simmer in as much sun as you choose. But beyond all this, beyond the Spanish tile factory, beyond the last fantastic house, gabled, turreted or Moorish blue and white, there are cays which nobody frequents. There is a turbulent confusion of palms which one of Mr. Christie's real estate companies intends to tame for human habitation. Further still, there is Lyford Cay and that is quite perfect, even though it is destined for plots—large ones, super-plots screened luxuriantly by bush and agitated shaving-brush palms which are always talkative, even when there isn't a wind.

On either side of the promontory, there are beaches. One is so unbelievable that it should be secret. Day after day my husband and I lingered there and saw nobody. We took lunch and tea in a fibre basket whose handles immediately broke. We spread a straw mat under the palms which chattered away, fussed as usual, although the day dreamed in a haze of gold. Under them we slept. Then we walked a long way down the pearl-smooth sand which gleamed like the lining of a conch shell. We watched small, chestnut-coloured crabs scuttle into the sea and followed them, step

A UNICORN IN THE BAHAMAS

by step, savouring the first tentative caress of the water and then its ardent, enveloping embrace.

In the Bahamas, the sea is never cold and you cannot sink. It takes you and holds you while, with renewed energy, you imagine swimming to the furthest bournes of your thought. Then it rocks you gently, with the murmuring softness of the island voices. Once, at Lyford Cay, I went to sleep in the middle of swimming, and woke with my mouth full of sea.

CHAPTER XIII

GHOSTS AT SPANISH WELLS

FLYING over Bahamian seas gives me all the feelings of Alice when first she stepped through the looking-glass.

Some day, I hope, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, the Conrad of the air, will write one of her great stories and call it Tail Wind or Head Wind over three thousand islands. Only she could adequately describe the adventures of Bahamian Airways whose sea-planes fly in all weathers. In Nassau harbour they take off from among a crowd of yachts, schooners and speed-boats, with a liner or two, reefs, rocks, ferries and swimmers, to emphasise the difficulties. They land anywhere. Indicate a destination on the map and they will get you there—somehow. "You may have a bit of a bump," says the pilot, Captain Collar, when you ask him to come down among white-capped breakers. "I guess there ain't enough water to cover the turtles," he reflects, when you express a desire to land on mud among mangroves. But Bahamian Airways planes have horse sense, or maybe it is fish sense. They have flown unnumbered miles and never had an accident.

"We'll find the place all right. No need to trouble. Sure, there'll be somewhere to land."

"What do you do when you meet a hurricane?" I asked.

"Get in front of it and run for Miami where there's a hangar." But no other weather troubles these most enterprising Airways. They ride the tail of a storm with positive enjoyment. "This isn't our idea of stiff weather," they say, when the clouds are low and a nor'-wester, tearing through them, confuses land and sea shapes.

On a tail wind, we set sail in the air, 1,000 feet up, no more, for Spanish Wells. The island of New Providence lay upon the sea-surface, long and lazily curved. It looked

like a greenish-grey snake idling on the top of the water. The roads, smooth as oiled silk, went on for ever, winding over the rougher material of the bush. The beaches were shining silver scimitars laid flat against the sea. The native houses, very small and square, looked like molluscs clamped solidly to the rocks. Some stretches of sand were peach-coloured against the jewel-clear water, through which I could see everything which grew or moved on the bottom. It was as if we flew over jungle and saw it all through an extraordinary iridescence.

I remembered an unbelievable dawn when I coasted over thick cotton-wool clouds, colourless as shrouds. Below them lay Brazil and above them the limitless ether with one great Pan-American liner, south-bound. We passed at 6,000 feet and immediately, as if it were a salute, the sun broke through the white wadding, muffling, it seemed, even the sound of the engine. The empty air became drenched in light. Fire burned under the clouds. First they were warmly red. Then they turned to gold. Shafts of flame tore through them. Above the mighty conflagration of the morning, we flew through liquid colour. It seemed to me to pour off the wings. I imagined a white-hot wake. Yet it was cold. And the air was smooth as glass. There are no words to express its blazing clarity. Suddenly the cotton-wool clouds were burned up. Only the smoke remained, a stain upon the incomparable effulgence of sunrise. We were flying over forest, dark green without break or difference of tone. We dropped to within a few feet of the tree-tops and then the miracle happened. Out of them burst a flock of scarlet ibis. It seemed to me that we had brushed them like huge, over-full blooms from the branches. For fear of disturbing them further, instinctively, we climbed. In a moment the birds, sacred to ancient Egypt and to the Aztecs who believed in the divinity of perfection, were no larger than butterflies. Redder than fresh red ink, they were spilled upon the greens of the forest. Art could not imitate the careless profusion of design. As the foliage began to acquire form with the thousand different shades that from a greater height merge into indigo haze, the last of the birds settled. There was no more of that

startling and strident clash of colours which has the effect of sound.

Only once again, have I perceived beauty with such a sense of shock. This was on my first Bahamian flight. I had been told that from the middle of the sky I would see everything happening at the bottom of the ocean, but the words had not made a picture. Looking down at New Providence and its tail of islands, I forgot the sea, for the bush-covered earth suggested worn tapestry. The palm trunks were the bare threads in the pattern. The little hills made knots and where pits blown out of the limestone had once held fruit trees or vegetables, there were gaping holes in the canvas. It was a dull, uninteresting design, dim as the hunting-scenes which hang in draughty Gothic halls.

A double line of rollers piled into untidy heaps. On the ocean side where the wind had its way, the surf looked like torn white frilling. It was muddled and over-emphatic. Then I looked down and gasped. Something painful happened to me, but I do not know exactly where it happened. The ribbon on which the rarest and most intimate of all our emotions are strung in the complicated depths of our being, was pulled slowly out of my body. For only over Brazilian forest, breaking into a flood of scarlet ibis, had I seen such contrast of colour. The sea was no longer flower-coloured. It had the living clarity of wine, reflecting unimaginable blue—the blue you see in furnaces and crucibles or searing a vat full of metal at boiling-point. The bed of the ocean, seen through this blue, was the essence of all precious stones. The rocks were raw amber and the weed a dusky, changing purple. I thought of the vintage on Umbrian hills, when the earth is golden and the leaves prophetically wine-coloured. It was a good thing I was not flying the plane, for I should have been hypnotised by the colour of the sea, which the islanders call 'white' within the reef. Into the drenched blue light I should have come down and there, I suppose, I should have stayed, without sufficient impetus to leave the water.

An old sea captain told Major Bell¹: "With my own eyes I saw a mermaid astern of the wessel." That was off

¹ *Isles of June.*

Eleuthera, I believe. The man evidently had a sense of the appropriate, for there should be mermaids in Bahamian seas. I saw an enormous, coal-black fish, motionless. It might have been a flaw in pale emerald. The pilot said it was a sting-ray, but I would have preferred it to be a shark. He told me it was great fun "graining a ray."

The islanders use a metal spike with a rope attached to it. Sometimes the monstrous flat fish, which may be anything up to fifteen feet long and eight or ten wide, buries himself in the warm sand and prepares for a sleep in shallow water. He has a set of barbs in his tail more effective than the 'cat,' but otherwise he is like a great sea-blanket. Fortunately, he lies about on the bottom or heaves himself weightily across it. Otherwise, he might, without any hostile intention, smother an insignificant human swimming towards the horizon.

"If you get into a young ray, he'll pull the boat all over the place," explained the pilot in that strange monotonous undertone which those familiar with the air use because it is more effective than shouting. "The old ones are lazy. They stay put. You can make holes all over them and they won't stir. It's like heaving up the reef, when you try to get 'em on board." I decided to leave sting-rays alone.

Gently, we landed upon what seemed to be open sea. A little distance away, there was an island. It looked clean and very still. A boat came out to meet us. The small waves ruffled about the bow. A man stood up to row. He was colourless as the houses behind him. That was the first thing I noticed about Spanish Wells. Time and a persistent sun, I thought, have drained away the colour. Everything has been too much washed. The boatman's skin was not brown. It was greyish-white like his hair, his shirt which had lost all its buttons, the wood of his unpainted boat, its sails and his own intricately patched trousers.

Without apparent effort, he rowed us ashore. The policeman had come down to meet us, he said, and we should see everything there was to be seen. No, there was no gaol. They had never had a prisoner that he could remember. "I reckon the policeman's about the least-worked man on the island," he reflected. "There ain't no crime here, nary

a one. In twenty-five years, there's bin just one cutting-scrap. No, it weren't murder. Jest two fellers got mad with each other and started cuttin'."

While we slipped into the channel of deep water which, recently dug, adds accessibility to the other enticements of Spanish Wells, he continued his reflections. "I guess we're mos' frien'ly people here. Never a quarrel. We're all white. You won' see a black skin on the island. We don't want coloured people. This is a white settlement." In every line of his body and in his speech from which at random he omitted unnecessary letters, he expressed the lassitude of the small, isolated white colony, self-sufficient and self-centred, its blood thinned by centuries of inter-marriage. Yet some of the best sailors of the Bahamas came from Spanish Wells. The captains of Nassau pleasure-schooners, taking relays of tourists, furtively longing for calm water, into sudden storms which impress the 'foreigners' and leave completely unperturbed the men of the island seas accustomed to 'weather,' often come from this small, sandy cay on the Western side of the channel, narrow and winding, which leads to Harbour Island. Hence their casual courage, for they are the descendants of the men who fought with Andrew Deveaux when he took Nassau from an entire Spanish army.

The seamen of Spanish Wells were always in the thick of the trouble, whatever it was, buccaneering, wrecking or the American Civil War. Like the Irish, they have always asked: "Is this a private fight, or can anyone join in?" So when an American ship pillaged their settlement in 1812, thinking to pay off some of the score recorded against the names of succeeding English Georges, Spanish Wells put up a good resistance. They also put out the fires Uncle Sam had lighted. But the wooden houses burned easily. Most of them had to be rebuilt and after every hurricane it is the same. The men of Spanish Wells seem to be good builders.

In return for the help they gave to Colonel Deveaux—and some of them went out to assault twenty-four-pounders with machetes or fishing-grains—the inhabitants of St. George's Cay were given a grant of land 'overseas.' Every morning, they sail away to their farms, on what they call

the mainland of Eleuthera. They grow fruit, corn and vegetables, so I suppose they use plough, hoe or cycle, but I cannot imagine them working, except in a storm at sea. "But we do," insisted the boatman. "We work plenty hard, especially us old 'uns. I'm sixty and past, but my grandchildren expect me to go on workin'." It sounded harsh, but the bleached grey man smelling of sea-salt and tobacco with the added odour of dry herbs, explained: "All our children use' to go t' America t' earn money, but they all plenty fond of homes, plenty fond of father and mother, so they all came back here. But now America don' want us—some new fangle' immigration law. So the children mus' try an' fin' work t' Nassau. Plenty difficult."

He looked at the bottom of the sea, where every rock was familiar to him as the furniture in his sitting-room. Opining that it would be a good day for lobsters—"We stick 'em with grains"—he asked if I would give him a shilling for seven.

The settlement of Spanish Wells with its scrubbed clean and rubbed dry appearance, is comfortably established upon a slight rise looking across the channel to mangrove swamps. The houses are mostly white with roofs of sun-bleached shingles. The people are entirely white. They are the descendants of Loyalists who escaped from the imposition of the Stars and Stripes. In every house, I saw oleographs of the British royal family and in nine out of ten some memory of the flag for which, not as a symbol, but as an essential part of their lives, thousands of rich and ordinary people, not much more than a century ago, went into exile.

It was mid-morning when we landed, and hot. The policeman met us at the end of a wooden jetty. He wore tweed trousers and an open shirt. His manners came from a courtlier age. Companionably we walked up clean, hard, cemented paths, colourless as the houses and the fair-skinned people. There were very few flowers. The white faces under the broad home-made straw hats lacked the emphasis of negro flesh and feature. I began to think that I had walked straight into an elysium where gentle and contented ghosts enjoyed translated English soil.

For everyone was insistent on his English blood. They

talked English, too, without the strong infectious fusion of American to which I had become accustomed in Nassau. But there was something else missing. Emptiness, clarity, an exaggerated quiet, the washed effect—of what else was I persistently conscious? There was some quality about Spanish Wells which I appreciated, for which I was grateful. Then I realised why the soft-toned, monotonous speech was so suited to the village. Nobody had any need to raise his voice. The silence was complete. There were no birds. Rope-soled shoes made no sound on the smooth paths. There was no wheeled traffic of any kind, not a cart, or a bicycle or a barrow. No clip-clop of hooves suggested stones dropped into a pool. It happened that not even a hen had laid an egg.

From one end to the other of the pleasant village we walked. We saw the new house which was being prepared for the new school-teacher, of whom Spanish Wells had great hopes. We bought American cigarettes for sevenpence a packet instead of the Nassau hotels' shilling. We sat on a clean, clean porch and a clean, clean woman with a washed face and a starched apron, stiff rows of curling-pins in her hair, provided us with a lot of home-made orangeade and some pepsi-cola for sevenpence-halfpenny, so that I began to think the sum of seven must have a particular significance in Spanish Wells. From the porch, we could see two wooden churches like well-scrubbed barns—how difficult it is when thinking of this particular cay, or indeed of any island in the Bahamas to avoid this over-emphasis on the appearance of extravagant cleanliness! We saw the shop, this time it was not a store, where tinned (not canned) food and shilling-a-yard prints, hurricane lamps and glass funnels for those which insist on spluttering in the wind, primitive spotted calicoes, harsh to the touch, nibs as pointed as safety pins, notepaper with a gloss on it and ruled paper with coloured lines to encourage less proficient letter-writers, were neatly arranged. It was all Victorian in period. Nothing had been omitted. The pale, well-laundered women with a lot of petticoats must have escaped from the pages of a reticent novel, in which nobody had even a bowing acquaintance with sex. "We all know each

other familiarly well. We're brought up together, because we're mostly cousins—there's hardly an unrelated person on the island," said the matron with curling-pins. "We never marry a stranger. It's all very comfortable and friendly." It is also entirely out of the world.

The houses all seemed to me alike. There were windows on every side and hurricane shutters. Each dwelling stood up stiffly on posts with a porch in front of the door. Sometimes the woodwork was painted in pale colours. Inside, the wind blew pleasantly through a familiar parlour, divided by intention and habit. For in one part there was always the conventional group of chairs and table devoted to the purpose of dining. In the other there was often furniture of considerable character, some of it inherited perhaps from the 'great houses' of the plantations, with an occasional old oil-painting or silver heirloom.

In Spanish Wells, my thoughts ran backwards. While the policeman talked of the excellent boats building on the beach, I imagined the desperate ventures for which his grandfather and great-grandfather had put to sea. Yet it is difficult to connect emergency with so peaceful a people. Even a hurricane leaves them undisturbed. "Oh yes, the water sweeps right across this low bit here. Shoulder-high it might be and nothing would stand against it, but we get out of the way, all of us, on to the high ground. We're safe there, without even a tree for us to be blown into, but we haven't had a hurricane for a long time."

Everything at all violent was described in similar fashion. It had all happened 'a long time ago.'

Sitting on the porch, I felt myself sinking into depths of stagnant clarity. I felt the pressure increasing. Soon I would be enclosed, like a 'fly' in amber, in some transparent substance from which I should never be able to escape. It would be very peaceful. No further effort would ever be required of me.

Then, across the insistent blues of the reef water, suggesting a magnificent savagery out of keeping with the warm, slow quietness of the village which has forgotten everything but its white descent and its mastery of the sea, I looked at the 'mainland,' pleasantly and productively

GHOSTS AT SPANISH WELLS

green. It was not as flat as usual. "Lord Beaverbrook has bought a lot of land there. They say he's going to build a house." The policeman laid no emphasis on the name, but it brought me back to reality. I began to ask questions.

The average family income in Spanish Wells is about £50 a year. A fisherman might earn as much as £1 a week, but a sponger could not count on more than a quarter as much. "We all take a hand in working the fields," said the matron.

There is no rivalry except between the local pastors for souls. Every man plants where he chooses. He only registers his holding, so as to be able to leave it to his children, if he plants fruit trees on it. The youth who had been to America might own the largest house in the settlement. His brother, a sailor, might be content with a single-roomed shack. "We're all the same here," said the woman with curling-pins. Her voice was candid and untroubled.

CHAPTER XIV

“WOULD IT INCONVENIENCE YOU AT
ALL——?” HARBOUR ISLAND

WHEN Columbus was asked by his patrons, the Spanish Sovereigns, to describe Jamaica, he picked up a sheet of paper, crumpled it and laid it in front of their most Catholic Majesties. The gesture might be applied to Harbour Island, loveliest of the Bahamas. Even from the air, it looks hilly. But on these islands, scarcely raised above the sea, the word ‘hill’ is a comparative term. I was born and bred in Lincolnshire, where the furrows run straight and deep to an infinite horizon and the ‘ridge,’ which to us is so high that it is almost another world, appears to be invisible to a Highlander or a West countryman. So I understand the value of a Bahamian hill and am prepared to regard as something of a natural phenomenon any land which rises fifty feet above sea level.

Harbour Island is full of such little hills. They are thickly covered with the best imitation of jungle I have seen in the islands. The palms are magnificent. In a great thicket, they sweep along the northern shore. Below is the finest of all Elysian beaches. For mile after mile, it runs colourless and smooth. The natives always speak of this particular sand as ‘pink.’ To me it looked like the thickest Devonshire cream smoothly laid between the crest of palms, so tall, piled close against the sky, and the open sea. In the twilight, I thought of it as paint, the kind which, if a bucket is upset, flows evenly over your floor-boards, in thick, semi-circular patterns. Upon this pearl-pale, silken surface, the breakers are fearful of impinging. The foam and fret of the Atlantic remains at a little distance. Slowly, as if reluctant to shatter themselves upon a perfection they might impair, the arches of the waves rear their crystalline

clarity. In their curves are the colours of precious stones and wine. When, at last, they break, it is as if glass had been shattered over gleaming conch shell.

Harbour Island has an air of ancient and well-established peace. It was settled before the American War of Independence sent Loyalists to find refuge under their own flag in the Bahamas. In the middle of the eighteenth century, we read of nearly a hundred white families living on the prolific island, with their slaves, yet it is only a mile and a half in length, and no broader between the Atlantic and the harbour opening on to 'white seas.' Its capital is Dunmore Town, called after the cautious Earl who failed to hold the Americans on sea or land, but, in exile, held the Governorate of the Bahamas from 1786 to 1797.

All Dunmore Town is engaged in the building of boats. For £60 to £100, you can have a thirty-foot shell, made from stout Abaco pine which is so hard and tough that it puts up a good fight against nails and resists altogether the predatory ant.

For the rest, the little town has been taken straight from Finland. It is made up of stalwart, weather-proof houses set with conscious independence in their own plots and gardens, where they mind their own business, except in the matter of wireless. To the accompaniment of a petrol engine making electricity, this begins before breakfast and goes on for a little matter of eighteen or twenty hours. But it is only at one end of what I suppose would be the main street—a wide strip of cement running up one of the little hills, straight out of the Song of Solomon. "Skipping like young lambs," so round and small, and, if they don't belong to the town, so thickly covered with sapodillas, trumpet vine and all sorts of lush, half-tropical growths for which the islanders have no names, these hills add irresponsibility to the landscape.

There is no time to breathe between them. Up one and down another, I plodded in search of the view which I felt was my due. I had the same feeling about that view as Bay Street has about tourists. I was entitled to it and at last I found it, after the fattest of the little hills had skipped away leaving me breathless among a crowd of trees bearing

wild fruit. "What are they called?" I asked a coloured girl who wore an elegant straw hat and carried her shoes on top of it. Rubbing one bare foot in the sand, she gazed doubtfully at the jungle and said: "Oh, they're just bushes."

Ignorance is really the most satisfactory of the emotions if one accepts it as final. With entire content, the girl stared over the hills, thickly quilted in green, with the palms rushing away below us like an impatient tide. "There's lots of bushes on this island," she informed me. I agreed.

The view compensated me for the frustration I would otherwise have felt. It comprised no more than solid, self-sufficient white houses keeping themselves to themselves under their bleached grey shingles, and uplands rolling lazily towards a variety of seas. An old man leading two pigs moved at about a mile and a half an hour. The pigs regretted such haste. About them was not the least suggestion of Gadarene swine. I was sure they would never rush anywhere, least of all into anything so strange as the Atlantic. Those pigs had not an original idea between them and they obviously did not like exercise.

"Where are you taking them?" I asked the old man, for he seemed to be heading towards the more insistent hills. For several minutes, it seemed to me, he considered the answer. Then he said: "We are jooost wa-alking," and the three words, as he pronounced them, took a long time to say. Meanwhile the pigs lay down.

At Dunmore Town I stayed in the most delicious Noah's Ark called 'The Little Boarding House.' There were New England rockers on the porch and a hammock fussily upholstered. There were quantities of bible pictures on the walls. Supper was at six and it consisted of a proper Thanksgiving turkey with sweet potatoes and a wholesome, home-made pie. I imagined myself in one of the clean little townships of New England, with its board-walks and multiplicity of pastors, each urging his flock into a different narrow way. Outside the porch, where the creepers were neatly tied and clipped, a sleeping hibiscus very properly furlled itself into a Christmas tree, covered with red candles.

After my six o'clock supper, postponed to that late hour

HARBOUR ISLAND

because of the unaccountable tastes of tourists, whom the good lady of the house treated as orphans, to be cherished and disciplined, I feared that breakfast might be at five. That would be a pity, I thought, for here in Harbour Island, I could make up for the late nights and the no nights at all of Nassau. I could, if I liked, sleep the clock round.

What a mistake I made! In the adjoining room, separated from me only by a wooden partition, snored a master-mason or somebody equally constructive, engaged upon the new hotel. By midnight there was nothing I did not know about that man's habits. At 2 a.m. he rose and began to throw his boots one after another at the cats making love and a great deal of noise. He evidently possessed a quantity of boots. When he had disposed of them all, he got back into bed. The creaking of his mattress ceased as the snores began again. At five the cats went away and cocks started to crow. They were the most operatic cocks I have ever heard. No wonder they roused the town to the sense of another day and lots of work to be done at once. Before six there was a mighty hammering. All along the beach, and immediately under my window, of course, boats were in that stage of construction when every component part had to be hit and hit again. The new hotel was not going to be left behind. Hammer, hammer, hammer! Every workman must have flung himself in a whirlwind of nails upon the nearest window-frame or door.

When the sun succeeded in getting up—rather late, I thought, but I never saw a clock on Harbour Island—the street was full of children having a grand time. The wireless had started one of those fearsome 'talks' upon an indistinguishable subject in an unknown language. The engine, with prudent forethought, was busy making electricity. With a final trumpet, suggestive of the Day of Judgment, the master-mason tumbled out of bed. Later in the morning, he told me that he hadn't been able to close an eye in "that cats' brothel."

I said I thought it was certainly more peaceful in Nassau.

He looked at me, surprised. "I don' know that I'd say tha-at. It's kind o' quiet here."

"Perhaps," I said, "in the daytime." And I went

away to find the best cream-laid or mother-of-pearl beach. The policeman went with me. He had produced one horse on which I rode. Its foal trotted behind, but this did not satisfy an exaggerated maternal complex. By the time we had mounted the first hill, we had collected two other foals. "They can't all be hers," I protested.

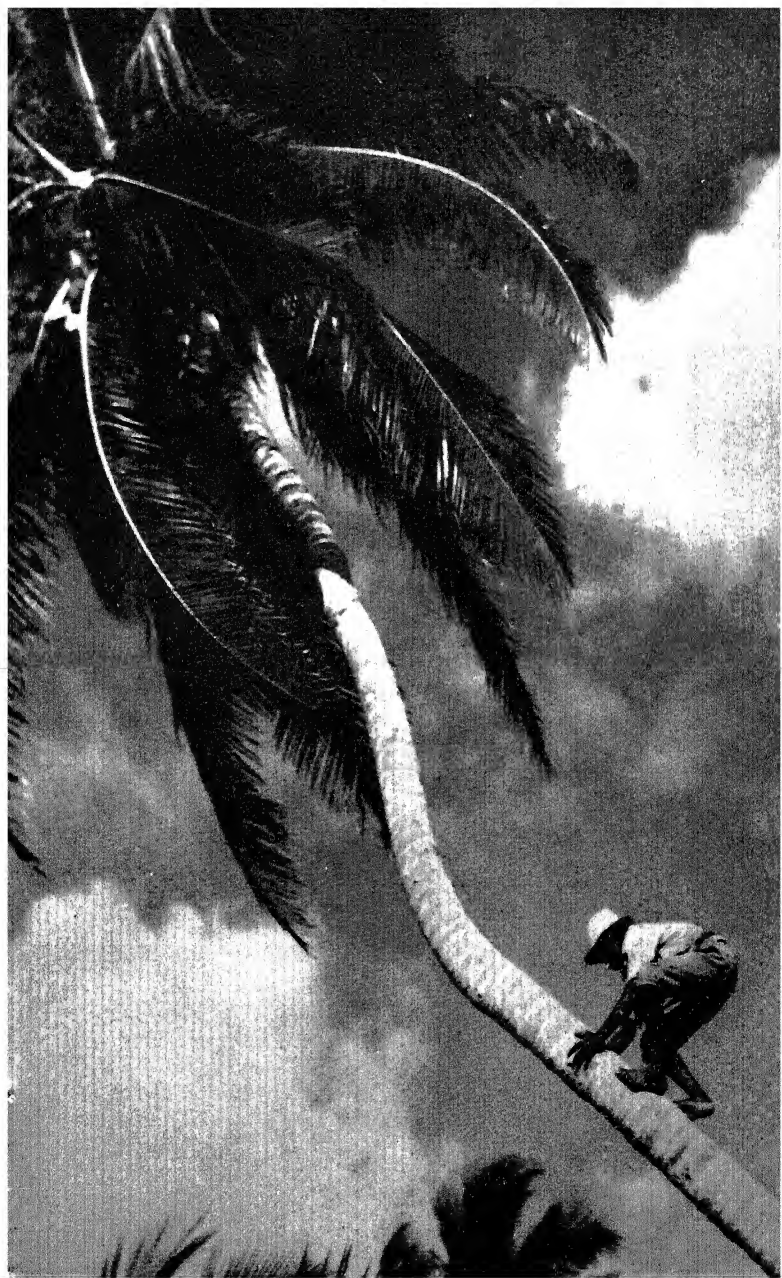
"Reckon, she's kind o' motherin' them," said the blue-black policeman, who was very hot. I begged him not to come further, but he said it was a change and would it inconvenience me at all if he took off his coat.

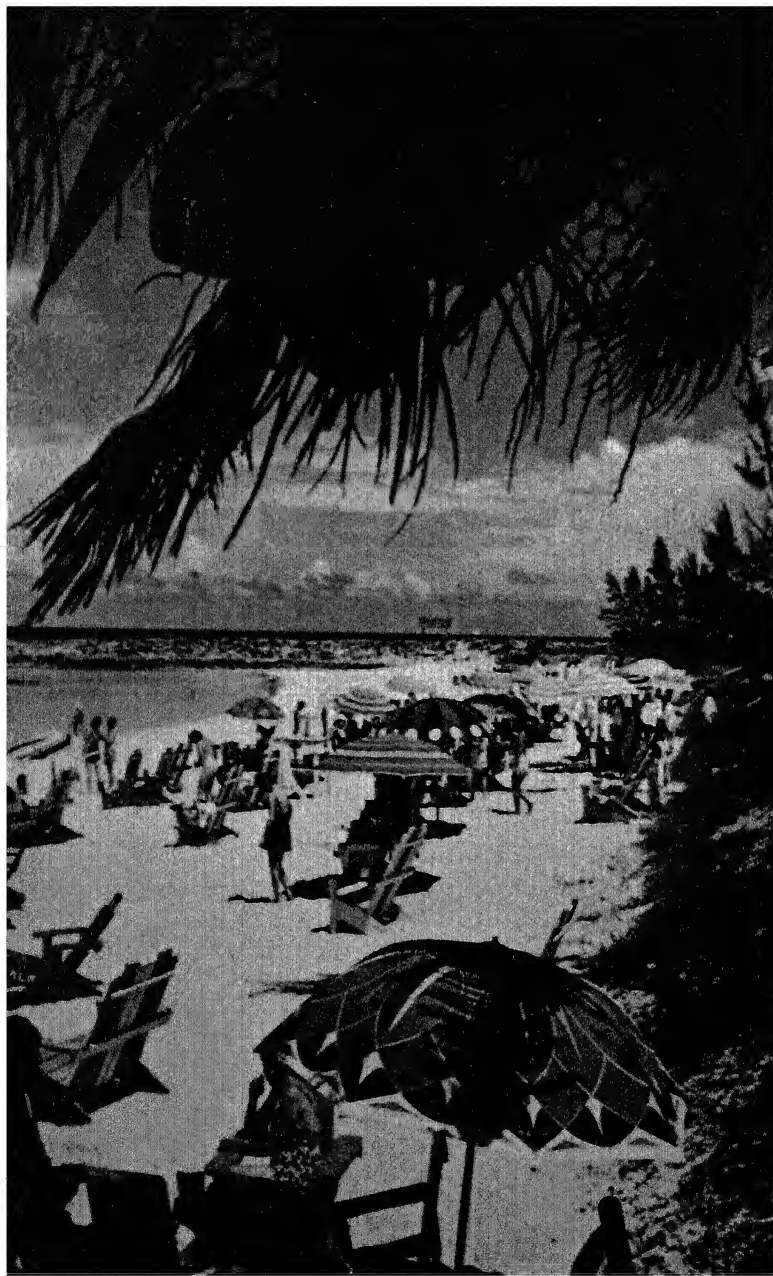
Silently we climbed another sandhill. Then my weed of a pony, held together apparently by a rope in its mouth and another making pretence of girthing the saddle, displayed surprising spirit. Without warning, it catapulted down the other side of the hill. The more important rope broke, but this did not really matter very much, for the saddle, being much too big, was already confused with the mane. In another second it fell off. So did I. The mare stopped. She looked ridiculously surprised, but the foals were delighted. With flying heels, they gambolled—after the best post-impressionist manner. The policeman picked me up. He was respectful, but not at all concerned. His manner implied that foreigners always fell off horses. "Would it inconvenience you at all, ma'am, if I took off my boots?" he asked.

"No," I replied, shaking sand out of my hair. "But it would not inconvenience me either if you rode the horse."

The policeman was shocked. "Ma'am, she's a nice-natured crittur," he protested. Then he balanced the saddle on the middle of her back as if it were an over-heavy roof with long eaves. "Ma'am, you get on again and hold tight and you'll be all safe. She's as gentle as a daisy."

There was no girth at all and as no amount of pulling on the other rope had any effect on the 'daisy's' mouth, it was not long before the saddle and I slipped off again. By this time the policeman was carrying a varied collection of garments, including his socks. But he still wore his trousers and a magnificently official sort of yachting cap under which he had placed a palmetto leaf. "Ma'am, you surelee better walk. It must be kind o' upsettin', so much fallin' about."





I agreed, not without bitterness and suggested that a girth would not have inconvenienced me at all. He seemed surprised. "Ma'am, that's surelee so," he said.

On the beach we forgot our troubles. The policeman enjoyed himself very much chasing away a few children who were collecting sacks of sea-weed as a fertiliser. I enjoyed myself still more the instant I stepped into the sea. For, as usual in the Bahamas, it was a perfect day. The sands were deserted. They stretched as far as I could see. In the distance, there were shadowy cliffs. Against a temperate blue sky high up without any of the oppressive weight of the tropics, the palms were sun-gilt breakers, rearing their crests above the depths of the undergrowth. They tossed about in the wind which belonged to them alone. For air and sea were equally still. Swimming lazily, more often lying half-asleep upon the extraordinary resilience of the ocean, I dreamed that I was drowning in blue glass. It was a satisfactory sensation.

Afterwards I lay on the 'pink' beach and tried to think what the sand looked like. It wasn't really pink, I decided, but it gleamed with the pale polish of coral in the shop windows at Naples and it was smoother than anything I could conceive. I thought of peaches on the garden walls at home. Then I thought of all the tourists to which Harbour Island believes—with justice—that it is entitled. The new hotel would be ready in a fortnight. 'English prices' were to prevail. For a sovereign a day, the traveller of reasonable taste could have his bed and food, with a bathroom, I believe, included, and as much sailing, fishing and swimming as he desired. Or he could idle all day on the limitless sands, between the fervour of the palms and the painted sea, remembering with the Arabs, that "the world is as wide as a man's imagination."

I envied the tourists who were to be the pets of local enterprise. They will even be able to sleep, for the hotel rises several stories superior to cats, and there are no boats building outside. From the porches trimmed with coloured shutters, there is a view of the harbour, astir with boats and of all the people of the 'town,' which is really a pleasant village. Great folk and little folk, 'foreigners,' meaning

A UNICORN IN THE BAHAMAS

the one or two American families who have bought a skipping hill or two, and built upon them toy houses, prim as Mrs. Noah's, and natives, all carry bunches of fish. The coloured people wear them—as if it were the latest fashion—on their heads. The settlers, less assured, gesticulate with their bunches as they talk. There is a great deal of talk on the edge of the harbour. If the weekly plane is coming in, everybody, still carrying fishes, goes down to the jetty to get letters or other treasure. The mail-boat has an equal number of fans. More tourists may be expected to arrive by it and the harbour-rats, prematurely wise, expect to make easy money by carrying a suit-case to the Little Boarding House. A week's keep may depend on who can first get hold of resistant American luggage. There is generally a fine scrimmage. Then, well in the middle of the road, for there are no motors or carts, the procession walks off, triumphant, cool, and scarcely clothed, in the persons of its leaders, hot, starched, spectacled, acquiescent, a mixture of doubt and hope as to the led. If there is an Englishman, he is generally protesting.

CHAPTER XV

ELEUTHERAN ADVENTURE

“**M**ADAM, I must leave you,” Gabriele d’Annunzio said to me one evening in Paris, when he realised to his dismay, that he had wasted quite an hour after dinner on the least important person in the room. He added: “I owe myself to all the other women.”

Harbour Island has this sort of feeling about tourists. Recognising its own desirability, it is anxious to share itself with admiring visitors. Eleuthera prefers settlers. To them to-day she would repay—in generous measure—the debt incurred some centuries ago. For William Sayle’s adventurers gave much to the island and took nothing from it. The Caribbean Seas and their Indies were already known to the merchants of the City of London. There was no difficulty, in 1647, about financing a company, each of whose members, limited to a hundred, had to be able to invest as many pounds, besides being persons of some standing, reasonably addicted to “Godliness, Justice and Sobriety.” Such investors secured to themselves good terms from the Parliament of the day. Each was to receive a free gift of 300 acres, of which, by testament, he could dispose as he chose. In due time, if he proved himself a good farmer, he might be master of another 2,000, without paying a penny, for William Sayle, with the vision which characterises the Governor¹ and the Colonial Secretary² of to-day, had decided to include some of the other out-islands in his plans for agricultural development. It says much for his attention to detail that every servant of the Eleutheran Adventurers’ Company was to receive twenty-five acres for himself. The profits from wrecks—these held first place on the list—gold, silver, copper, brass or lead mines, am-

¹ The Hon. Sir Charles Dundas.

² The Hon. James Jarrett.

bergris, salt and lumber, were to be divided between the self-styled Adventurers and the far less enterprising Lords Proprietors of Carolina.

It is interesting to observe the mention of salt as one of the natural products which might be worked for profit. To-day, with the sponge industry in abeyance, the Bahama Government has a scheme for employing the sailors of Andros in the production and transport of salt. This new industry should prove a source of considerable wealth, for the costs would be small and the American market unlimited. The men of Andros have, fortunately, always been responsive to new ideas, and I saw a sponger, who had lost four-fifths of his synthetic crop, but had saved about 50,000 by hanging them on wires no more than 18 inches under the surface—the plague apparently has not reached such shallow water—inspired to a completely new range of ideas, by the eloquence of Mr. Jarrett. The Bahamian needs, above all else, encouragement. The Colonial Secretary gives it, allied to practical common sense. “That’s a grand man,” said the sponger from Andros. “I wish the Lord was as effective.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“The great pity here is that people rely too much on God. If a tree dies, they won’t trouble to plant another. They say the Lord will make one grow.”

Feeling altogether superior, we agreed that it would be better perhaps for Nassau to rely on the extremely energetic Government Development Board, led—sometimes driven, pushed, and also inspired—by its President, the large, good-natured, much-travelled and wholly dependable Mr. Taylor.

New Providence, we felt, could well continue to rely on Harry Oakes, who gives employment to thousands, with generous disregard for their limitations, and Eleuthera on Harold Christie with his providential inability to distinguish between the possible and the probable. The remaining two or three thousand out-islands had better rely on the Governor and Mr. Jarrett. “For,” said the sponger, very much cheered, “they have fine ideas and we’ll certainly carry them out.”

ELEUTHERAN ADVENTURE

The same evening it happened that the Labour Adviser to the Colonial Office expressed to me his surprise that there were no labour troubles in the Bahamas. His pleasure seemed to me a trifle less marked than his amazement, but perhaps I misjudge him.

"Well," I retorted, "the Bahamians have always enjoyed relying on God, and at this moment, they have quite a number of new deities on whom, with more hope of reward on earth, they can rely as much as they like."

"Er—what? I don't think I caught what you said," protested the Labour Adviser.

This conversation returned to my mind when the red sea-plane of Bahamian Airways landed me neatly on a salt-water lagoon near Hatchet's Bay in Eleuthera. For here, an intelligent and practical business man, Mr. Levy, feeling that he was indebted to the Bahamas for a good deal of happiness, is attempting to repay the islanders for pleasant years among them, by teaching them to grow their own food.

At present the chief import of the Bahamas is tourists, but the next biggest is certainly the food they eat. This, says Mr. Levy, is illogical and unnecessary. The islands must grow everything their treasured tourists want to eat. With intent to show how it can be done, this determined American, the twentieth-century successor of William Sayle, has just established a farm and a settlement at Hatchet's Bay. It is, at the moment, a scrap of New England, a charmingly coloured illustration torn out of a story-book with strong principles. But it is doing good work. It is also doing it very fast. On several hundred acres out of the thousands he has bought, Mr. Levy, ably seconded by the Byrom family, straight from the comforts and the limitations of New England, is growing grain, vegetables and fruit, and building the most delightful houses as a temptation to other settlers.

With Mr. Byrom, I saw the terrific yellow tractors which have made roads and fields out of bush, the "flock of palms" imported from Florida, the poultry royally lodged in cabins which I supposed were intended for coloured workers. I also saw the thatched shelters being prepared

for the arrival of ninety-five cattle from Florida, and the shop where a self-taught artist was instructing already interested Bahamians in the manufacture of furniture after old colonial patterns. With Mrs. Byrom I went round one of the houses. It represented the epitome of American efficiency, and U.S.A. has always realised that it is not necessary to be uncomfortable or ugly in order to get new things done in a new way or a new land. Where the English pioneer is apt to be content with a shack, in which he shares his bunk with the chickens, the cooking materials and some oil-cans, the American produces an admirable imitation of life at home. John Bull always used to be pictured as dressing for dinner, in starched shirt and so on, even when his dinner-table consisted of a tropical ant-heap. But, in those days, John Bull was content to make his home at the back of beyond. Now he only pitches a tent and, metaphorically speaking, it is generally without either groundsheet or double fly. Only the American seems to have the art of reproducing the conditions of civilisation in a jungle or a desert.

Eleuthera is neither of these. But it was interesting, as well as agreeable, to eat a perfect lunch with everything fresh and just sufficiently iced, on an experimental farm, so new that its owner had not yet had time to build himself a house, in the middle of the bush separated by fifty or sixty miles of sea from the nearest source of supplies.

The Hatchet's Bay venture is called 'Eleuthera Ltd.' and it intends to supply, at reasonable prices, milk, meat, fruit, grain and vegetables, as well as everything required for building houses or living in them. The Nassau market will benefit. The cost of living, prohibitive at present, so far as the ordinary Englishman is concerned, should drop as supplies increase. With more tourists able to afford a Bahamian holiday, Bay Street will sell more goods and the islanders will have much more employment. So Mr. Levy, who has already given work to many Eleutherans and whose genius will make it possible for the average man, without any desire to be a pioneer, to settle on the island, must take his place among the gods on whom Bahamians can make a habit of relying.

ELEUTHERAN ADVENTURE

Americans, I thought, always bring a lot of America with them, when they settle in an outpost off the map. The English always leave too much behind and regret it. I admired so much the shining white enamel bathrooms in the Hatchet's Bay houses, and the mattresses. I sat down heavily on these to see if they were as good as they looked. They were. I sighed, because the English generally omit the best parts of their houses. They do not mind. They feel they can't have everything in the wilderness. So they rough it, with courage and good temper, but sometimes without reason.

"Do you think, by any chance, you have a unicorn anywhere on your property?" I asked Mr. Byrom. But I wasn't very hopeful, because among the treasures listed for the benefit of William Sayle's first Eleutheran Adventurers, there was salt and gold and ambergris, but no mention of apes, peacocks, ivory, slaves, or unicorns.

"I'll have a good look," said Mr. Byrom, "when our ninety-five pioneers arrive. Maybe, a horn will have slipped."

There was as much excitement about the arrival of those cattle as over the advent of Sayle's famous hundred, who, it is said, were not at all appreciated in Bermuda, their first choice of a colony, because they were rigid nonconformists. Ordered to leave the more northerly isles, they transported themselves with their baggage, their discreetly bonneted and petticoated women, and two clergymen of the Church of England, to the more tolerant Bahamas. Bermuda had described them as enemies of "Ye Keinges Company and Country," a stigma borne by many worthy subjects of Charles I who had broken no law, but who fiercely and effectively resisted any attempt to curtail their religious liberty.

The first Eleutheran adventurers were of the right material. They cleared their acres from what must then have been primeval forest, and held them through the perils of Spanish invasion. At the worst, they were succoured by friends in the young New England colonies, then loyal to the Crown. At the best they struggled with drought, wind and the sea, with encroaching sand, rock and bush, but not

with ill-health. For the climate was their friend. The least hardy, or the least persistent, their houses burned and their new fields laid waste by a squadron from Havana, escaped to Boston and Maine. The others refused to admit defeat. They held on to the lands spreading round their headquarters at Governor's Harbour, weathered the exciting years of piracy and wrecking, kept close contact with Nassau, established the constitutional principle of self-government by means of a representative Assembly much as it exists to-day, and disappeared from the history of the Bahamas only when the break in cotton prices, the abolition of slavery and the American tariffs dealt successive blows to island agriculture. Perhaps among those of old English name on Eleuthera, there are still descendants of William Sayle's venturesome hundred.

After the War of 1914-18, during which humanity sacrificed itself to no purpose at all, for, as President Roosevelt once said to me: "No nation can afford even to win a war," another Company of Adventurers came to Eleuthera. This time, they settled round Hatchet's Bay, intending to re-create the vision of Nonconformist pioneers. As if the sun-washed island were an outpost of the great—and for many months of the year, frozen—North-West, they chose to build in the style of the Hudson's Bay Company. They must have spent a considerable amount of money, for they created a harbour, a water-works and a farm fitted with electricity. By way of relaxation they had a cinema which in those days was called a living-picture-theatre. But they were, one and all of them, officers retired from the army and navy and they knew nothing at all about agriculture. Eleutheran soil is better than on many of the other islands, but it is still poor. The rock has to be broken and the light, sandy earth fertilised. The second edition of Eleutheran pioneers fared worse than the first. Within a few years they acknowledged a failure due to ignorance of local conditions, but their settlement which had cost some £30,000, subscribed by individuals unconnected with the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street, or other sources of supply in the City, continued to benefit the local inhabitants. For the money had been spent in the colony, and it was

responsible for a period of prosperity in which, illogically, the originators of the scheme did not share.

Mr. Levy's Eleuthera Ltd. has far more chance of success than the post-war scheme, which had inadequate material, human and mechanical, at its disposal. For the new Hatchet Bay experiment is managed on scientific lines. There is a vital need to be satisfied in the form of food and transport. Without these, Eleuthera cannot be satisfactorily developed. Without these—at reasonable prices—the Bahamas cannot attract their own countrymen of British blood and limited means.

Eleuthera was once the centre of pineapple production in the West. There are still, among the coloured people, old men who tell of three- and four-masted ships, barques, brigantines and schooners at anchor off Governor's Harbour, of gold and silver in the villagers' money-boxes, of 'pines' by the thousand loaded in the waiting holds, of English and American markets greedy for the stiff-necked hedgehog fruit. Then the Southern States, with better soil and organised labour at their command, seized the profitable trade. Pineapples, introduced to the Bahamas by enterprising Germans from the Palatinate, those other fugitives from the religious intolerance of the period, ceased to be a world commodity. They are still grown in small quantities, with tomatoes and other vegetables, maize, a little sisal which at eight shillings does not pay for stripping and washing, some citrus fruits and corn, but the island money-boxes are empty. The coloured people wait, with unlimited patience, for the Lord to provide a new way of living. Meanwhile they sleep, sing and scuffle about on the top of the soil, which they treat with the utmost ineptitude. Only on the sea are they certain and unafraid.

When I drove away from the new settlement at Hatchet's Bay, which is growing with surprising celerity, I thought that instead of ninety-five reluctantly adventurous cattle from Florida, there should have been a hundred. Thus would the landing of William Sayle's company have been imitated in entertaining fashion. For I had laughed at Mr. Byrom's description of the Company's steamer loaded with surprised and supercilious beasts who would all follow the

usual policy of complaining to the purser—if such a personage existed—about the defects of the accommodation afforded them. “The holds will be full and the deck too,” said the New Englander, a successful textile expert turned overnight into an equally resourceful farmer. “The best animals will be in the saloon, I suppose. I don’t know if they can find room in the cabins for our very superior bulls. They wouldn’t like having to double up.”

“Do you think there’ll be much of the steamer left?” I asked.

Mr. Byrom looked surprised. “Cattle don’t give nearly so much trouble as people,” he said, and I was reminded of a Patagonian sheep-farmer, who, having driven me for five days across the plains at the end of the world, in a wind like an iced razor-blade, informed me that he preferred sheep to humans because they’d more sense. I was too depressed to ask on what he based his opinion.

A road runs the whole length of Eleuthera. To me it seemed quite a good one, but the arbitrator of Hatchet’s Bay, driving vigorously and accustomed probably to a regular fifty on the oil-silk-surfaced highways of America, remarked that if he was given a free hand with his tractors, he could greatly improve the communications all over the island. I was less concerned with the road than with the bush, for the latter seemed to me pleasantly varied. Sisal, half-wild, reared its sharp, flowering spikes. Sea-grape sprawled clumsily on the shore. Palms, as solidly inelegant as German maidens intent on health culture, rose to a certain height, but eschewed all suggestion of abandon. There was a decided lack of fashion about those palms. Neither slender nor tall, they reminded me of Australian opossums comfortably bunched at the top of a sapless trunk, shagged and very sure of themselves. The rest of the bush was composed of ragged, dark-leaved growths, with here and there a breadfruit tree, audaciously modern.

Where, I wondered, are the 950 flowering plants recorded by naturalists? Where are all the exiles from far foreign lands, the sugar-cane, limes, lemons and oranges, the African yams, the Chinese grape-fruits, the Indian mangoes and the Jamaican bananas? Since 1700, there have been

descriptions of West African grasses, of Madagascan flowering-trees, of Brazilian bougainvillæa, jasmine from the Dutch Indies, bamboo from Haiti, and royal palms from India.

For twenty miles the bush remained to me just bush. There were occasional hills of it, Bahamian hills solidly upholstered as the bosoms of Victorian housekeepers. There were threadbare patches which had been cultivated by negroes who seem to be content with the least and the worst, so long as they can achieve it by the work of one hand and no brain at all. There were heavenly stretches of beach, with golden and amethystine rocks glowing under the caresses of the tide. Having seen Eleuthera, I can no longer imagine Zeus and his court reclining upon cumulus clouds, their disproportionate limbs sprawling over ethereal cotton-wool. For me now Olympus has nothing to do with the sky. It is a Bahamian beach, petal smooth and unblemished as the shore on which the shipwrecked Swiss Family Robinson—administered to us in our extreme youth after lesson hours—landed so full of good and prim intention. The Elysian fields are no longer starred with asphodel, whose petals at night become tapers. They are Bahamian coves, still as the sea of glass by which they are encompassed and decorated by starfish cast up by the fastidious waves. These strange creatures are amber and rust-red. They lie quietly among the purple tumult of the rocks.

In an ancient German town, I once saw a picture of a unicorn painted on metal. The beast was drinking out of a forest pool in which its horn was reflected like a sword. The leaves on the trees were very heavy and of the same dark wine-colour as the sea-grapes. In the grass there were flowers shaped like stars, and in the centre of each there was a light. I have always remembered that picture because it cost just one shilling more than my total worldly possessions at the time, so I could not buy it. I was twelve, and of the many disappointments and failures in my life that is the one I remember best. For life is kind. It takes away the worst of our sorrows, as a ship's sails are furled in harbour, leaving us only the memories of

healing moments which we had not sufficiently savoured at the time.

Driving towards Governor's Harbour, I decided that any self-respecting unicorn would prefer a beach shining like the very best mother-of-pearl to fussy grass in a forest. Then Mr. Byrom said: "Do you like paw-paw? I'm getting accustomed to it." He pointed out the thin, pale green trees with leaves all out of proportion, and I remembered the numberless unpalatable breakfasts I had eaten in hot, damp countries. Always, when there was paw-paw, there were sickly eggs which had died in the middle, bread that had never been young, and a muddy beverage which my cinematographer in Abyssinia called 'tea-coffee' because neither of us could tell its origin. On one occasion, the meal had been completed by a woman who said she had hurt her hand and would I please do something about it when I had time. Into the midst of the inevitable paw-paw and peculiarly pallid eggs, she thrust a stump ending in five ripe strawberries. "Leprosy," squealed my cook, who was also muleteer and soldier of fortune. Since then, I have never really enjoyed paw-paw, in spite of the theory of its being so good a digestive that if it acts too well, you may find yourself digested with the breakfast tray as well!

Governor's Harbour appeared to me as a delicate lithograph, or one of those faded water-colours hanging on the walls of manorial parlours where nothing has changed for a hundred years. The little town, very clean and quiet and grey or white under the gossiping palms, represents the calm in which Eleuthera has alternatively prospered and decayed. Her records are devoid of violence. She has not played the part of highwayman, or bartered her ploughshares for musket and pistol.

Dreaming in a delicate sunset, above the hydrangea colours of the sea, the township seemed to me a suitable goal for Sayle's pious hundred. Their principles would be safe. The Quaker hoods of the women, their ridiculous shoes, their unnumbered yards of skirt, would be in keeping with the discretion of the atmosphere. Governor's Harbour still has an air of Puritan reluctance, but it is very attractive. A causeway reaches out to join a spit of land to the main

shore, so the harbour is almost a lake. Here the palms grow taller. High above the smooth-shingled roofs and the silent lanes, there is a confusion of leaves. Tossing in the wind like the manes of centaurs or the horses of the Apocalypse, the palm-leaves suggest all the emotions on which William Sayle's adventurers deliberately turned their backs. At present, I think there is only a boarding-house at Governor's Harbour, but there will soon be a hotel. The sensitive, the imaginative and the practical all say, with regret, with pride or with insistent decision, that there must be a hotel. But the village does very well without one. There are several hospitable houses which will provide a bed. It may be mountainous, but there will be nothing else wrong with it. There may even be enough space to get out of it without bumping against a wall, for the average Bahamian bed fills nine-tenths of the room it occupies in emphatic fashion. There are sailormen to tell tales of high winds at sea. There are fishermen with stories of sharks. There is always somebody crooning: 'Ride on Jesus' or 'Bull-Frog dressed in Soldier's Clothes.' There are even some of the spectacular trees mentioned in the reports of naturalists.

Of what happens after Governor's Harbour in the geography of Eleuthera, I am a little vague. For it began to get dark. On and on we drove over the road which would be superlative in Brazil or Roumania and not so good to Anglo-Saxons. The only difference, I thought, between savagery and civilisation is in the scale of our needs. Every year, cunning advertisement adds to the list of our necessities. The primitive needs food, sleep and a woman. The sophisticate needs amusement more than anything else, and for that he encumbers his life with a multiplicity of conveniences and occupations.

Fifty-five miles from Hatchet's Bay, thirty-five from Governor's Harbour, we came to Rock Sound which will be the metropolis of Mr. Christie's ideal settlement. There I spent a very pleasant evening with the Commissioner, Mr. Pinder, and his wife. The superlative milk which we had brought, bottled and sealed, from the farm at the other end of Eleuthera, had stood the journey well. Just one pat of

butter floated on the surface as a reminder of potholes and hummocks. Into the ice-box went the milk, and instantly I wondered whether frigidaires or cosmetics or contraceptives had done more to change the lives of my sex. How erroneous it is to look upon Mustapha Kemal as the liberator of half the world's women. It was an inventor of domestic machinery who did that, or perhaps the genius who eliminated hooks and buttons in favour of a zipp-fastener.

The sea lapped under my windows like a hungry cat. A small shark was caught off the end of the pier. There were no lovelorn felines. Refreshed by so much peace—and more milk from Hatchet's Bay—I set off next morning in a new Ford van which I wished had been a Morris or a Commer to look at Mr. Christie's new heaven and new earth. With me went my host, determined that I should also see the ocean hole which has neither beginning nor end. There it is, a great round tear in the rock, mysteriously dark, a considerable distance from the sea, yet full of sea-water. The enterprising Commissioner has had steps cut, so it is a perfect place to bathe. The water, of unfathomable depth, is like a rubber mattress. You cannot sink. But you can lie most comfortably upon flat rocks and cook yourself to the colour you prefer.

After that, there was a great deal of talk about the road, which seemed to me adequate. But the Bahamas are intent, not on being good like the American prohibitionists, but on doing good so that good—in the shape of tourists—may immediately come. In this year of all years, when so much is at a standstill, when, of necessity, there are few signs of enterprise and many of fear, it is particularly pleasant to watch the Bahamas' determined development. On every island something is doing. Every second man has a project.

At Half Sound, a few miles from the village destined to be a commercial centre, when Eleuthera becomes popular as New Providence, Harold Christie—son of a poet, the Homer of piracy and the Robert Burns of the islands which his sentimentality, sweet but poignant, immortalised—is treating the bush as if it were so much material on a craftsman's bench. Out of it he intends to make pleasant homes for people who do not want the difficulties and the responsi-

bilities of pioneering. He has chosen well. For Half Sound is circled by land, so its waters are ideally calm. The ocean breaks in through an opening which is being widened for the easy passage of boats. There is a splendid beach with low hills massed behind it and on the North a promontory curves round the inland sea so that it is always protected. This narrowing spit, still encumbered with bush, seemed to me delightful. It tumbled into hills, extravagantly shaped, and the beaches on the sound were irresistible. I found one shaped like a slice of melon with the smallest of waves rippling into the curve. It was shielded by immense boulders. Sea-grapes leaned over the smooth sand. There were rocks of the deepest amber and crabs as golden as a newly-minted sovereign. Here I thought would be a perfect place to live, for the most irresponsible of all the hills rose behind, and beyond, on the north shore, the mighty breakers of the Atlantic flung themselves upon the reef. I was already planning a house with a path leading privily to the cove, when I learned that here upon the point, between sea and sound, Mr. Christie plans to build a hotel or perhaps a fishing-camp.

In the voice of a B.B.C. commentator, expressing the immutable and the final, the long, lean man who had been showing us where there would be fruit and farms, houses, beasts and gardens, sweeping away the bush in his imagination and substituting the well-ordered forms pertaining to civilisation, explained his employer's design. I felt very much as if I were listening to a seraphim—were they not the messengers of heaven?—describing the seven days of Genesis. We sat upon a rock and I plucked a quantity of burrs out of my trousers and my toes. From the middle of nowhere came cold beer. A real estate man, or perhaps he was a surveyor, told me of his bootlegging years when he never knew if he'd finish the day as 'a stiff.' For the racketeers were kind o' tough, he said. If they could steal a cargo, they saw no reason to pay for it. There was one American coastguard boat with no regard at all for British waters. "She'd put a shot into you as soon as look at you and the 'leggers were just as handy with their guns, so it was a short life and a hot one for a good many of us."

I looked at the dreaming bush. Only the palms were active. But, where the land curved lazily towards the Atlantic, between the reef seas, purple and indigo, and the transparent greens of the sound, fields had already been cleared. There were great holes from which the rock had been torn. The earth was being shaped to the needs of an exigent Adam. So was it on the morning and the evening of the First Day.

That night, six of us dined in great comfort on board a 20-ton ketch with an auxiliary engine. She was called the *Nya* and she was a good sea-boat, but sailing in the Bahamas is for those made of whipcord and cast iron. When the last of the guests had left us, Sam, the coloured cook, who was also a poet and ready to be anything and everything in an emergency, assured us that he loved the sea. "Yes, *sir*," he said to my husband, the emphasis on the last word with which he contrived to express affection, respect and a benign consciousness of our dependence, "I'm a very good sailor, all right."

The Captain said there would be a south-east wind on the port beam, but nothing to worry about. So I established myself, most mistakenly, in the forward cabin, and we slid gently across the harbour. After that, the first thing I knew was the flight of everything not already on the floor. With the unanimity of a flock of starlings, bottles, brushes, soap, and clothing, left the places in which I had neatly and carefully arranged them, and sped, with winged insistence, to that portion of the floor which dipped most giddily into the sea. My husband, an excellent sailor and an imperturbable man who can be relied upon in the most surprising conditions, forced open the door, stumbled across the cabin, and informed me that we had left the shelter of the Eleutheran shore. I agreed, but made no attempt to move. "There's a strong wind," he said. "You'd be better aft." Again I agreed, but only with what remained to me of voice. The width of the earth and all the centuries of history, every effort that man had ever made, lay between me and the cushioned poop. So, for several years, I lay upon a scrap of bunk, one arm braced

against the floor, and realised what it would be like to be imprisoned in an egg-shell at the mercy of centrifugal force.

I did not know there was so much movement in all the world, and there was no sense in it, either, for I seemed to be thrown about in all directions at once. I thought again of the egg, but now it was being beaten up in a frying-pan. By the time we reached Wax Cut in the long chain of Exuma Cays, I had savoured every sensation of an omelette, and I sincerely hoped that I would drown. Nothing could have been more engaging than the solid, motionless bottom of the ocean. But the *Nya* was a good sea-boat. She made light of the weather, while the steep green seas retorted by making nothing of her.

"It'll be quieter on the lee side," shouted my husband, with intent to comfort as he staggered into the cabin, followed by a luggage-slide. It seemed to me that many months ago I had dined in blissful stillness, and it seemed to me also that it was time for breakfast or lunch or another dinner. I had no idea which meal would be appropriate, but I felt one of them was due to me.

"Where's Sam?" I murmured in the voice of one grossly and undeservedly injured.

"He's decided he doesn't like the sea as much as he thought."

There was a terrific lurch as we turned south. "You really would be much better on deck," persisted my husband, who is kind, but terribly determined.

"Yes," I agreed, for I could not explain that he might as well have advised me to try walking over cloud-quick-sands to the moon. I thought of the endless miles which separated me from the giddy behaviour of the poop, swinging up and down to talk to the stars, or perhaps the sun still shone. I thought of the decades that must pass while I struggled aft between the recumbent Sam and the confusion rolling out of the galley.

"Hadn't you better make an effort?" urged my husband, still kind and hardly at all disapproving.

"No," I said. It would be much more comfortable, I thought, to die.

"It'll get calmer," he promised, "once we get inside the reef." But it did not.

When I felt that I really could not brace myself any longer against the shuddering floor, the *Nya* solved the problem by tipping me out of the bunk. Therein, she showed sense, for it was more comfortable wedged among familiar things which had acquired surprising angles. The wind shifted. The *Nya* showed her independence in a combination of movement suggesting the finale of a Russian ballet. Time had ceased to mean anything at all to me when we turned in under Elbow's Point and anchored in what the Captain assured me was calm water.

Sam, a delicate greenish-purple, crawled from his refuge and produced a simpler dinner than usual. He was kind, but distant. After the manner of the policeman on Harbour Island, he asked if we would be inconvenienced by the absence of soup. Fervently I sympathised with him. The effort of making soup would be prodigious.

"Ladder overboard!" sang a gentle and apparently delighted negro voice. The Captain still assured me it was quite calm. Monotonously we rolled away the night. I slept on deck, my feet wedged against one rail, my head against another. At intervals a cheerful darkie voice cried that some gear had fallen overboard, or there was a rumble of oil-drums slipping. Once I thought I heard: "Man overboard," but it was only a mattress. Indifferent, I lay and watched the stars reel.

Next morning the Captain said it *really* was calmer, and Sam reacquired his rich grape colouring. South along the cays we sailed, but far outside the reef because of sandbanks. They were very lovely, all these little shell-like islands, strung together on a cord of blue sea-silk. But I was still sick, so I did not become fully conscious of Exuma until, towards noon, we slipped into still water between Derby Island and the shore. There was a beach of smooth sand and a small shark swimming lustily within reach. The enclosed sound had the air of keeping a secret. It was romantic and not at all real. For a turtle passed, paddling along under water, and immediately the gentle-voiced black who had recorded with the mixture of sorrow and pleased

surprise habitual to his race the losses of the night, flung himself overboard. In trousers and shirt, he 'wrestled' with the turtle. No lover ever seized a mistress in a more ardent embrace. But no nun vowed to heaven could have been more elusive than that turtle. When the swimmer returned, disillusioned, he opined that the crittur was made of oil. Only a spoon could have held it.

We wanted fish for lunch, so one of the small boats which had gathered round to exchange news drew away, but without hurry. I thought it would be hours before we could eat. But the fisherman took a look at the under-sea world through his glass-bottomed bucket and dropped a line overboard, after which, as if it were no more difficult than winding yarn on a spool, he pulled in one fish after another. In five minutes he had enough. A few gentle strokes of the oar and he was back again beside us, offering a silver-grey bunch. "There's plenty o' fish," he said, "but nobody to sell them to."

I understand that an intelligent Midas has already bought Derby Island and put a refrigerator and a shower somewhere in the bush, so a house may follow and then there will be work for the coloured people, acquiescent and unembittered.

These men, sailors by instinct, farmers in times of necessity, must be the descendants of tribal Africans, pagan for centuries, subsequently converted to Islam at the sword's point. Their ancestors had been captured in the vast swamps and the sunless forests of the Congo. Ebos, Mandingos and Nangobars, by descent, they have forgotten every word of their original language. The gods of Africa are not theirs. When they perform what they call a fire dance, it is a parody robbed of every jungle feature. There is not even a fire. A hundred and fifty years ago, their forbears danced naked, streaked with red earth and fruit juice, among the heavy shadows of the forest. Flames destroyed the moonlight. The savage figures flung themselves into the blaze and came out of it unharmed. It was a war dance with a religious significance. For, by fire, the purest of all elements, young warriors tested their courage. To-day, on an Exuma cay, the descendants of the fighting

Hausas and Fullahs, Africa's best soldiers, with slave blood in their veins, dance in a lazy imitation of abandon round an imaginary fire. Behind them are the dead centuries of their savagery and their heroism. The slave tradition is still in their veins. Work is distasteful to them, because it was once imposed by an overseer's whip. They are, if you understand them, good fellows. And one thing, at least, they have inherited from the fine tribal strains of which they are oblivious. The lines of their bodies are perfect. Copper-coloured where there is Moorish blood, olive, coffee-brown, blue-black or rust-black, with the bloom of fruit on young flesh or the grey-dust effect of age, with the blood wine-hot and wine-dark under their skins, they keep something of the youth of the world. Even when they have taken degrees, they are children crying with equal vehemence for the moon and the right to eat. Such fervour is only periodical, for it is always at the mercy of the lassitude which drives them to a plastic acceptance of 'de Lord's will' or indeed, anybody's will.

On the out-islands, during brief visits, I found the coloured people kind, helpful, and generous. Sometimes they did not think at all, but they had good manners, a particularly gentle courtesy, sympathy and a great respect for 'the real white man.' So much, in the days of slavery, they have suffered at his hands, yet—unless they are educated to substitute the thoughts of others for their own feelings—they attach themselves easily to a white. The local priest has immense influence, and it is a pity that the different sects of Christianity quarrel so continuously over island souls.

The Cardinal-Archbishop of Milan, wise in his understanding, once said to me that if he wished to reach Buckingham Palace from Trafalgar Square, he would naturally go through St. James's Park. It would be the quickest way. "But," said he, "you would get there in time if you went round by Piccadilly. Catholicism is the direct road to God, but all ways must lead to Him sooner or later." I tried to explain the Cardinal's philosophy to a gentle brown fisherman who sat and sunned himself above my head. He had been talking of a furious argument be-

tween spiritual shepherds as to whether their flocks would be whiter-fleeced by keeping Saturday or Sunday as a day of rest. "Some of de preachers sure be all wrong. Dey say dere's only one God, but each ob dem folkse got a different God in his pocket." He was very puzzled, but he enjoyed talking about the Bible. While my husband, disdaining the shark, swam about on his back, the tea-coloured man expounded his faith, Judaic in its simplicity. "De Apostles was all ordinary men same as me, but dey see Jesus Christ with deir own eyes and dat make plenty difference."

I asked him about his family and he said: "De Lord took my wife out ob her body, but he sure left her spirit wid me, so he sure don' wan' me to grieve for her nohow." I asked if he had been married a long time. He said "for four years," but the same woman had kept house for him all his life and his children were grown up. His worn feet hanging over the roof of the deckhouse looked as if they were covered with elephant hide. His arms hung down. They were very expressive. His whole body, relaxed and motionless, suggested an infinite power of acceptance.

As with all his race on the Bahamas, his energy was in abeyance. He would follow a leader, but never his own original ideas. Some of the younger men are more active, especially on the sea, but the islands need, above all things, leadership. In every enterprise, however small, there must be one man capable of expressing and enforcing authority. The smaller communities often look to the school-teacher for advice and encouragement. He is generally the secretary of the local agricultural association and as such has considerable influence. But for hundreds of the out-island people, knowing no change except night and day, birth and death, 'de only leader is de Lord.'

"Religion," said an intelligent young sponger from Andros, "is a brake on the island progress. The people get so confused between this world and the next that they don't do anything about either." But religion is a great comfort to the villagers. It enables them to cope with their fears—of spirits, of witchcraft, of all the bogies represented

by the unknown—and it relieves them of the responsibility of making up their minds.

“I had no conception of eternity until I went to call on a Cardinal-Archbishop without an appointment,” said the ready-witted Count John de Salis. But the Bahamians have no conception of finality. For them everything is eternal. They have all time at their disposal. Even Nassau is affected by this feeling. In one of the biggest hotels, the clock went wrong. It was taken down and a notice disposed in its place—“Why worry? It is 1939.”

Before we left the peace and the delicious shut-away-even-from-the-sea effect of Derby Island, a boatman brought me a present of conch shells. They were about a foot long and the colour of tortoiseshell cats. The inside was smooth and pink, like the petals of old-fashioned roses. I realised that they would be the dream of every seaside landlady with conventional ideas about decoration, but they went very well also with the violent blue and gold of the day. So, after we had eaten their inhabitants in the form of conch salad, I arranged them stiffly round the well of the boat. Until we left the shelter of the reef they sat up stiffly and I rather expected them to wash their fur, so smooth, shining and brindled were they, like all the best cats. But there was a strong south-east wind which seized hold of us as soon as we left the Sound. The *Nya* did her best, but she was tumbled about as if she were of no importance in the scheme of the universe. Once again I lay prone above the rudder and far from resigning myself to fate like the out-islanders, I was furious at its monstrous unfairness. Why could I not achieve the resilience of Sam, who was leaning overboard, attached, by a negligible line, to what was evidently a big fish? But at that moment a deflated Sam, no longer like a ripe, black fruit, smiling where the rind had cracked to show the seeds, gave up the unequal struggle and with a groan, laid his head upon his arms. Next moment he had subsided on to the floor, which had no more comforting stability than the ocean.

Some time during that unending afternoon, the pilot, taken on board in Derby Sound for the sake of his local knowledge, got in the way of the boom. The blow cracked

his head and he would have fallen overboard, but the Captain, with admirable promptitude, knocked him flat upon the deck. Even Sam then recovered sufficiently to suggest varieties of first aid. With bandaged head and an expression of surprise, the pilot did his best to get in the way of the boom again. He was restrained.

The *Nya*, with sail shortened, bucketed over the breakers at the entrance to Rolleville harbour. At one moment, it seemed that we should never cross the bar, and at the next we were stuck fast upon a sandbank. Scurrying over the surface like long-legged water-spiders, half a dozen boats came to our rescue. Their owners offered much conflicting advice. With their help we dragged ourselves off the first sandbank and settled comfortably upon another. The local wiseacres shook their heads, and hanging on to the *Nya's* stout sides, prepared to gossip till the tide should float us off. By this means we learned a good deal about Rolleville, which prides itself on being something of a Republic within the empire of the Bahamas. For the black and brown Rolles, descendants of the slaves to whom the big estate was given after Abolition, elect their own President. Nobody but a Rolle, they say, can do anything in Rolleville. Obstinate, independent, easily moved and equally easily discouraged, they are regarded by the rest of Exuma as a backward community. "How do you all manage with only one name?" I asked the agreeable coloured faces appearing and disappearing over the gunwale according to the movements of the *Nya*.

"What should we want with another?" they answered. "There's always bin jes' Rolles in Rolleville." Later it was explained that there was no difficulty at all in distinguishing between long and short, fat, thin, old and young Rolles, between carpenter, mason and sponger Rolles, or indeed between Rolles who cut his finger yesterday, who caught a shark last week, who patched his sail or had just finished planting onions, and the smaller Rolles with the darned pants or the swollen face where his mother slapped too hard. "It do be quite easy," said one of the fishermen, "although dey mos'ly called George." He reckoned his own parents had been clever in differentiating

him once for all from his fellows by christening him 'Anthem.'

By midnight the tide had risen. Three fishermen, singing gently because it was Sunday morning, piloted us through a narrow channel. With caution, the *Nya* slid across the harbour to anchor within forty yards of the sandbank protecting the shore. There we spent the night, rolling gently. The stars were a flight of swallows. They wheeled within reach of my arm as the swell rose and then they were away again. For hours they behaved in this irrelevant fashion, and Sam, waking suddenly where he lay huddled half in and half out of the deck-house, forgot his exceeding sophistication, the variety of cocktails he could make and his undoubted value to his employers. In the voice of a small boy, he said: "The stars do sure move. Perhaps dey get some fun chasin' about like dat."

CHAPTER XVI

SIXTY THOUSAND ACRES OF ROMANCE—EXUMA

WHEN the sun rose, I went ashore in the *Nya's* dinghy. Rolleville was already prepared for Sunday. The children were excessively clean in starched prints, and when their hair was long enough to be plaited, it stuck out in thick quills tied with tape. The women wore bright colours, freshly laundered, and all sorts of wide-brimmed hats made from palmetto leaves. On Sundays, everybody looks as if they had taken a great deal of trouble about their appearance. The negro women are like forest fruits, dark-skinned sapodilla, custard apple and the mangostines of the East. The men give an extra hitch to their trousers and lean less heavily on their spines, which they use as walking-sticks. Always they have clean shirts, and if they are going to church to sing, full-throated, the hymns which are the most important part of the service, they wear their boots instead of carrying them.

Although it was so early, the schoolmaster of Rolleville came out on to the beach to meet me. He is an enormously tall man, broad in proportion. Before we had reached the porch, he had told me that Rolleville needed shaking up, but that he had succeeded in starting an agricultural association with a community farm on which about twenty households worked to grow guinea-corn and pigeon-peas. "But," said he, "it is only the old men, with the women and children, who work on the land. The young men wan' to go to sea. Plenty happens at sea and they like that. Or else they go to Nassau to make money."

He led me across a wooden porch, on which a pig was sleeping, into the usual Bahamian house. The inner walls stopped short of the roof, so it was very cool and everything that happened in the kitchen or the parlour or the bedroom could be heard everywhere else. The ceaseless wind of the

islands blew through the sparsely furnished rooms. The windows were uncurtained and the wood whitewashed. There were Bible pictures on the walls and portraits of the royal family torn from illustrated journals. The table was covered with a darned white cloth and on it hymn-books were arranged round a bunch of oleanders. The chairs had been mended several times. In the bedroom, there were straw mats and a beautiful patchwork quilt. There must have been several hundred different pieces in it, finely stitched, and home-made cotton lace decorated the pillows. As in many village houses on the out-islands, the rooms were clean as newly minted coins. They were very simple, but an effort had been made to decorate them with scraps of print and crochet work.

It may be from the old slave days, with their 'great houses,' that the coloured Bahamians have acquired a gracious taste. For, in spite of their prodigious poverty, with the whole village unable to muster more than half a dozen shillings in 'real money,' they sometimes succeeded in achieving a simple form of decoration. It may be with coloured paint or carving, with patchwork or crochet or Victorian antimacassars. Always, when I entered an out-island cabin I felt as if the pages of history were turning backwards. A hundred years ago, English labourers lived with comparable simplicity, but in a much worse climate. The Bahamians can rely on the sun and a wind to blow away whatever they do not want to keep, whether it be a memory of an engagement, or the peelings of sweet potatoes. Not so long ago, the private apartments of the Emperors of Austria and Germany were furnished as simply as the boarding-house rooms of to-day. Wandering through the smaller summer palace of the Tsar at Tsarskoe Selo, it seemed to me that a middle-class farmer in England would have enjoyed as much luxury, except for the solitary bath, which was enormous and lit from underneath, so that no assassin could place in it an unnoticed bomb. It is only within the last twenty years that everyone has demanded ease and comfort of living.

The Bahamian out-islanders are still in the days of the Irish cabin, with the pig as a familiar family friend, and

goats or chickens as acquaintances with a right to the back door. While I was drinking strong tea in the school-teacher's kitchen, Rolleville was roused to the most pleasurable excitement by the arrival of the Colonial Secretary in a scarlet sea-plane. It was the first time the villagers had seen such an object come down in the harbour. It was the first time also, said my host, that a Government official had arrived "as if he were jus' a frien'." Every man, woman and child hurried down to the jetty. The frail wooden structure threatened to subside into the sea. From the schoolmaster's porch, it looked as if the rocks were covered with bright fungus and the shore piled with a different-coloured weed. There was no movement in the crowd. They just stood and watched. Presently, the Colonial Secretary came ashore, bareheaded, in a jersey and flannel trousers. The people were delighted. They began to think of the Government as something human and helpful within reach. Mr. Jarrett, having shaken a vast quantity of hands and said pleasant things, "jes' like he was one ob us," decided to make a speech, but the villagers thought there should be some ceremony about so important an occasion, so, instead of going to church and singing hymns, they all trooped into the schoolhouse.

Therein, the Colonial Secretary told them of the Government plans to combat the effects of drought and the failure of the sponge crop. Seed-corn would be distributed free, and implements loaned to the local agricultural societies at the request of their elected presidents. The Government would guarantee to buy all the corn which could be raised, at 5s. 6d. a bushel, of which sixpence would go to pay for transport. Sacks would be provided and empty petrol drums in which the grain could be stored. Like Hitler, who, before he dreamed only in terms of conquest, would have put every villager back on to the land and every woman into kitchen or nursery, Sir Charles Dundas plans to make the out-islanders appreciate the possibilities of the soil as well as of the sea. "The Bahamas must grow what the Bahamians eat," says his far-sighted Excellency.

At Rolleville, in the crowded schoolhouse, where the people in their Sunday best listened wide-eyed, and some-

times open-mouthed, as children to the last chapter of a fairy-tale, the elegant Colonial Secretary, as interested as his audience, concluded with: "Now, I want you all to get to work, the young men as well as the old. You've been thinking about it quite long enough. Now you've got to make a start."

The youths leaning against the walls were impelled to smile. Mr. Jarrett's enthusiasm is infectious. He had brought lollipops for the children. So he won their mothers and the meeting ended in a storm of applause and good intentions.

"Well, I hope that'll do some good," said the Colonial Secretary, shaking more hands. "Have you got a radio here?" he asked the schoolmaster. "No? Well, I'll see you get one. I want you all to listen in. You'll find some of the talks helpful. No, I don't want any breakfast. Can I land at Rolletown? I'd like to see the community farm there. Then I must get on to Georgetown."

Brushing wisps of black hair from his forehead, he made for the shore, followed by the entire populace. So must the Pied Piper have led the children in search, each of his own dream. "Yes. The Government will provide dynamite if you want to blast pockets for planting fruit trees——" were the last words I heard. Then, like the murmur of a rising tide, came soft negro speech, all of it appreciative. The Government had become real, like 'de Lawd.' A dark-haired young man, overworked but still brimful of ideas, would soon be confused with a number of Biblical characters, all equally helpful. "Sure, Ma'am, de Saints dey know de sea like I knows de inside o' my own han'. Dey was fishermen same as me. No, Ma'am, I nebber heard dey was farmers. De Lawd Jesus, he walk on de sea. He ain' got no use for de lan', no Ma'am, dat's true." Any excuse to be on a boat, with a full spread of canvas, a cargo for Nassau, or the prospects of two months' sponging!

But I was delighted to get a lift in the plane. It seemed only a few minutes before we were at Georgetown.

Sixty thousand acres of romance. So somebody described Greater and Little Exuma, sea comets with a tail of brilliant cays, spattered across the reef. Green, blue and gold, the

land lies lazily within the embrace of the waves, their crests no whiter than the blinding sands. The rocks and the weed are the colours of old metal, reddish bronze, strange yellows, and purple. Palms lean down towards the beaches. Sea-grapes and 'rosy apples' and the clattering, long-podded foliage of 'women's tongue' trees, make a setting for the wooden houses. Exuma is very beautiful and riper, in the way of inherited tradition, than many of the other out-islands. For there are traces of the old slave days, with their mansions and their tremendous acreage, their trains of negro servants, fifty or sixty to a household, and their great names, some of them still a delight to Debrett. The Lords Rolle and Wright, the Earl of Dunmore, all had property on Exuma. In their days there was scarcely an acre of land uncultivated. The sailing-boats, and later on the small iron ships, were heavy-laden with as many products as a country fair.

In any of the settlements, set high on their hills, with something of the mental as well as the physical detachment which one finds in the pleasant villages of New England, there are coloured people who will repeat the tales of their grandfathers. The cotton estates were isolated by their size, but the white folks rode on fine horses. They had their carriages and blood stock. They lived 'like lords.' The women wore silk dresses and shawls, with feathers and bows in their bonnets. They ate enormously. Dinner at six was ceremonious. There was a 'main hot' and 'a side hot,' beef and mutton, home-reared, turkey and fine fat chickens from the estate, fish of course, and game, wild duck, plover and pigeon. All the semi-tropical fruits were grown, oranges, bananas and melons, with sweet potatoes and avocado pears, as well as fields and fields of sugar-cane, the silkiest green under heaven.

Labour cost nothing except the food which came out of the soil and the clothes it wore, check cotton for the women, coarse blue sacking for the men. Each slave family had its hut, thatched with palmetto leaves, and its pig, its chickens, and its scrap of land. Each coloured woman bore a child every year. If it happened to be the master's, she and her pale, tea-coloured baby were free, but that did

not change the form of their existence. It was a patriarchal life, good enough if the owner lived upon his estate like an English squire among his farms and villages. But when the plantations were left in the hands of half-breed overseers, the slaves suffered. It is extraordinary that so well-established a manner of life should have completely disappeared. None of the 'great houses' remain. There is no trace of the cotton plantations. Sugar-cane has disappeared. So has the entire feudal system, with its villagers dependent on the manor. If there is any pattern of living on Exuma to-day, it is communal. The knots in the thread are the community farms to which each man gives so many days or hours of labour in return for a share in the sales of produce. But, so far, although there is a Government-controlled marketing board in Nassau, fruit and vegetable prices are not guaranteed and transport is not organised. The islanders have little idea of quality although, if they were sure of selling, they might be able to produce sufficient in quantity.

Exuma is no longer interested in the great ambitions of the past. The island blood is mixed. The spur of white impatience is no longer applied to the lassitude of a charming, courteous, brown or near-brown people who enjoy waiting for something to happen. "Sure, they'll begin to work soon," said the wireless operator at Georgetown. "They bin thinkin' about it for a year."

When the plane landed in this loveliest of all the island harbours, a few people, very smart and starched in their Sunday prints, came down to the cay, but they had seen the machine before and it was getting on for noon, the hour sacred to food and sleep. Still, a procession of unusually well-dressed men, with collars, some of them even with ties, carried our suitcases and our bedding to the policeman's house. There we were to lodge. The Colonial Secretary immediately disappeared. With unabated energy he proposed to see everything growing and everybody capable of growing yet more.

We, on the contrary, drifted, in true Bahamian fashion, towards the porch of the policeman's house. I cannot remember that we did anything at all, until, hours later, the

Nya arrived and another well-dressed procession was formed to carry stores upon Sunday-sleek heads, from the harbour to the policeman's kitchen. By this time, the plane had left, taking away the representative of Government. With him went the feeling that something, indeed almost anything, must certainly be done at once.

With relief, our host loosened his belt. The Acting Commissioner, Mr. Fitzgerald, who was inspired to make prodigious and most successful efforts for our entertainment, did say to the policeman: "I'm going to the office right now. I'd like to see you there." But our host, large, amiable and interested in onions, of which he was growing an acre or so under his back windows, could not live up to such an official attitude. Leaning against a post and rolling the words as if they were chewing-gum, he replied: "Sure, sure, I'll be along later."

From the kitchen, a separate wooden hut with the African outdoor oven made of sunbaked earth beside the door, came the policeman's wife. She was a smiling, smooth mountain of brown, with gay print stretched across her curves. A red and yellow bandana confined her stiffly plaited hair. She said: "I hope you'm find de bed comfortable. It sure is a good bed. We use him for twenty years."

It was a very good bed, and immensely large as well, for it occupied the whole of the room apportioned to it. Fortunately the door opened outwards and the window straight on to the pillows. I could just, but only just, squeeze round the end of the mattress to hang my coat on a peg or pour water into a splendid basin decorated with blue roses. But everything in the house was delightful. So much trouble had been taken over it. The local mahogany furniture, of a rather harsh red, was adorned with blue cotton covers wherever head or arms were likely to slip about on the carefully polished surfaces. There were a great number of mats worked with care and patience. There was china suggestive of presents from the seaside. It was all exquisitely neat and clean. There were no children to disarrange the multiple ornaments, or to upset their hurriedly gobbled food upon the embroidered cloths. "I wanted plenty children, but de Lawd nebber gave me one, no, ma'am," said the

policeman's wife as she straightened one of the blue slips and put a small table exactly half-way between two chairs.

Fortunately Sam approved of the house. On land, he was all and more that the most imbecile of spoon-fed tourists could require in the shape of guide, guardian, philosopher, friend, nurse, cook, teacher, housemaid, banker and intimate personal adviser. "You can' wear that shirt. I goin' to have the top button sewn. It's loose. You better put on your ole trousers. You be doin' plenty ridin' to-day and there's no girth to the saddles. No, missus, you get your arms burn' unless you wear long sleeves. De Colonel lend you one ob his shirts if you got none." Sam's English was superior, but, when he was feeling friendly or bothered, he slurred his consonants into *b*'s.

Our first supper was wrapped in paper napkins. Each spoon and fork being thus hygienically arrayed, as well as everything we were to eat, the meal proceeded as if in an editorial office. The tide of attractively coloured paper rose as we proceeded and I thought of the desks and chairs and floors in Fleet Street, especially when a new editor is making hay of his predecessor's selections. "It is very clean this way, just like Nassau," said Sam with pride. He was a marvellous cook. His hot lobster included most of the contents of spice-box and store-cupboard. It left us replete and benign, but we did not want Exuma to be like Nassau.

We did not want to go to even the best kind of party which always takes place on a beach at midnight. There is an enormous bonfire, so the sea looks red and shadows go leaping over the sands. Straw mats are spread upon the beach just out of reach of the waves. In the distance, there are crooners, with a concertina and the island form of guitars. In the distance also, there is food, great bowls of it, delectably confused. In the foreground, insistent and unavoidable, there are white-coated servitors with dark, complaisant smiles, offering drinks. And Nassau drinks are the very essence of temptation. They are subtly concocted, so that their first taste is of fruit juice and ice with maybe a little brown sugar, but there is a kick in them. After the second or the third, there is a sting in them and

a burn and an unutterable ache. So all the attractive young couples and the not so young too, who have been sitting and sprawling on the straw mats, picturesque in their bright-coloured trousers with orange and emerald, and bright blue and brighter red scarves and shirts, wriggling painted toes in the sand or sitting on them with a make-believe of being altogether grown-up and discreet, all these wander away from the blaze, till they find some moonlight and a kindly rock. There they establish themselves as far as possible from the party, which they tell each other is a particularly good one, the best of the season, and they surely are enjoying it. But very quickly they begin to confide not what they think, which is negligible, but what they feel, and that, after several Bahamian drinks, is a great deal and very important. The moon, doubtless, is amused. In the small hours there is no one left at the party, strictly speaking, but it goes on—and on—between the laughing, gossiping waves trying to clamber further up the beach, and the casuarina trees. These, affected by the number of confidences they have overheard, have lost their heads completely. With imitative abandon, they lean upon the rocks, which are cynics. Knowing that the whole landscape depends upon them and every Nassau party as well, the rocks remain unmoved. The casuarinas get no encouragement at all.

At Georgetown on Exuma the moon was quite as effective as on New Providence, but Mr. Fitzgerald, the Acting Commissioner, sat with his back to it. A practical man, disturbed by a sense of duty, he told us that he had a store which paid very well so long as sisal prices were high. But now it did not pay to strip and wash the crop, especially as the islanders had to use sea-water. Nobody could afford to buy more than an occasional tin of herrings, prints to cover themselves, or a lamp chimney after a high wind.

Agriculture was difficult, he said, speaking with excessive moderation. You could no longer count on any regular rain. The climate seemed to be changing. He remembered regular rains when he was a boy.

When the conversation languished, we turned on the radio which we had brought from the *Nya*. It was a great

success. In the small, dark room, lit by an oil-lamp, the shadows piled in the corners. A number of coloured people drifted through the open door and sat or stood, equally still, while they listened with absorbed interest. There was not a movement, nor on any face an expression. On the porch, there were dark moons of faces, tilted a little backwards, with straw hats hanging like haloes on the crowns of their heads.

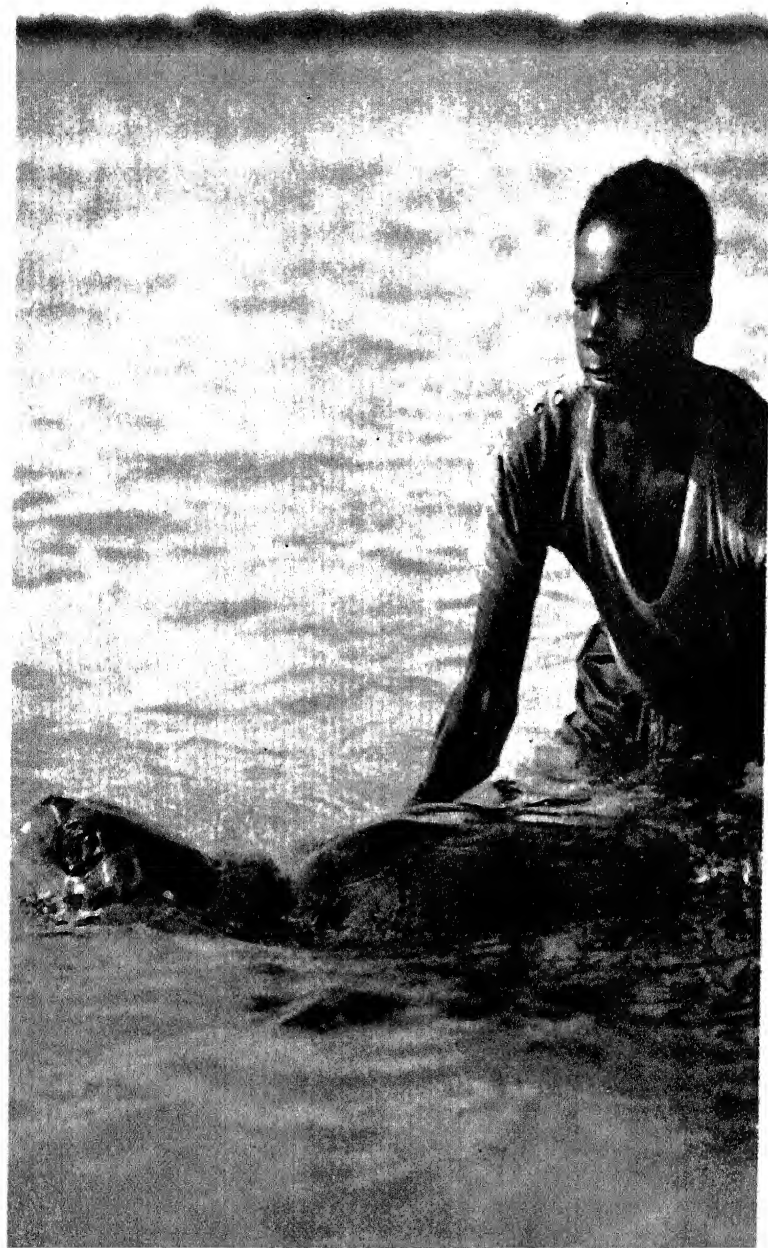
That night I slept fitfully in the enormous bed. An oleander tapped briskly against the window. I could hear Sam rolling about on the bed he had set up on the porch, and on the other side of a thin partition there was determined snoring and the sound of a heavy body striving with wood-work and springs.

In the morning, Sam told us his real name was Samuel Theophilus McKinney and that he had 'fixed a bath.' Simultaneously, Mr. Fitzgerald, leaning over the window-sill, said that he had worked most of the night, but could not fix his car. "I don't know what's wrong with it, but it's gone bad."

"Isn't there any other on the island?"

"Well, Father Marshall's got one, but I don't know if it's workin'. Something had fallen out when I last saw it. Anyways, he's expectin' the Bishop. He may be here any day in his boat, if he isn't held up by the storm."

While various dark figures went off in search of the priest, Sam indulged us with a most sophisticated breakfast. We then sat on the porch with the exaggerated blues of the harbour broken into islands and promontories, lapping almost to our feet. There was an enormous almond tree which had withstood the last hurricane and so become an object of pride and veneration. On the same green there was a war memorial with twelve names inscribed on it. "Where were they killed?" I asked. The Acting Commissioner looked doubtful. "I never heard that any of them were killed," he said. "That was the difficulty when we wanted to have a memorial service. There wasn't any dead. I don't know that they all got to the front, but they enlisted all right."





With our eyes on the full-bodied almond tree, we talked of hurricanes. "It's much better to build in wood. Then, if your house or your church is blown away, it goes off all in a piece and you can go after it and fetch it back," said one of the villagers, and another gave it as his opinion that no shutters were of any use. "The rain is horizontal and it's driven along, mind you, at a hundred and twenty miles an hour." "A proper hurricane," said the policeman, "goes in circles. There's about fifteen minutes' pause before it comes back again. You wan' to shut everythin' on the side it's comin, but it's better to leave one door open on the lee side. Then, if the wind does get in, it can go out again without liftin' the roof."

Eventually Father Marshall arrived in an eighteen-year-old Overland which he had bought second-hand in Miami. There was hardly any of it left except the engine. Hood and windscreen had long ago departed. The stuffing in the back seat was falling out in lumps. The doors were doing their best to break away, but, as the priest reasonably said, "You can't expect anything to hold together on these roads except the engine and that's all you need in a car. The rest is just trimmings."

The Bishop, it appeared, was marooned somewhere by contrary winds, so Father Marshall prepared to show us the island. Having been born in a flat English county, I like the whale-backed Bahamian reefs covered with close scrub, the only break a brackish lagoon, on which sometimes you see duck. Very pleasant it was, jolting along in the sunlight, with fat white clouds bursting out of a blue sky like Michelangelo's massive-limbed figures on the roof of the Sistine chapel. How much, I thought, can leave a car, without seriously affecting its utility? That was when a large piece of the back fell off. I don't think there were any mudguards. Father Marshall remained unmoved. He was an excellent driver, although there wasn't very much left for him to drive. "Look," he said. "There's a lot of cultivation round here." Politely we stared at the bush. "You mustn't expect to see fields. Here, when you sow, you walk about with a stick poking the ground. When you manage to make a hole you drop in a seed." It

sounded difficult, but the islanders are accustomed to spend hours instead of pennies.

Upon a hill, we found Rolletown, looking as if it might be blown away by the next gale. This was another of Lord Rolle's estates, given to his slaves after Abolition made it impossible to work the plantations at a profit. Thirty-three families live high up with a top-of-the-world view and very little else except their own conviction that they have the best settlement in the island.

There are no words to describe the painted seas, transparent on the reef, with an unbelievable depth and violence of colouring outside, which are spread between the gold and rust of the rocks under the hill at Rolletown. I cannot think why more travellers do not embark on the Cunard Line via New York—seven or eight days of superlative comfort—or by the Pacific Steam Navigation's direct line to Nassau—eleven idle days with no possibility of being called upon to decide at what point Europe can no longer escape a war!—upon some of the best sea-going boats I know. As the result of doing either of these things, they would see the beauty which must have existed in Eden, before man and woman learned unnecessarily from the serpent. For me, the Bahamian out-islands are entirely different from anything else I've ever known, east, west, north or south, but they are only for the simple in heart who can still see heaven.

Apart from its astounding view over silken seas, heaped carelessly upon the harsher colours of the rocks, Rolletown seemed to me a clean and pleasant place. It prided itself on the possession of its own schooners, which took cargoes of vegetables and citrus fruits to Nassau. The energetic young school-teacher explained to us that the Agricultural Association had twenty-two members, who all gave one day a week to the community farm. "They prefer to work on the same day, so that they can all keep an eye on each other," he added, smiling. "Nobody likes to think he may be doing more work than his neighbour!"

Two black ladies in very vivid green offered us some oranges from trees which were just beginning to bear. The Government provides budded trees free of charge in order

to encourage settlers. They bear fruit in about three years, and cease to yield after twenty-five. The trees grown from seed are a slower proposition. They do not give any fruit for five years, but after that they continue to give a good harvest for sixty.

One of the women in green took me into her house. It was very clean and quiet. The harmonium in the parlour had long ceased to make any sound at all. I pressed the yellowed notes and thought that a ghost of a sigh came from the dust-closed case. Seven-foot partitions divided the house into the shape of a Maltese Cross. The usual enormous beds, each with a pile of hard pillows at the end, yawned out of the sleeping cubicles. There were flowers arranged in the stiffest possible bunches and a goat was exploring the kitchen. He came out of it eating a rag, with an expression of ecstasy.

"D'you milk your goats?" I asked, remembering our chief source of food on a seven months' journey across Abyssinia during which I had become quite proficient in tucking an animal's hind-leg between my knees while milking into any receptacle that a muleteer could produce. "No, ma'am," said my hostess. "We don' do nothing with the milk. We lets the kids have it."

Rolletown, in common with the rest of Exuma, pastures a number of cows, but there is never any milk to drink, except that which comes out of a coco-nut or a tin. "No, ma'am," said the green lady, "we only like real pra-aper milk out of a ca-an."

"How d'you think it gets into the can?" I asked.

"Out of a factory, ma'am."

Great amusement attended our departure, for I shook hands with the wrong lady in green. "You'se thankin' a mistake," she said. "That weren't my house, nor my oranges." Peals of laughter followed us down the hill. It was a good joke and it would last for days.

Father Marshall's car took us back to Georgetown at a fine pace. On the way we met a long, lean man who looked as if he had been lost for years. We asked him if he wanted a lift. He stared doubtfully at the car which, by this time, was hung all over with bundles of people as if they

were goods for market, and said he hadn't much time, so he would go on his feet. I don't remember how it happened that he told us he was a preacher. When we enquired where he intended to preach, he said: "Mos' anywhere." He had no church. He preached wherever there were people to listen, for he belonged to a wandering sect called the 'Go Ye's.' Father Marshall was sympathetic but puzzled. None of us had ever heard of a 'Go Ye.' Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Sabbatarians, Holy Rollers or Jumpers, Latter-Day Saints, Seventh-Day Adventists, Catholics, consciously united, struggle with the best intentions and considerable individual courage, but often with surprising results, to bring faith as they understand it, to the ignorant islanders who say: "Yes, ma'am, I bin mos' everythin', but always a Christian."

The return journey was so successful—I think we only dropped a step and a few mysterious nuts—that Father Marshall generously offered to drive us next day to the ferry. "Nine miles it is, and then you'll be able to see Little Exuma. We can lunch on one of the big cattle-farms and Mr. Bowes will send horses to meet us."

So it was arranged. We started early and what was left of the car held together. The official ferryman, who earns sixteen shillings a month, rowed across to meet us. We climbed the first hill of Little Exuma and found an attractive settlement on the top of it. The school-teacher as usual was active and informative. He was also a comparative plutocrat, for his salary amounted to £112 a year. I'm not sure that he belonged to the Ferry settlement, but he seemed to have a great deal of authority. "All these people need is someone to look up to," he said. "They kinder git an ache in their necks if they kin only look up to the Lawd." That man was a character. He applied castor-oil, common sense and a judicious amount of learning to the people in his charge, and they were not limited to school-children.

Little Exuma is justly proud of its looks and the good earth which makes it possible to breed thoroughbreds for the Nassau racecourse and cattle for beef, but it acknowledges that it is just a trifle isolated. The mail-steamer calls once

a month. The Postmaster's job cannot be arduous, for his remuneration is calculated at £2 a year.

When we arrived at the Ferry village, there were no horses waiting, so we went into Mr. Fitzgerald's house and he showed us some interesting documents relating to his far-away ancestors, collaterals of the Leinsters. This premier Dukedom of Ireland struggles under a curse. For centuries the family has suffered appalling tragedies, but it has continued to produce and to marry the most beautiful of women. A portrait of one such hanging upon the wall of a wooden cottage on the lost Lucayan isle, so far removed from the wars and plots, heroism, loyalties and betrayals, which went to the making of Leinster history, was conducive to thought. The world, according to the Arabs, is no wider than a man's imagination. Mine ran loose between a cabin in Exuma and the greatest house in Ireland. Then a voice called out from the lane: "Here's Satan coming."

The information was sufficiently startling. But the lord of evil turned out to be a horse. "He is a fine beast," said Mr. Fitzgerald. "There's just one thing about him. He won't move."

Father Marshall hurriedly offered to walk. It was eight miles to the Bowes' farm, but he set off there and then. There was no stopping him. My husband mounted Satan. "I'll get him along, all right. Don't bother," he said. But the girth broke within the first mile. The rest of the journey resolved itself into a struggle between a horse, a man, and an ill-fitting saddle several sizes too large. My husband won. Indeed, Satan looked dispirited by the time we reached Williamstown where Mr. Bowes farms several hundred acres. He should have known better than to take on an Irishman and a Gunner to boot!

We had ridden, with great effort but very slowly, through lovely country, more varied than is usual in the Bahamas. At times we climbed through luxuriant vegetation and there were many trees and wild fruits whose names I wanted to know, but the villagers at Forbes Hill gazed vaguely at the earth or the sky, and, with an infinite softness of speech, "guessed they were just trees." At

others we sank into palm-groves which might have belonged to the Southern Pacific, and always there was the sea. But I have said enough about that. Indeed, I feel like the Portuguese priest, Father Alvarez, who, in the early sixteenth century, discovered the underground churches hewn out of the rock at Lalibela in Abyssinia. This Jesuit reported to his supervisors:

It wearies me to write more of these works, because it seems to me that they will not believe me if I write more and because as to what I have already written they may accuse me of untruth, therefore I swear by God in whose power I am, that all that is written is the truth and there is much more than what I have written and I have left it that they may not tax me with falsehood.

So it is that I feel about the unbelievable seas of the Bahamas.

Mr. Bowes, living in a larger edition of the bleached and scrubbed island houses, with white walls and shingle roofs, gave us an excellent lunch, all home-grown, even the guava jelly which is his speciality. In spite of the fact that he can import his sugar free—for the Government makes every concession to help local producers—he cannot compete with American prices. But he sells the delicious cheese and jelly and also the bottled fruit in Nassau. By this means, he gives employment to a number of women who work for a penny halfpenny an hour and doubtless eat a good many guavas in between.

Beyond the paddock which surrounds the house, where Satan and his companions were having a good meal, there is an old tomb belonging to the great days of the plantations. Not far away are the ruins of some stone cabins, the slave quarters adjacent to the 'great house' which has disappeared altogether. But there were no cattle in sight, and it was difficult to credit the legend of seventy blood horses bred on the farm and sold at high prices for racing.

When the problem of our departure became urgent, Mr. Fitzgerald shifted uneasily in his chair and said he would as soon walk. My husband retorted: "There must be a boat. Let's sail!"

"It's a mile to the south shore," said our host. "With this wind, we'll go quicker from there." A mile on foot was

evidently preferable to eight on Satan. Everybody looked delighted except Father Marshall, who kindly offered to ride the evil one back with me. The sea, I felt, would do worse to me than any horse. Here I was wrong, for the boat made swift and easy passage within the reef. We all arrived at the ferry simultaneously, but that was because Father Marshall was used to dealing with the devil. Whenever one of his coloured congregation died, it was necessary to reassure the others. All day and all night they would sit round the house in which the corpse lay, and howl at the top of their voices to keep away 'sperrits.' The devil they left to their priest with some hope and more fear. So Satan ought to have known what to expect. Within sight of his own gate, he found himself hustled into a trot. I never saw any animal look more surprised. By the time we reached the Ferry village, he had 'moved' quite a lot.

Mr. Fitzgerald regarded us with respect when he found us waiting on the cay. "Surprising," he said, "most surprising." Then he cheered up. "But I've seen lots o' surprising things on these islands even when there isn't a hurricane. Thirty years ago I went up along the coast to Farmer's Hill to buy a mast and it was the first time the people there had seen a stranger. They all ran away and hid, thinking we was the Spaniards come to capture them."

CHAPTER XVII

LONG ISLAND AND CAT ISLAND

LONG before we were tired of Georgetown, the sea-plane came to fetch us. A small boy eating melon paused with the red seeds dripping out of his mouth to look up at what he thought was a gigantic cockroach. After a while he confided to me that it was too big, 'bigger'n any of the bugs' in his house. Then he buried his face again in the rind.

We flew over Long Island, feeling that we owned the heavens. There was nothing else in them. Earth and sea were a map spread out for our guidance. Sam was ecstatic. He had never flown before. "If you offered me a thousand dollars, I'd rather have this," he said.

We saw Dead Man's Cay with its large red church illogically inland, and 40 miles of road between Sims and Clarendon where we landed in the enclosed harbour which Columbus visualised as being able to shelter the whole fleet of Spain. In long canoes with eight paddles on either side, the Admiral, adopted and subsequently disowned by Spain, travelled about the fragrant cays. Long Island was his Fernandina, called after the King of Aragon. The women, he wrote, were vainer than in any other islands and took more pride in their appearance. For they wore head-dresses and "small pieces of cotton." The plant then grew wild and the Lucayans brought it to Columbus in exchange for beads which presumably added to the vanity of the straight-limbed, smooth-haired Indian women, kin, perhaps, to the Aztecs and the Mayas.

There are gaps in the history of Long Island and mysteries as yet unsolved, for the seven-foot skeleton of a reputed Lucayan was discovered with some wooden and stone implements. But certain it is that by the end of the eighteenth century there were 500 planters on the island,

and pineapples stretched from sea to sea. There are still a few broken walls belonging to the plantation houses and here and there the remains of gun emplacements to protect the islanders from pirates or the sloops of Spain. But it is all old history now. The people are more interested in their prolific seas, teeming with many kinds of fish, and in the water-birds which linger about the island creeks, than in ancestors who may have fought the French privateers when Napoleon threatened most that England possessed.

Columbus himself was enthralled by the fish in Charlestown Harbour, which he says were "formed like cocks of the finest colours in the world, blue, yellow, red and of all colours, and others tinted in a thousand manners." In his day, there were parrots of equally brilliant appearance. Some of them were taken back as gifts to the Spanish sovereigns.

Mary Moseley quotes the offer of £20,000 made by a Loyalist settler in Exuma to a Mrs. Groves for her property on Long Island in the halcyon days of the plantations. But now, although the land shows more traces of settlement and cultivation than many of the isles and its population of 4,659 has increased by several hundred in recent years, there are no great signs of activity.

At Clarendon, the biggest building is the Commissioner's house, which, as usual, flies the Union Jack. In the Bahamas, the out-island Commissioners may be of British or African blood. Colour matters not at all, providing the man's education and character be satisfactory. For in the principal settlements, the godhead upon earth is represented by a trinity, with the Commissioner as the chief official, the policeman and the school-teacher as his assistants. The former has to combine the duties and the qualities of a magistrate, agricultural expert, doctor, technical adviser, philosopher, postmaster, tourist bureau, banker, confessor, minister of transport, and, generally speaking, up-to-date father with every form of experience at his command. The policeman does everything except the work usually attributed to him, for there is no crime to sour his outlook. The schoolmaster fills in all gaps. If he is a good man he represents the cement of the out-island settlements.

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Somewhere near the Commissioner's residence there is a courtroom, an office and a simple little gaol whose cells are generally used as storehouses. The Commissioner administers the Common Law of England with a full measure of common sense added to it. The cases that would go to Assizes in Britain are tried by a Stipendiary Magistrate who sails or flies round the islands as he is needed. Some of the Churches are successful in settling disputes among the members of their congregations, which would otherwise find their way into court. When I asked which sect did the best work on the out-islands, I was told by an Andros sponging-captain: "Maybe it's the Baptists, for the ministers deal with their own folk as if they were magistrates. Times, they'll hold informal courts in the church grounds and a lot of ill-feeling gets settled that way. The people don't like to go against their Minister."

I remember the Commissioner's house at Clarendon as being particularly pleasant. It was made of wooden slats and painted pale yellow. Primrose-coloured flowers grew round the steps of the porch. Yellow and black butterflies drifted over them. I think they were the first I had seen in the Bahamas. In the rough grass stood the remains of a motor. "Does it work?" I asked. "Reckon it's gone bad," said a negro, without much interest. Cars are alien to the spirit of the more distant out-islands. It is natural that they should 'go bad.'

In the absence of the Commissioner, Mr. Wood, his wife gave us an excellent lunch. Sam helped with the cooking. Consequently, we had huge platefuls of rice, sweet potatoes, chicken and macaroni, for there is nothing eclectic about Sam. He likes to mix everything he can lay hands on in the same dish, and after his first flight he was so elated that he would have been quite likely to include the pepper-pot as well as its contents.

Our gentle-voiced, dark hostess refused to eat with us, but she sat beside me and talked about the island which sends two members to the House of Assembly, and like the rest of the Bahamas is generally represented by 'mainland folk.'

There is an open ballot and votes are quite frankly

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bought. The price at a recent election averaged about fifteen dollars and so well recognised is the custom that a rich man went to the candidate and said: "Look here, I'm voting for you anyway, and I don't need the money, but I hear you're paying" such and such a sum "so you might as well send my cheque to a charity we both want to help."

As every elector registers his vote at the top of his voice and in his own name, dealings on this particular market are quite straight and actually they do not do much harm, for it is doubtful if a poor man, farmer, sailor or storeman, from the out-islands could afford to live in Nassau during the sessions. The present Governor, in his speech at the closing of the House of Assembly, emphasised the desirability of a secret ballot, and this may eventually be introduced in spite of the resistance of Bay Street which likes to see the merchandise for which it pays.

Some of the out-island representatives have done good work for their constituencies, in spite of the fact that they are business men primarily interested in commerce on New Providence. The out-islands might gain by a secret ballot which would make it possible for them to elect—if they chose—a poor man and a local man with specific knowledge of village problems. On the other hand, the best educated and, on the whole, the most enterprising men, coloured or white, are to be found in Nassau. Some of these have taken to politics too much as a business, perhaps, because personal considerations are strong and the Bahamas in the years of peace have been, naturally enough, intent on their own problems rather than on those imperial ones by which, of necessity, they must be deeply concerned. There is no income tax in the Bahamas. The revenue depends primarily on import duties. This satisfies Bay Street and the rich men who build their winter playtime houses on New Providence, but it makes the cost of living exorbitant for everybody. Duties on food, drugs and other primal necessities amount to twenty per cent¹ and the shopkeepers must add a considerable amount to cover their overhead expenses and the liabilities of the short season, lasting only three

¹ On the bulk of such goods imported from U.S.A.

months, for prices are often three times as high as in England. Therefore, the very poor, who would be exempt from taxation in Europe, pay a certain amount in duty on the simplest necessities without which it would be hard for them to live. On the other hand, the fact that there is no income tax encourages settlers overburdened with liabilities in their own countries, who spend a good deal of money and give employment in the Bahamas. "If you had a secret ballot," I asked some of the Long Islanders, gathering gradually at the Commissioner's pale yellow house, "would you vote for one of your own people?" The general opinion was that if any 'real white' were available, he would be assured of the largest quantity of votes.

I don't know how the conversation drifted from politics to 'Obeah,' the witchcraft brought long ago from Africa, but fast disappearing in the Bahamas. Nobody whom I met at Clarendon town believed in magic, except as a means of keeping trespassers and petty thieves out of their crops. But one of the seaplane pilots told an excellent story about taking a magistrate to Cat Island to try a black who was in prison charged with murder. "I'd radioed the Commissioner the hour of our arrival and asked him to have food and lodging ready, so I was a bit surprised when I came down, punctual to the minute, and there was nobody to meet us. We had to rout out the Commissioner—it was some time ago—and he seemed very surprised to see us, although he'd got my message. He apologised because there was no food and he went on explaining that he hadn't expected us. I lost my temper a bit, so did the magistrate, because we didn't understand why he'd taken no notice of my wireless. At last, we found out that the prisoner had got hold of a famous Obeah man and paid him twelve pounds to make the plane crash. After that, nobody, not even the Commissioner, imagined it possible that we should arrive!"

After lunch, we went out for a walk with the policeman. He wore his blue uniform and his boots and he looked both smart and hot. Determined that we should see every single thing in *his* settlement, he made us climb the little hill on which the splendid new church had been built. The old

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one had been destroyed in the 1908 hurricane. "It blew away, roof and all, and we couldn't find enough of it still together to bring it back," he explained. While the bunches of pods on the 'women's tongue trees' chattered in the wind, the policeman told us in his charmingly gentle voice that all the village had worked together to build the church. "It took us two years," he said, "and we had to live, so the Father paid us for four days' work each week and we gave the other two days free. We dug our own stone and we made pits way over on the reef to burn our own lime. We put it on horses and took it to our boats. Then we sailed it over here. Our priest is a good beggar and he got the white folk in Nassau to pay for the lumber, but all the rest we did ourselves. Why not, ma'am, it's our own church?"

I thought the building was worthy of the pride its creators displayed, for it was very simple. The lines were good. We sat on a dark, hardwood bench, and appreciated the quiet and coolness. No sound reached the church. From its windows, there was a wide view over the swell and roll of the bush. Spears of sisal stood up, sharply effective against a very clear, newly washed sky. Not far away, there was the sea. For once it was calm and no breeze stirred inside the church. The calm, white building had all the assurance of a fortress. Convictions, not transitory opinions, had built it, and from their simplicity it had gained strength.

"On festivals," said the policeman, "there's such a big crowd of worshippers that we has to sit on the window-sills and the steps and on the grass outside. You never seen, perhaps, so many people all together."

It was with the feeling of leaving behind me something of great value, but without price, that I went down the small hill. The policeman was talking of 1908 when the gaol had been blown away while there was a prisoner in one of the two cells. "Right off from over his head it went, and we'd nowhere else to put him, so we had to let him go free," explained the representative of the law, "but I called on him every so often to say that if he didn't behave himself, he'd have to serve his sentence. But we can't do

anything more to him now, because he's buried. No, ma'am, I don't call on him any more. It would surelee give me a real turn to see him now."

On we walked between Clarendon's square blocks of houses, with their lime-washed stone walls and their storm shutters whose colours had once been bright, but were now faded to a delicious inconsequence. With gloom, the policeman referred to the car marooned in the Residency gardens. "They mostly go bad," he said, as if motors were subject to a disease. But the sight of the harbour gave him as much pleasure as it had done to Columbus. "We've four fine schooners to the island," he said, "and ten or a dozen fishing-boats. We don't have no trouble in getting food. Every week we send sheep to Nassau. They're packed so close on the deck they can't move and they don't want to move, either, for they kinder don't like the sea." Each sailing ship takes a hundred sheep and makes the voyage in about thirty-six hours. The best ewes are sold for between thirty shillings and three pounds according to their size. "The littlest sheep only fetch five shillings or maybe two," said the policeman.

From Clarendon we flew to Cat Island which, in shape, is much more like a boat than a cat. It is 42 miles long, has an acreage of approximately 100,000 and a decreasing population which, in 1921, was 4,273. We landed at the Bight, and as we came down on to a sea of brilliant glass, we saw a long, long, lazily-curved isle with one white sandy road, apparently going on for ever. The square, mollusc houses were clamped solidly on to the scarred and pitted rock. There was no colour except the green of the bush and the jewel and wine tones of the sea. For their own amusement, because, that day, there was no wind, a quantity of palms scuffled about like the trimmings in an old-fashioned hat. I saw no coco-nuts, but there were groves of 'silver-top' used for making mats and straw hats nearly as large, and of 'pond-top' which makes fine head-gear almost as good as the famous panamas hand-woven in Ecuador in damp mist and moonlight by women sitting high up on the porches of their stilt-legged houses and treating their work as a religious rite. There were also

'Spanish tops,' which make brooms and delectable thatched roofs. Altogether, the long, narrow settlement strung on its solitary road, deep in sand, was well provided with palms and it had a few big trees as well. The coloured Commissioner was a mine of information, for he was interested in the backward islanders, each of whom feared his neighbour might be practising Obeah, while denying all inclination to do so himself. And he talked of the ways of the people who had all intermarried for generations. "They're very superstitious. Not one of them will have a chink of window open after dark and they'd be sick with fright if the door came unlatched. They'll tell you it's because of the mosquitoes, but really they're terrified of spirits." The school-teacher and the store-keeper, who was also, I think, the telegraphist, joined us and the talk continued. "These islanders are the most suspicious I know," said one of the young men. "They wouldn't sleep or eat with a neighbour, no ma'am, they'd be too frightened of being 'fixed.'¹" He told how a youth brought back a cake from Nassau and gave a slice of it to one of his neighbours, with whom there had been some dispute. Apparently the man could not resist 'shop' cake. He ate it and within a few hours was dead. All the villagers thought it was Obeah, good, hot and strong. "But it may have been poison," concluded the narrator. "Nobody could possibly tell."

In the long, sandy lane, we met an intelligent-looking negress who was considered a good doctor. Most of her medicines grew in the bush. She picked and brewed them fresh for each patient. But sometimes she used cows' gall, rare as a needle or a shilling on Cat Island, lard or a melted tallow candle, a big rusty nail stewed in the juice of certain herbs, sea-weed, a poultice of earth and red peppers, or a conch taken from the shell and laid on an open wound. The one thing she did not believe in was fresh air. Nobody ever died of her treatment, she insisted. They died from old age, or 'sperrits,' from poison and drowning and fresh air and sharks or sharp-teethed barracuda—she even acknowledged that her fellow villagers occasion-

¹ Bewitched.

ally died from consumption "if dey plum' obstinate about it, but dey nebbber die from what I do to dem, no, ma'am."

Such a 'wise woman' has to work very hard. She cannot just feel a pulse, prescribe and go away. She must go out into the bush or along the shore and find the numerous complicated ingredients for her medicines. She must then 'bile' them or stew them and take them to the patients, whom she will bathe, rub, knead, plaster and so on, "packing them with pepper grass" or other hot plants, "filling them" with purges of oil or herbal infusions. Her methods are drastic. The patients are generally thinner when she has finished with them, but I was told nine times out of ten she effects a cure. When she fails, it is because 'de Lawd sure wanted dat man very bad.'

On Cat Island there is only one white man and only ten per cent of the people can read or write. We went to the cheerful little schoolhouse, where all the windows were open and the children sang for us fragments of the old songs which will soon be forgotten. They could never remember more than two lines, which they repeated indefinitely, without accompaniment, in concerted syncopation. There was never a break in the rhythm. It might have been one voice singing. From the first lines of 'Way down Maya road, oh baby lick it up,' with its suggestion of unlimited booze, and 'I haven't drunk potato wine'—reluctantly temperate, they went on to 'When de sta's refused to shine, When ev'ry sta' dissapeah, King Jesus will be mine.'

My husband suggested that they might try the National Anthem. With grave amiability they complied. In rich, dark, dreaming voices, the words acquired a melody of which I had never been conscious. As a prayer they drifted out to the sea and the wind with which the palms played.

The Commissioner and his delightful wife invited us to lunch in a cool wooden room with windows on both sides. While we ate freshly caught fish and vegetables grown in the village, we talked about the people. As usual, there were so many different kinds of Christians that the more unstable must have been bewildered by the choice offered. At Devil's Point, the Minister of the Seventh-Day Adventists

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had offered no less than twenty pounds to anyone who could prove that Saturday was not the day of rest and worship appointed by the Lord. The Baptists retorted with an offer of double the sum to anyone who could prove the same about Sunday. The harassed Commissioner had to make a special journey to settle the matter. "How did you do it?" I asked. "Well, I made a speech about the Seventh Day mentioned in the Bible and I said you could count it according to taste. The only important thing was that it should be the seventh day, not the sixth, fifth or fourth."

"Were they satisfied?"

"Well, I think they'd come to a dead end. Nobody could prove anything and they were a bit tired of talking."

In the village, we looked into one or two of the cabins. They were clean and simple. I asked one of the women what they ate, for there seemed to be very little in the store-room, kitchen and parlour combined. She giggled and turned her head away. The teacher explained that there was a difference between what they were able to eat and what they would like to eat. If they could have their way, there would be tea and corn bread at sunrise. Nine o'clock breakfast would consist of hominy meal and land crab or fish, but you had to go far out to catch the latter. Three or four hours afterwards they would eat again, bread or roast potatoes and peas, broiled pigeon, if one had been snared. For supper there might be a dumpling of dough in soup, or peas and rice. While the list of meals proceeded, the woman nodded her head and looked interested. When it concluded, she giggled again and said: "When we got food, we cer'ainly eat a whole lot so's to make sure."

The people of Cat Island do not like marrying outside their own settlements. They prefer to know all about the family, its blessings and its curses, from which they choose a bride or groom. Who knows what strangers might be able to do in the way of Obeah, about which everyone talks while denying experience or belief?

A marriage, whether it be 'the Church kind' or an equally durable union unblest by priest or minister, is celebrated by a 'jumpin'-dance' which may go on for twenty-four hours. When one lot of performers are ex-

hausted, others take their place. There are springs in negro knees. Coloured limbs have the strength and resilience of whipcord. No dark-skinned islander exerts himself in a dance. He relaxes. Inseparable from the rhythm of the music or the unaccompanied movements of his companions, he ceases to feel anything but the emotion inspired by the dance. I have seen work-worn bodies in stiff, ill-fitting calico or sacking acquire the grace of a Pavlova when the current of flute and guitar or the pulse of the drums carries them, as on a stream, beyond their ordinary limitations. I have seen tired, shapeless feet, which longed for the peace of a coffin, take new life. Young, gay, indomitable, and without any bones at all, they pick up and hold the rhythm to which the earth itself responds.

"But a funeral is the really big show here," said one of the brown men walking with us. "The night before, there's a 'sitting-up' inside and outside the house where the corpse lies. Lights burn all the time and nobody would dare to go to bed, for fear the spirits should come and lay hold of the dead man. If they could get his body before it was buried, they could do what they like with it." With a synthetic soul and a familiar physical appearance, the 'haunt' would add to the terrors of the night. Not even barred shutters would keep it out.

Cat Islanders are determined that their dead shall not walk. To prevent such untimely action, they place upon the new grave, a glass, a dish, a basin, everything the friend or relative has used in life. "It is all there, ready for him, and he doesn't need to walk a step to lay hold of anything he wants," explained a fisherman who had added himself to the party.

He concluded that he would prefer to be buried at sea. Then nobody would mind how far he walked, because it would be at the bottom of the ocean. "Yes, ma'am, it might sure scare the fishes, but there'd be plenty much to see."

CHAPTER XVIII

ANDROS STILL A MYSTERY

ANDROS is the largest of the Bahamian Isles. A legend persists to the effect that in the great hardwood forests of the interior there are descendants of the lost Lucayans, but nobody has ever seen them. Flying over 1,600 miles of bush and creek and lagoon, with the pines as smoke sentinels below us, most of the island seemed to us uninhabited. The forest was sufficiently dark and impenetrable to suggest smoke drifting over virgin earth. Much of it is still unsurveyed.

The Spanish discoverers of the new world, which they believed to be old in wealth and history, called Andros 'the isle of the Holy Spirit.' It was renamed by Sir Edmund Andros, Commander-in-Chief of Barbados in 1672, either because he wished to perpetuate a personality which evidently pleased him, or because when African St. Andro on the Mosquito coast was ceded to Spain, its inhabitants were allowed to settle in the Bahamas.

There is still something definitely African about the mysterious land, deep in bush, over 100 miles long and nearly half as wide.¹ There, we found the sharpest contrast between the Books of Genesis and Revelations. Inland, there are 'bush blacks' primitive as their blood brethren in the Congo. These still hold to the fetishes and taboos of a tribal system which did not survive the original crossing of the Atlantic. They know a few words of the African dialects which have created a jungle freemasonry over thousands of miles—between the Gold Coast and Tanganyika—but they have lost all sense of their meaning. Oppressed by the fears and the superstitions of the hot, dark continent in which their slave ancestors were captured, they avoid all contact with modernity.

¹ 40 miles at the greatest breadth.

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In some of the settlements round the coast live coloured people and negroes, of the same origin, but removed by centuries of imposed civilisation from the mentality and the outlook of the forest blacks. For, some 200 years ago, seventy adventurous Britishers, men of Devon and Bristol and the imaginative West country, soft in speech and hard as a blade in action, were granted land in Andros. "Twenty-two white heads of families, seven planters, and a hundred and thirty-two slaves cleared over eight hundred acres of land in one year," writes the historian McKinnen, but the island must have been already populated, because before the arrival of these competent and energetic settlers,¹ it sent, by special direction of the King,² two elected members to the House of Assembly in Nassau.

From this eighteenth-century tide of emigration must be descended the spongers and the fishermen of to-day, the farmers of to-morrow. At Staniard's Creek, lavish in its beauty, the villagers are displaying an energy altogether unusual in the islands of dreams and lost causes. In one week the Agricultural Association acquired 162 new members, and the President, Enos Riley, had reason for his enthusiasm. "We are now having very nice rains," he said, "and many people have already begun to plant corn and seed. Every sponger, indeed every person who can work at all, is making good use of the tools provided by the Government. Staniard Creek is setting an example of industry."

On moonlight nights in March, ploughing went on till eleven o'clock, by which hour the 'sperrits' and the 'chickannies,' fairies peculiar to Andros, might be expected to take a malicious interest in the work. Enos Riley, writing to the *Nassau Guardian* to express the gratitude of his people for prompt, adequate and intelligent Government assistance, said:

It is true our people are generally known to be indifferent and lazy, but we can truly say 'the scene has changed.' Really it is a miracle. The sponge plight has created in all classes an insatiable thirst for the land. This seems to mark a new era in the history

¹ In 1787.

² 1784.

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of Andros Island. Never did we expect to see our people so interested in cultivating the earth . . . and we do not hesitate to say they cannot work any harder.

Here is a recrudescence of the spirit of the eighteenth century, when white men from England, brown and black men from Africa, gave to the heritage of Carib or Lucayan another era of fertility.

Yet Andros as a whole cannot be judged by the most enterprising of its coastal settlers. The inland swamps hold the traces not only of a lost race but of many a forgotten purpose. Weapons and tools, wrought stone, pottery and wood-carvings, have been found in the vast, jungle stretches where the folk-lore is still African and superstition takes the place of faith. Here there are traces of witchcraft and the children are terrified of a white skin. To the dull-witted, resentful primitives, who find sanctuary and little else among the trees of the south—the mahogany, horseflesh, mastic gums, logwood, braziletto and madeira which made the hulls and masts of old-time sailing-ships and good, solid furniture for the planters who have disappeared—the arrival of a stranger is a matter of no interest and little comment. Those I saw hardly raised their heads to look at us. There was none of the gay, appreciative response which we found on the coast. Nobody asked for tobacco, or invited us into the tumbledown cabins, where there are still bows and arrows, and the "grains" for fishing resemble the barbed spears of aboriginals.

The birds were more friendly than the dark-skinned human beings who wanted to be left alone to do, without method or knowledge, what their forbears had already done to the soil and to the forest during hundreds of unchanging and helplessly unproductive years.

There were, I thought, a surprising number of birds, cranes and cormorants and pelicans flying heavily with the restrained expression of dowagers, cuckoos, black parrots and mocking-birds, beside the two famous 'rookeries' belonging by deed poll to the flamingoes. These last I did not see, but if they are like the Kenya lakes, they must be a lovely sight. I shall never forget a great stretch of water blooming like a bed of brilliant, rose-red and flame-red

tulips. The shore was painted pink by the feathers which had fallen. Knee-deep in the lake and so close together that only their own vivid red could be seen, the birds rested motionless. There were tens of thousands of them. It looked as if the setting sun had splashed great streams of colour out of the sky. Suddenly, the flamingoes decided on flight. Rank after rank, with military precision, they rose, wing to wing, with their long legs streaking behind them. As they lifted higher, with the rich red splendour of dawn, the dark feathers under the wings could be seen. It looked as if smoke trailed under a sunset, of which every cloud had come to life and was burning with its own inherent fire.

In keeping with the legend of a lost tribe hunting giant lizards with bows and arrows, with the mysteries of Nicolltown's caverns and the fabulous subterranean passages, in keeping also with the magnificent failure of the sisal estates, one of which belonged to Joseph Chamberlain, and was managed for years by our present Prime Minister, is the independent republic of the flamingoes, with its minister and plenipotentiary in the person of Mr. Forsyth.

To visit this remarkable man, who knows so much and needs so little, we made a special flight to Andros. "You'll have to chase him. We don't know where he is," said Government officials in Nassau. "Try Nicolltown first, but probably you'll find him somewhere on the mud at Mangrove Cay."

Off we flew in the twin-engined scarlet Douglas of Bahamian Airways, which appears to small out-islanders as the most enormous of all cockroaches, but it was too rough to land among the heaped tumultuous breakers at Nicolltown. Down towards their crests we circled. Above the roar of the engines, powerful, assured and serene, we could imagine the thunder of the surf. With the desperation of the ancient Rajputs demanding dissolution as the price of defeat, the waves hurled themselves upon the reef and broke. So, in countless wars, the greatest chivalry of India died to no purpose, their swords hilt-deep in Mongol or Mahratta blood.

"I guess we'll have to go on," said the pilot, as the spray caught his wings. "We couldn't live on this sea."

Easily, the Douglas rose. I thought of the full-breasted pelican dowagers, hampered by a suggestion of whalebone. Of all the powers which man now commands, the wheel of a plane under his hands, the control stick between his knees, gives him most nearly the sensation of omnipotence.

Discarding the waves, as if they were crumpled paper which we had thrown away—to our arrogant divinity, the earth and the ocean were no more than receptacles for waste material—we flew along the coast to Mangrove Cay. There were glimpses of lovely beaches, of tortuous salt-water inlets, of lagoons and further inland the dark smoke of the pines. Then we came down. A boat sped to meet us and toy figures hurried along the shore. The arrival of a plane meant news, unexpected letters, a different kind of speech, perhaps a new idea.

Stalwart boatmen carried us ashore. Draped ignominiously about their necks, we were first reassured as if we had been teething infants and then dumped anyways at the feet of the amused Commissioner. With him was the priest, Father Brooks, short, cheerful, intelligent, and a hard worker. We had already met him in Nassau.

After we had all shuffled for some distance through soft sand, I asked if there was any wheeled transport on the island. "A bicycle, perhaps," said the pleasantly brown Commissioner, "but there isn't much road."

"What about a horse?" I persisted.

A boatman broke in with a doubtful: "We-ell, there's the crittur we met under the gentleman who was riding and there's another, a poor weak crittur who don't hardly knows it's born yet." The description was amusing, but not encouraging. We continued to walk. On his knees, among newly planted citrus trees, within reach of the shore, we found the ebony agricultural expert, with a frown on his forehead. "Do they like just sand?" I asked, with interest.

"They don' min' much when they'se young," he explained. "We transplant them after a while, but they'd grow all right if we lef' them here." I thought Bahamian oranges must have nice natures, or perhaps they are particular friends with the palms which always grow with one root in the sea if they can so contrive.

The next people we met were a group of women armed with machetes. They looked purposeful and two of their hats were amusingly designed. "Did you make them yourselves?" I asked. They smiled with a slow and lazy distension of the lips. "Hers is a shop hat," they said, nodding at the third woman who was crowned with rusty black.

"My son from America brought it for me. Seven years it's worn."

The other hats were island-made, and could be renewed in an hour or two with the help of a palm, but evidently they had not the same local value as a 'shop hat.'

The sun bore down out of an unusually cloudless sky. The wind, that continuous wind of the Bahamas, was very definitely somewhere else. Father Brooks tramped uncomplaining beside us. His mind was occupied with what—on an out-island, where he had no luxury and scarcely a recognisable comfort—he could give up in Lent. "Not meat," he said, "because you can't get it, and I don't know that sugar would be fair, because I really would be glad not to have to afford it." There are greater victories, I thought, than Hitler's. "Sieg Heil," I said under my breath, but Father Brooks probably had not seen a newspaper for a month.

In the middle of the long strip of sand which took unto itself the importance of a lane between plots of Indian corn and vegetables and the generic bush, sat a dog busily picking burrs from its coat. When we stopped to drink coconut milk, it obligingly removed a number from my trousers. "Clever, isn't it?" said the Commissioner. "If you come and sit on our porch, it won't leave one on you. I don't know why it doesn't like to see those burrs about; got a tidy mind, I re-eckon." There was the long, soft island drawl in all his sentences.

In Mangrove Cay every man and boy takes it as natural that he should go to sea. "They're sick on land," said Father Brooks. "You can't keep them ashore. This generation will never be farmers. Their feet won't function properly unless there's a deck under them. Pity, because there's some decent farms round here."

"What do you call a decent farm?"

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"Oh, five or six acres. That's as much as a family can manage. Only the women work the land."

By this time we had reached the Commissioner's porch.

"The men are thinking about working," he said. Surely I had heard that sentence before? "They don't do nothing without thinking"—except sail and sing, eat, sit about and sleep.

From long rocking-chairs we regarded the sea, gaoler of Andros, because beyond the lane and the row of houses, there is only the bush with scraps of farmland torn out of it. The colours out on the reef went to my head. I expected to see a white beast with a golden horn on its forehead rise out of the sea. It would shake from an impatient mane drops of emerald, aquamarine and amethyst.

We had dreamed for a long time upon the porch before we remembered that we were in search of the elusive Mr. Forsyth. "You'll find him at Mastic Cay," said the Commissioner, as if this were the easiest thing in the world.

"Where's that? How'll I know it?" asked the pilot.

Our host looked surprised. "Why, you'll have no difficulty at all. There's a mastic tree somewhere about on the cay."

The pilot, exceedingly long-suffering, expressed something stronger than bewilderment. "What the hell's a mastic and what d'you suppose it'll look like anyway a thousand feet up?"

The Commissioner was not dismayed. "I'll come and show you," he said. Immediately, his wife went in search of bananas. "You'll all want food," she surmised and we agreed with fervour. Breakfast, at Nassau, had happened a long time ago and lunch, it was obvious, would not happen at all.

"How'll you get back?" asked the pilot, who could not rid himself of American efficiency.

"Walk," retorted the Commissioner.

"Walk? How? Across the sea?"

"Oh, I'll find a boat to put me ashore." The out-landers are admirable in face of the unexpected. It is only farm implements which make them feel seasick.

The Commissioner's house was large and agreeable, but

unfinished. "Next year, I'll have it complete," he said. A windmill on the road was making current for electric light and the wireless and doing it so effectively that in a gale it had to be stopped for fear of overcharging the batteries.

Wound once more about the obliging necks of fishermen, we were carried to a boat and rowed out to the plane. Then, from mid-heaven, we set out to look for a mastic gum tree. There seemed to me to be hundreds of small islands scattered upon the mud flats and the shallow reef. The Commissioner leaned close to the windows and stared through them all in turn. I could see no landmark among the bush with which the cays were thickly upholstered, but the out-islander was soon calling: "There it is! There it is!" He thrust his way forward and leaning upon the pilot's shoulder, pointed to a scrap of an island moored in the shallows. I felt it might float away before we landed, but the pilot, with a laconic: "Wee-al, I don't know whether it's wheels or floats that'll save us," banked down towards the sheet of water spread over mud.

Fortunately we had not to 'chase' Mr. Forsyth any further. As we landed, in spattering confusion of earth and sea, he pushed off in a boat to meet us. Soon we had all landed on his stray fragment of island which might just as well have been the back of a comatose and unusually shaggy dolphin. On it was recorded the whole history of sponges. For the shore was edged with the kraals in which the dead—drowned in fresh air—are left to rot, and the land piled with clean corpses of every sort. There were 'velvets' which I thought would be comforting in an out-size bathroom. I could just have held them between out-spread arms.

Mr. Forsyth is the pioneer of fiction, the scientist careless of discomfort, who does not know whether he is well or ill, what he eats or what he wears, providing his work progresses. The cabin to which he led us might have been built by an unexigent Crusoe. The larger portion of it was given up to sponges and to a carpentering bench. The small remaining space was divided between a wooden bunk, covered with chickens and dark blankets, and a stove on which the implements of several entirely different trades

were heaped. The hens had evidently been laying, for Mr. Forsyth, with the boundless generosity of the learned whose needs are not of the flesh, gathered eggs from the most peculiar places and forced us to take them. So a Bedouin of the desert would kill his last camel to feed his guests.

He told us as we walked along 'ocean drive,' a path cut in the bush, which circles the fragmentary isle, that the 250,000 sponges which the Government had planted for seed had all been killed by the plague. The under-sea nursery where flat rocks had been so arranged that a quarter or even a half-million scraps of sponge, destined for cultured growth, could be tied to them, was empty. "No, we know nothing about it. We've analysed everything we can lay hands on without result. The disease doesn't spoil the skeleton—I'm crowded out with those. You can take your pick—but it stops breeding." Mr. Forsyth always spoke as if his sponges were sentient and responsive, although, at the moment, he was injured by their unaccountable behaviour. Death after all is the final insult, which not even a scientist can repay.

Into the centre of the islet we wandered to look at the mastic gum. It had yellow berries, but to the ignorant it looked very much like other trees. There is a member of the same family in Jamaica, which bleeds for three hours on Good Friday. Every other day of the year, a cut produces no more than white syrupy gum, oozing from the inner bark. But at noon on the day Christ died, at the other end of the world, the owner of the tree with his family and his neighbours and friends from distant villages, gather as if for a church service. The trunk is tapped with the reverence due to an altar and—according to well-established local tradition—a liquid, red and thick like blood, drips out of the wound.

Mr. Forsyth, lean, browned by sun and wind, leather-skinned, with fierce, kind eyes—the combination is not unusual in the wilderness—is a descendant of Loyalist plantation owners. "But they were exploiters," he said. "They took everything out of the land and did nothing for it. They cut down every bit of timber and never replanted. The rainfall's gone with our best hardwood. Nothing will

bring it back except unlimited afforestation." He added: "It's extraordinary what an effect the slave-owning colonists had on the islands, for they weren't here long. They only had about fifty years of prosperity between the American revolution and the abolition of slavery, which ruined them."

As we were going back to the plane, it occurred to our Commissioner, stolen from Mangrove Cay, to ask how he could return to his home.

"You can't," said Mr. Forsyth. "I haven't a boat."

The out-island official was unimpressed. "You can drop me somewhere," he said, as if we were taxi-ing along Piccadilly. "I've still got the bananas," he added.

But we ate most of those, while we flew around looking for some calm sea with a boat on it. Eventually we saw a small schooner and came down beside her. The Commissioner signalled vigorously. "They'll put me ashore," he explained. "It's all right. I'll walk."

We left him with the three remaining bananas and a great deal of land and water between himself and the settlement which I am sure he rules with sense and understanding.

On the homeward flight, with the pine forests of Andros laid like a thin, dark carpet, worn in patches, I reflected upon this man's description of the villagers at Mangrove Cay. "They've got to think it over for eight months. It takes time to think, you know. When they've finished just thinking, they begin to think about working."

Flying over the perfection of Bahamian seas, I also had time to think and I found myself comparing the men involved at the present moment with the Bahamian earth. There was Mr. Levy at Hatchet's Bay, who could not bear to look at unproductive soil. "I am not interested in anything which cannot be made to produce," he said. For this experimentalist, Schopenhauer expressed his theory that "beauty is the hall-mark of efficiency." There is Sir Harry Oakes who, in his mining days, may have been an ill-treated servant of the earth, baulked, frustrated, fooled by it until he learned all its mineral secrets and turned them to good account. Now he does what he chooses to the element which once denied him. As a conqueror he disposes of its

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shape, curtailing, eliminating or creating as he desires. If any debt existed, the earth has been forced to repay.

Harold Christie civilises the soil. The returns which he requires from it are scheduled. I don't believe he sees the *land* so much as the people who will live on it and the things they will eat and use which come out of it.

Mr. Forsyth is different. I could never think of him apart from the sea and the islands he serves. His are "the bones along the wayside," by which the city dreamers come into their own.

CHAPTER XIX

SAN SALVADOR

FLYING over flawless aquamarine, we passed Rum Cay, the second island discovered by Columbus. He called it Santa Maria de la Concepcion. Renamed after the wreck of a tall-masted Indiaman with a cargo of rum, it is a treasure-house of salt. Carmichael's pond has yielded nearly half a million bushels in the year. By way of contrast, there is a cave on the north-east shore, called Indian Hole, where curious primitive figures are engraved upon the rock. It may have been the burial-ground for Indians, Spaniards or henchmen of the Jolly Roger. The initials and other marks in the clefts suggestive of coffins have not yet been deciphered.

Glass-clear, over flowers of rock, amber and rust-red, the sea spread below us. We had become accustomed to its transparency, and the first beaches of San Salvador, with the lustre of pearls or the bloom of petals on their sands, seemed to us unnaturally opaque.

There are no paths or footprints left in the sea [writes Filson Young], and the water furrowed on that morning more than 400 years ago by the keels of Columbus's fleet, is smooth and trackless. Yet from the East during the hours of darkness, a light waxes and wanes on the horizon.¹

What light Columbus saw is not certain. It may have been a torch held by a native woman at the door of her hut, or a charcoal cooking-fire in a boat. But to-day the lighthouse on Dixon Hill, where a tower of coral holds a lamp 160 feet high, at the north-east end of the island, keeps four-hour watches nightly, so that passing ships may suffer no such uncertainty as befell the Lord High Admiral of the yet undiscovered Western Atlantic.

¹ *Christopher Columbus and the New World of His Discovery.*

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The great light was erected [says Filson Young], in no sentimental spirit . . . yet of all the monuments that have been raised to Columbus, I can think of nothing more appropriate than this lonely tower standing by day in bright sunshine and full in the track of the trade winds, while by night it throws its powerful beam in half-minute flashes across the sea and the storm-ridden darkness confused by rocks and reef.

By a light, but not of man's kindling, Columbus was guided upon his lonely voyage. The ocean across which he travelled had no name. According to his ardent Catholic spirit, the lands he sought were lost in the darkness of the pit. So it is true, I think, that "whatever its subsequent worth may have been, it was a burning fragment of the Christian religion which Columbus carried across the world . . . to kindle the fire of faith in the lands of his discovery."

The beams, which night after night, year after year, blaze out from the Imperial Light on Dixon's hill, towards the Old World, exhausted with its problems and its fears, are symbolic of the Genoese no longer young, adopted by the sovereigns and the priests of Spain, whose ambition was not only for gold. For lust of knowledge and for love of the Cross, he sailed. It is the greatest tragedy of history that so high an ambition was destined to immolate under the shadow of an unrelenting cross the entire Indian race of the Western Atlantic.

From the gallery of the lighthouse I looked down on the island, impartially divided between land and sea. Twenty ships a day pass by the stalwart white tower with its light. The sailors only see a village of white houses with grey shingle roofs, surrounded by rocks and bush, but their determination to occupy so rugged and exposed a site, the way they clamp themselves to the obstinate soil in defiance of the winds which filled Columbus's sails, suggests that the spirit of battle still lingers on San Salvador.

From the top of the lighthouse I could see more. Not far away where rough grass ran wild towards the sea, a cairn built by an American newspaper in memory of the Spaniards' landfall, rose out of a heap of stones. Wind swept over the bushes, turning them into waves. Great clouds piled in the sky. The whole island was spread below

us and half of it at least was water. The 'great lake' in the middle had been divided by simple causeways. Across these came negresses carrying bundles of firewood on their heads. Their feet were bare. Thin cotton clung to the sturdy lines of their figures. They walked splendidly, like Ceres, conscious of full summer, but they were not of the same blood as the Lucayans who first trod these paths. The Indians found by Columbus were children of Eden, straight, slender, with proud features, simple as the earth, but unafraid. They were painted by the sun and the wind to the browns and gold of the shores on which they lived. They also, probably, walked in single file, but without such emphasis on hip and breast.

In the lake, but on the further side, I could see the half-isle, or promontory, inhabited by iguanas. These giant lizards lie lazily on the rocks, their pouched throats wrinkled like the jowls of city fathers. Bald and wizened, with crests half-raised, they resemble nothing so much as the guests at a Guildhall banquet. With shrewd, pocketed eyes which know all wisdom and all chicanery, they have the self-satisfaction of financiers between years of successful promotions and the final public appearance at the Old Bailey. The islanders have less respect for iguanas than the city of London for their prototypes. The great lizards, lineal descendants of 'Eryops, the mud puppy,' first living creature to separate itself from primeval slime, are hunted with dogs, or stoned by hungry islanders and cooked as if they had been eels. Their flesh is succulent, but it tastes of rank fish. The largest of them are three or four feet long. They are, no doubt, the 'dragons,' whose blood was the last resource of explorers and the Jesuit missions sent by a kingdom of black African Christians to the Emperor in Byzantium.

From the top of my tower—mine for an unforgettable moment—I looked down on the mollusc houses, four square, ranged solidly against the wind like schoolboys, refusing to admit any qualms in front of an omnipotent headmaster. The islanders have so little except the sunshine, the colours of sea and beach, and their own inherent content. Against them, there is always the wind. It splits their sails, lifts

the roofs off their cabins, and blows away the soil in which they have planted a hard livelihood. Pushing into the village, I could see the sharp spears of sisal. Once it had been a crop, confined to its own fields, but now the great cacti grew wild. Asserting their right to a soil on which they thrived, they forced themselves upon the long sandy lanes and pressed into the garden plots. There was bougainvillæa, purple as an Indian shroud, and, pale in contrast, a few English roses, conscious of unsuitable exile. Everywhere water had poured in and taken possession of the land. A flight of duck stirred the surface of a creek. I saw no other birds. Except for the wind it was very still.

I could imagine the arrival of the Spaniards, dark men, short and strong. They would be unwashed, I suppose, after their long journey, and thickly bearded. The Admiral with a light in his eyes, the flame that burns for scientist and sailor and priest, would be first to step from the ship's boat. What must he have felt with the sand of an Asian isle, as he thought, under his mailed foot? Westwards he had sailed and found the fabulous lands of Marco Polo, outposts of Tartary's Grand Khan. Cumbered by his armour, with the scarlet cloak of history filled as a sail by the wind, he strode up the beach. High in front of him he held his sword, but it was of the cross on its hilt that he thought. In his own diary, he tells how he could not wait to reach the forest. Upon the silken sands, as little trodden then as now, he knelt to hear the first Christian mass of the Western world.

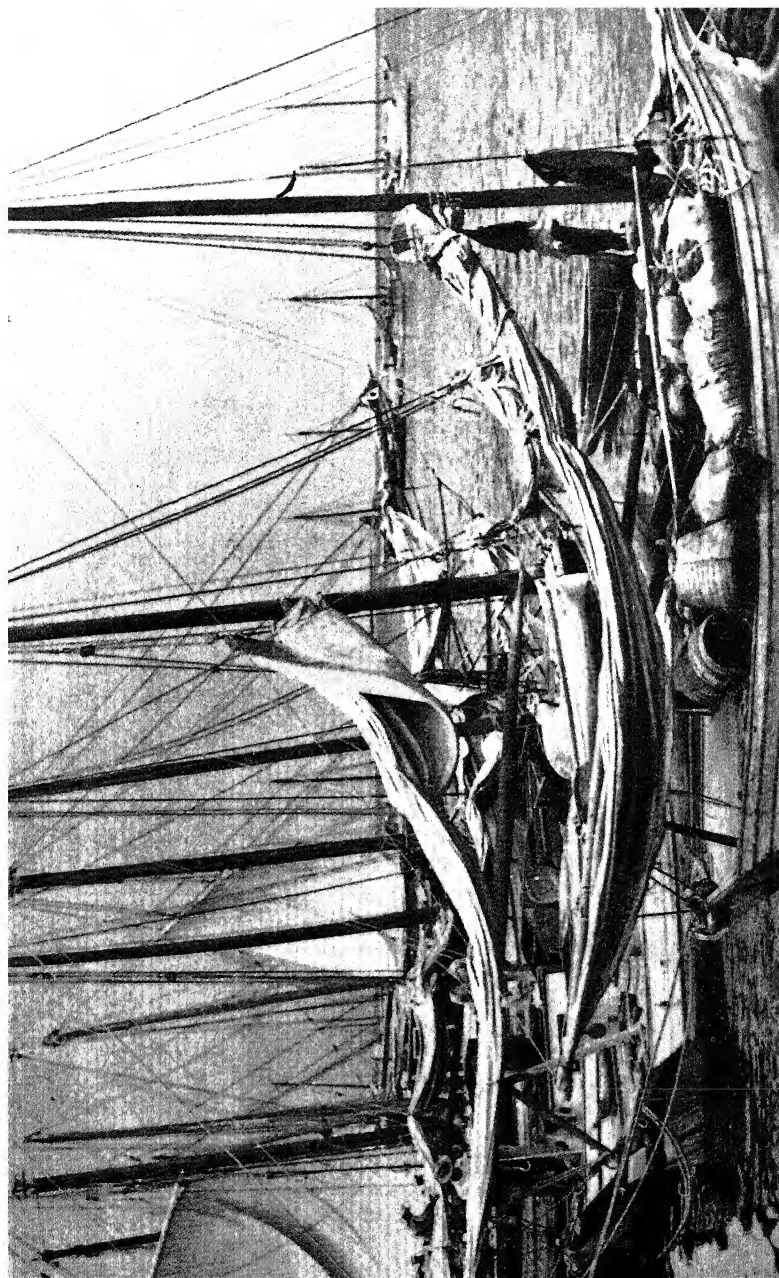
What were the feelings of his standard-bearers, kneeling on either side, the Pinzon brothers, hardy adventurers, who risked their lives for gold, and of the mutinous crew who had been afraid for thirty-five days and who, not seventy-six hours before, had grudgingly accorded to the greatest of living men three days' grace in which to discover a new world. Was the priest praying for a guerdon of souls saved, or for precious metal to enrich the treasure chests of a great monastic order? Never can a mass have been said with such divided motives.

While I was still dreaming, an exceedingly good-looking young man, the assistant lighthouse keeper, whose shape

would have inspired and been divinely distorted by Epstein, murmured to me in a gentle voice: "If we leave the car to get cold, it will go bad."

With the manner of a Roman charioteer, ignoring obstacles as if they were flowers thrown by applauding patricians high above the arena, he had driven us twelve miles from Cockburn town. The twelve-year-old Ford had held together for the simple reason that there was nothing more it could lose. There was no windscreen or radiator cap. The steps and mudguards had been bumped off or sheered off with the hood and such unnecessary appurtenances as handles and lamps. There remained all that was necessary, a square chunk of body with an engine attached to it.

Splendidly we drove, past the houses of fishermen and sailors, so like Scotch crofters' cabins, or the sturdy, small-windowed homes of the Hebrides. Through the bush we went. It looked as solid as a mattress and it had the same implication of well-upholstered springs. On the smooth top of Bahamian bush, I thought, I could lie as comfortably as on the resilient seas. Along the shore we went and as befits the landfall of Columbus, the rocks were bolder than on the other isles. Boulders reared out of the reef or sprawled upon it, vigorously shaped like the mammals of prehistoric ages. Cliffs-rose sheer from the breakers. In such a landscape there was strength and force as well as beauty. But San Salvador lies fallow. The Lucayans, kin to the Aztecs, knew the secrets of metal, stone and wood. Their copper steel was harder than anything known since Atlantis sank into the waves. Their villages of wattle, or palm thatch, in which case they must have looked like rough haystacks grouped in an English farmyard, have given way to houses of stone and lime. Indian pipe notes linger in the music of negro guitars, in the wail of a concertina or the beat of the 'earth-drums,' father, mother and child, which the player strikes with the palm of his hand, his fist and the balls of his fingers. But the long, hollowed-out log canoes have been replaced by fishing-boats and schooners. The thousand coloured fish which roused the surprised delight of Columbus are the same. So are the outdoor ovens, made of





sun-baked clay and shaped like apple dumplings. But between the Lucayans and the islanders of to-day, lovers of the sea, reluctant prisoners of the land, there is a complete phase of history.

So much in San Salvador has been lost, mislaid or forgotten, but there are still traces of Loyalist colonisation. Major Bell quotes an official document in which there is a description of an estate on a neighbouring island belonging to a Miss Fontaris—

One of the best in the Bahamas, particularly for the breeding of cattle and horses, great care having been taken in the improvement of the breed. Thoroughbred stallions were imported from England and even at this day, the blood is visible in the horses of San Salvador. It has now, however, like all others, gone to ruin. The house alone is kept in something of the order of former days. On the walls of the hall are inscribed the names of all visitors, [including] several Governors and officers of the Army and Navy.

No doubt among such names would be those of the old-fashioned, courageous and stubborn families who would not change their flag.

The phrase: "Then the Loyalists came," has signified as great a change in Bahamian history as the convulsions caused by Spaniards, hurricanes, or the quick wealth resultant on blockade-running and bootlegging. If only Henry VII of England had listened to Bartolomeo when, sickened by delays and doubts in Spain, Columbus sent his brother to offer the Tudors the greatest gift one man has ever made to a nation, the 'fortunate isles,' 'the fragrant isles,' the 'isles of June'—all these they have been called—might have known two or three centuries earlier the prosperity which came to them after the American revolution. With free indigenous labour farming its own land under Western instruction, for the mutual benefit of two races, the golden age of the Bahamas, gilt with fruit and grain and sugar, with sleek hides of country-bred cattle, with blood horses shining like ripe peeled chestnuts, might have endured. As it was, Williams, Deveaux, MacDonald, Hepburn, Tulley, Mulyne, Cornish and Howe, with many others, left what had been the American colonies to internecine conflict among the stars and stripes representing

thirteen different interests, and became land-owners on the Bahamas. But they depended entirely on their slaves to amass the money they intended to spend at home. San Salvador, for all its beauty and its air of wild, free youth, was never 'home' to the planters whose blood runs now under coloured skins. Some made great fortunes and went back—contented, I wonder?—to the limitations of Scotch Presbyterian life, spined like a hedgehog with conventions. Others squandered in roistering St. James's the products of rain and drought, wind and sun and unremitting, unpaid black labour, in the Bahamas.

On the narrow road, so steeply walled with bush, between the Imperial Light for whose maintenance England pays—her privilege or her burden as warden of the seas—and Cockburn Town, we passed the ruins of a fine old house which must have known its days and nights of splendour when hospitable planters loaded their board and charged fat-stemmed Bristol glasses with the heady island punch in honour of a man-of-war visiting the harbour.

There is a plan, I believe, among many which are bearing, if not yet full-bodied fruit, at least very promising buds, to make this old 'great house' with its ghosts of a spacious, perhaps even a beneficent and gracious past—for some of the slave-owners must have been men of heart as well as substance—into a hotel. I cannot imagine any advertisement more likely to attract Americans whose appreciation of history is as strong as their determination to learn from Baedeker not only what they are going to see, but—in the same pages—what they should approve and accept and what reject. A week-end on San Salvador with Christopher Columbus! Only Aldous Huxley in the inimitable first chapter of his *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, could foretell the exact wording of the enterprising leaflet which would promise "peach-coloured plumbing," "worth-while front page people" as associates in the venture, and the right "to loll and languor" upon the sands where Columbus prayed. All the same, it is a good idea. After Jerusalem, San Salvador has effected the greatest change in world history.

The torso of car in which we rode—at a praiseworthy

SAN SALVADOR

ten miles an hour, due to the remarkable power of the assistant lighthouse keeper's wrists—was boiling by the time we reached Cockburn Town. A lovely three-masted schooner had just anchored in the harbour. We watched her sails come down. Her masts and rigging were a delicate and diffident tracery in palest grey against one of those skies which look as if they have been steeped in water. She was a Belgian training ship, and her captain told us next day that he had finished a four months' journey searching for sea-specimens for a museum in Brussels. He had intended to sail straight for Europe. Six weeks it might take him, with contrary winds and no sight of land. But he had letters to post and he had seen the red plane disappear on to an island lake. It was almost as unexpected as the light which guided Columbus. "I certainly did not expect to see a plane come down on this island and I didn't know exactly where you'd landed, but I thought if I could find you, I would ask you to act as a pillar-box." Immaculately starched, far cleaner than anyone or anything I had seen for days, he handed us a packet of letters and went off to look for the Roman Catholic priest.

Father Herbert is as important to the island to-day as Columbus may be when the threat or the promise of a hotel has been fulfilled. For everyone stays at his Mission House, which is admirably built and combines the solid qualities of chapel, store, library and hostel. The Benedictine Fathers and the Knights of Columbus between them—aided by the enterprising *Chicago Herald*, which made native limestone into a suitably harsh monument with the inscription: "On this spot Christopher Columbus first set foot on the soil of the New World"—have given to San Salvador the atmosphere of a sanctuary. The cross 'for valour' stands high above the shore which the Spaniards must have first sighted. In his diary the Admiral describes how he sailed half round the island before landing, a justifiable precaution which may explain why he did not anchor on the lee side. Perhaps the forest was lower and the shore more open where, borne headlong by Atlantic breakers, his boats grounded on the beach near Riding Rock. The cross stands now for comfort. Every islander who has a need,

generally material rather than spiritual, comes to the Mission in order that it may be fulfilled.

When we arrived there in the protesting Ford, a woman who walked eight miles to church every Sunday had just come to sell for three pennies as many undersized eggs. They were all bad, but she went away happy with a variety of medicines suited to the pains she invented because, with prudent foresight, she realised she might suffer from them some day. At the last moment, she asked for wood to mend her 'hog pen.' With the boards of an old packing-case balanced on top of her palmetto hat, into which her head sank, so that no more than her chin could be seen, she started on her three-hour walk, regretting only that she could not think of anything else to be had for the asking.

"Course they steal," said Father Herbert. "What else do you expect them to do? The white man has so much and they have nothing. They've got to live, so they just take. Mind you, they're very good at helping each other to live. You'd never catch a thief on Salvador, for everyone of his neighbours would think he might, some day, need to steal himself. But they don't take anything worth while—mostly food or a bit of building material if it happens to be lying around."

While we were at Cockburn Town we stayed in the Mission with Father Herbert. Sam, who by this time had adopted us, chiefly because he liked flying and liked still more talking to awed and envious friends about the wholly imaginary distances he chose to say he had flown, cooked delectably with nothing at all. I began to understand Father Herbert's gentle apologia for the natives: "They have so little. They cannot earn. They must just take."

In the evening, the Commissioner, whose car, to his surprise, had 'gone bad,' walked across from his pleasant pink house and we all sat in long, hard wooden chairs under the steep roof. Father Herbert was restless. He wanted to show us so much, a treasure of shells, some of them very rare, garnered from the beach, old Lucayan relics of wood and stone, books, endless worn, sun-bleached, interesting and exciting books. With a copy of Columbus's journal in my hands and a variety of strange objects on my knees, I

listened to Father Herbert talking about his people. They were his by an older law than those promulgated at the behest of Spanish conquerors or British colonists. "Go ye out into the wilderness and preach——," but the first of Christian Churches interprets the last word with generosity.

"Three parts of their religion is singing," Father Herbert explained. His indulgence was that of a parent knowing that worse would come when his children grew up. "When they sing they're happy. When they make a noise they're not frightened any more. On the sea, nothing disturbs them, but on land at night there's no end to their terrors. They shut every chink of their houses and keep the fire going for company."

Remembering the acrid fumes inside some of the cabins, I was amused when Father Herbert continued: "They 'smudge' themselves with smoke till they smell like cured hams and they tell you it's for protection against the insects!"

So time has moved in full circle. Upon the villages of the Lucayans, who had no needs which they could not satisfy, arise the equally simple houses of coloured people, with Africa in their blood. They want no more than the race destroyed by Spanish greed, but there is one difference. Where the cross was a symbol of torture and destruction, where it passed into oblivion with the evil done, it stands to-day, not proudly wrought in stone, but worn as the wood of the forest, the source of a primitive people's supplies. The cross on an out-island means more than the faith which brought Columbus across an unknown ocean. It means health of mind and body, food, medicine, clothing, 'wood for the hog-pen,' an opportunity to sing away ancient fears, and in a few words of speech with priest or minister the reassurance which, for a brief moment, the Lucayans found in their 'visitors from heaven.'

CHAPTER XX

BIMINI AND CAT CAY

BIMINI is a surprise. The out-islands, for all their charm, are, in the matter of comfort, much like Eden before Eve found knowledge as indigestible as an unripe apple. So when we left Andros in mid-afternoon, having eaten nothing since the first hours of the morning, I thought that lunch was for ever lost. The red plane rose from the spatter of small, clinging waves into the calm of the sky. A few swollen white clouds emphasised the clarity through which we flew. Bimini, I thought, would be another page from the first chapter of the Bible. We might get eggs, onions and tomatoes.

With the sun in the west, we saw a long, narrow, deeply-curved cay, scarcely a hundred yards wide. It rested lazily between the sandbanks of the Atlantic and the smooth harbour protected by a promontory and a smaller island. At first it looked much like the other out-isles divided between palms and bush. Then we saw houses, large, well-built, with attractive porches and painted shutters. Every village in the Bahamas is called a town, but here on North Bimini there is a charming collection of inns and rich men's fishing-camps, not unlike one of the famous ocean-side townships of America which blossom for a few months every year, according to the season of pleasure. There were white-sailed fishing-boats in the harbour. They looked like a flock of gulls, planing steeply on the wind. There were other boats, the launches and 'cruisers' hired in Miami for sixty or seventy dollars a day, in which hardened sportsmen or those who like their amusements as strong as their cocktails, go out in all weathers—but with only a hundred to one chance when it is rough—to do battle with giant fish.

As we came down on quiet water we saw hound-fish, slender as rubber-piping, wandering about near the bottom.

On the jetty hung an enormous white marlin which had been caught the previous day. Later, I realised how suitably it was placed. As a ship flies its national flag, so the village of fishermen, hedonistic and sophisticated, raised as a banner, denoting at once its religion and its calling, the corpse of a marlin.

Bimini is devoted to fish. It depends on them, not for food, but for excitement, for news, for subjects of conversation, as an excuse for an extra drink, and of course, for the adventurers who come every year with high hopes and heavy rods, their butts bearing the tally of previous spoil.

The best inn is the Compleat Angler, and it is very good indeed. Thither we went, about four on a hot afternoon, with a great emptiness inside us, carrying in a straw hat, for we had no other receptacle, the eggs so generously given us by Mr. Forsyth at Mastic Cay. They represented an iron ration and our last hope of lunch. But no sooner had we set foot within the living-room of our dreams—dark-stained Abaco pine on walls and floor, enticement of well-filled book-shelves, invitation of chintz-covered armchairs shaped to encourage and support—than the owner of the inn, who plays hostess in American fashion, said: "But don't you want food? It can be ready in a moment. Chops, strawberries and cream."

I felt my mouth opening, and it was with regret that I remembered the need to wash. Chops! We looked at each other with the gloating expression of bears at the zoo, for on the out-islands meat takes the place of the buns coveted by the animal inhabitants of Regent's Park. Soon we were eating one of those delectable but confused meals, which America is ready to serve at any hour of the day or night. "There was a ship in yesterday from Miami. So you're lucky. You can have everything you want, even milk," said our hostess.

But why should the Bahamians depend for the mattresses on which they sleep, the chairs in which they sit, the contents of their store-cupboards, and the whole machinery of their domestic lives, on neighbouring—but foreign—America? "Freight rates from England are prohibitive," says everyone. They range from forty shillings to seventy-

five shillings a cubic ton, which sounds large, but means that if you want to import a good-sized English chest of drawers for the new house you are building in one of the Empire's loveliest and safest 'places in the sun,' you have to pay more than its purchase price for transport. The same applies to building material. So when you build your English house, on English soil in the Western Atlantic, following the Loyalist Andrew Deveaux and the adventurous William Sayle, you will find that your timber and all your 'milled goods,' window-frames, doors and cupboards, your plumbing material, your heating and your freezing plant, will come from U.S.A., and although it pays double duty, it will be cheaper than you could buy from England.

This seems to me sad as well as stupid. The Bahamas are staunchly British. "We feel English and we're going to remain English," said an island-born member of the House of Assembly, walking with me through Eleutheran bush. "We'll support England all right in ninety-nine per cent of what she wants to do out here. But she's got to listen to sense. There's always scare-wits rushing to the Government officials with wild suggestions, and there's reformers who go too fast. We don't need 'slum clearance' here because the climate does that for us. We need bigger and better and faster transport, also materials and facilities for building. All that would mean more work, more pay, more spending-power, more needs, and in the end, but right at the top of the ladder, its last rung, not its first, better houses in the coloured settlements. First you've got to make the people want change instead of hating the very idea of it."

Cement does come from England, but, if freight rates were lower, lots of other things would come as well, glass, cutlery, and more clothing materials, cheaper in London than in U.S.A., tinned food and furniture, half America's price, but banned by the cost of transport. On the other hand, to facilitate building, which is the first letter in the Bahamian alphabet of development, could not a system of barter be established between the islands and the neighbouring continent? Could not Canada or America take more vegetables and fruit in exchange value

for timber and other materials essential to Bahamian settlers?

Of such subjects we talked in the pleasant dining-room of the Compleat Angler at Bimini. The walls were of Abaco pine, darkened with oil. On them hung models of giant fish covered with their own stretched, painted and varnished skins, so that they looked as if they had just been pulled out of the sea after hours of fierce battle. If I remember rightly, there was a sail-fish, his great fin spread, buccaneer of the ocean, a pirate sailing under his own magnificent colours. Opposite was a dolphin with the expression of an outraged aunt and, in contrast to such plump curves, well-corseted and a trifle breathless, a hound-fish insinuated himself across the panelling. He had a furtive air as if he hoped to escape attracting attention to a purpose which he knew to be barely decent.

Somewhere else, I think, there was a shark, blunt-nosed, stupid and obstinate. Blindly, he would attack and he would go on because he had not sufficient imagination to stop. His rival, the big barracuda, kills effectively and for pleasure. He is the only sea-creature which the natives fear. With razor-blades for teeth, he can cut off an arm or leg as if it were egg-shell. Fortunately, there is a legend that barracuda do not care for dark flesh, so the more timorous, or the more intelligent, stain with iodine the soles of their feet and the palms of their hands where the skin is pale. I do not know if these sea Inquisitors, cruel as Isabella's Jesuits, hang upon the walls of the Compleat Angler, but there are a host of photographs recording what would otherwise appear as the tallest of tall stories, for the catches dwarf the fishermen. For further proof there are skin-covered castes of marlin, blue and white marlin, vast as sea elephants, which weighed, fresh caught, as much as 600 pounds. The record, I believe, was 704 pounds, but the rod broke, so the angler was momentarily disqualified.

Among so much fish, so many fish—even the door-handles and the pattern on the curtains, the ash-trays and the design of the cocktail glasses were in the shapes of fish—I was interested and bewildered to see in the dimness of the raftered roof what looked like horns. I could not

imagine deer on the decidedly barren cay with its alien palms. "They're tails," explained my hostess. "We hadn't room for any more complete fish. You can't very well have the whole ocean in your house."

Out we went, replete with all sorts of good food, through a colourful garden, on to a terrace which at the moment was composed entirely of amber and pink conch shells. I supposed these were the foundations on which a superlative cement structure will arise, but imagine the ecstasy of all the landladies between Margate and Land's End if they were confronted with so much decoration. In the matter of conch colouring, Nature has undoubtedly made a mistake. Ginger, politely called amber, and the flannelette pink of durable Victorian underwear, do not go well together. Landladies of the English seaside enhance the error by ranging their treasured shells upon red plush.

Bimini deserves better than conch shells, for it has made determined efforts, not only to 'keep up with the Smiths,' but to surpass them. Along the single street between the excellent houses and the harbour, on which I saw only three wheels, two belonging to a bicycle and one to a barrow, there are a number of amusing signboards. Wooden sheds, agreeably haphazard, advertise 'Notions,' whatever those may be, or 'Old gin, proof rum and all other spirits.' A charming but lopsided hut called itself 'The Chic Store,' and the office of the smallest newspaper in the world reminded me of the potting-shed at home. It had the same suggestion of intimacy, mystery and earth. From it came the editor, suitably in shirt-sleeves. "Now you've arrived, I do hope I'll have something to write about," he said, with undue optimism, and I remembered the words of a kind but harassed official in the Far East. "The moment you set foot in a place, H.M.'s consular authorities can say good-bye to any chance of peace. They won't get a quiet moment till you leave."

The *Bimini Bugle* is the size of a small envelope. It carries thirteen pages of advertisement. By means of these you can buy anything from tackle to houses, or a complete island. The rest of the space is devoted to fish, with a little human interest in the way of footnotes. So I read on the

first page, headed 'News,' that a 340 pound marlin had been landed. There was as exciting an account of the sea-battle as if it had been between the fleets of France and Italy. Far less conspicuous was the notice of an American millionaire's marriage, but the correspondent put plenty of 'snap' into a description of the fishing honeymoon on which, apparently, bride and groom had no time for anything but their rods.

As in the Compleat Angler, where the emphasis is on the dinner rather than the diners, for fish are worshipped while humans are only cosseted, Bimini thinks much more of the contents of the ocean than the products of the land. I met a good-looking grocer, leaning upon his own bones—well-shaped they were, and reliable—outside his wooden store. He conversed with me about the island, which is only a strip torn out of the sea. "No, we don' farm much. It's simpler to get our food from ships. Mos'ly it comes out of a can. That's easier'n gettin' it out of the ground. There's some farms on South Bimini, but their owners live over here."

I thought this separation of house and field was typical of island mentality. The real farmer, lover of his land, watching as if it were the growth of a child the slow succession of crops, could not bear to be parted from his share of the earth. The soil is the womb which bears him fruit. With it he is inexorably linked. But generations of Bahamians have farmed only from necessity. Their houses, cabins or huts face their first love, the sea. Out of sight, the unfenced fields remain, step-children of the bush. There is as yet no family relation between Bahamian earth and the men who work it.

As I walked along the cay with the grocer, whose shirt was an enviable blue and his coloured skin like the very best sunburn which comes out of bottles, too expensive for most of us, I looked across the harbour to inconsequent South Bimini, cultivated in a few places, but uninhabited. There Ponce de Leon found, or did not find, according to conflicting chronicles, the fabulous fountain of youth. The Indians of Puerto Rico started the legend that, in an island belonging to the Lucayans, there existed a spring of sufficient virtue to

restore youth and vigour to all who plunged into its waters. Ponce de Leon probably mislaid Bimini, but he certainly discovered Florida, whose land has been of greater value to humanity than the legendary waters of youth.

One Mr. Weller describes the 'fountain' as having a 'warm flat-iron flavour,' while one Mr. Northcroft insists that it is tasteless. How anyone could ever have 'plunged' into it, I cannot imagine, for the spring has such a narrow opening that it is difficult to extract the water. But the cave in a thicket of pigeon plum and gumalumæ trees is attractive. The sides are green with moss. It is dim and shadowed. Lizards scutter about outside, where the sun is unnaturally violent. There are a few butterflies, grateful for the cool, and sometimes a humming-bird, 'without feet or wings.' In the centre of a coloured dynamo, surrounded by the flash of movement too swift to be seen as individual action, its body hangs apparently in mid-air, while, with sharp bill, it takes sweetness from the flower of its choice.

History does not record the manner in which the heir to Ponce de Leon's secret drew magic from the spring, but Northcroft records that in his day the dipper which dispensed the waters of youth to a decrepit age was "an outworn condensed-milk can." To-day, it is a marmalade tin. Only the clucking and chatter of water, hidden away underground, suggestive of a rush and tumble of eager speech, is at all mysterious.

"Have you drunk it?" I asked the charming grocer, whose shirt made mine look faded. Laughing all over his tea-coloured face, he said: "I ain' done with bein' young yet and I don' wan' to be no younger. I guess I got enough troubles at my age and I don' wan' a pack o' other troubles as well. I'd be plenty likely to get those if I wen' back to bein' a boy."

Revelling in the sight of the harbour which was pearl-smooth and not so transparent as usual, with indigo and milk-white streaks far out where the blue of the ocean spilled on to sand, he added: "I guess a bathe in our sea right here would do you as much good as tha' there li'l spring on South Bimini."

After that we talked about wrecking. Bimini had gone

in for it as a serious business. "Times the owners used to insure their ships and then they'd give orders to the cap'n and there'd be a thousand dollars to share if the pilot could pile her on a likely rock. There's plenty of those about. This islan's pretty good for wreckin'. Everythin's convenient-like." He spoke with amusement and regret. Like Mr. Levy at Hatchet's Bay, he could not bear to see good material wasted. The reefs which had caused and profited by so many wrecks were now unproductive. It was certainly a pity, thought my tea-coloured study by Donatello.

In a Blue Book of 1864, quoted by Major Bell in his *Isles of June*, it is recorded that two-thirds of Bahamian imports in years then recent had consisted of goods saved from wrecks and reference is made to the vast trade which passed these most dangerous coasts, fringed as they are with shoals and bristling with cays and rocks, where not only strong and shifting currents, but sudden and violent gales expose even the conscientious and wary navigator to unexpected dangers and difficulties.

Official redundancy continues:

Innumerable localities and opportunities offer temptation also to dishonest shipmasters wilfully to cast away their vessels . . . The rich prizes . . . have led to a large number of the inhabitants devoting themselves principally to the occupation of wrecking.

The Blue Book, while regretting that the islanders should rejoice in the "calamity and ruin of others," finds consolation in the facts that

much property is thus saved from the reef, where it was of set purpose first endangered, that large numbers of intrepid and hardy seamen are reared up. Also that a large income is . . . derived by the colonists from this source which, however undesirable it may be, is incidental to their geographical position.

Lighthouses, of course, have put an end to the commerce of wrecking, but my grocer friend regretted the days of his grandfathers, when there were three sources of wealth and argument, the American Wars, the uncharted reefs with their changing lights, and the Bible. For there is never an out-islander who does not believe that 'de Lawd will provide' and few who do not thoroughly enjoy discussing

what 'de Lawd' would think about the racket of the moment.

Even the Bimini grocer said he thought the Lord had grown a bit tired of wrecking. He got too many souls thrust into heaven before he expected them. So the wreckers' fortunes did not last long. "Maybe they was a bit cursed, or the people was jus' foolish. Now they're poor as well," he concluded.

To Bimini, Mr. Wacey, the immensely hospitable American, who has bought Cat Cay, sent a fast launch. So in reflected glory—which, alas, in the Bahamas, means wealth—and in a fog of spray, we departed. Both islands soon disappeared. Streaking along, over the top of the ocean, we passed the skeleton of a liquor barge, wrecked on the reef. By some trick of light it loomed up enormous and pitch-black, appearing larger than any of the surrounding islets. Like the sable skull and crossbones, it hung against the sky, but its menace was out of date.

Cat Cay is almost indescribable, because Mr. Wacey insists that it is English. He flies the Union Jack and presents club bills in pounds, shillings and pence. His furniture is Tudor oak or Queen Anne walnut. But there never was such plumbing in England, or such closets! There never was a hairdresser all ready, on a private bathing-beach, to restore what the sea has filched, nor have I ever met in England such perfection of foods in and out of season as is displayed upon vast baronial tables in a hall which no Magna Carta baron could ever have afforded.

In country England, we still make a great deal of use of our feet. Strenuously and with considerable enjoyment, we tramp across plough and anything else which happens to be there. The furniture of our country houses consists largely of inherited chaos. We use chairs because they have always been there, not because they are comfortable. But on Mr. Wacey's enchanted island, where nothing is missing, not even regiments of match-folders with heavenly fat cats on them, and cat keys as badges for the club members, nobody walks. The bicycle is a concession. There are single and double chairs on wheels, pedalled about the garden and the neat cemented palm walks by blacks

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whose energy is prodigious. There is only one hill where they obviously think the load ought to get out and walk.

Cat Cay is the whole alphabet of comfort—I have rarely met this in England—and Mr. Wacey has introduced into the superlative ease of his club a friendliness which is really not English at all. Nobody waits to be introduced. Nothing so clever as the bar, or so good as the drinks the barman mixes, could exist in our country, burdened with conscience, ideals and strong, commercial instincts.

Standing on the red-tiled terrace, with flocks of palms just where they should be and the most insinuating invitations to repose, half-couch, half-tent, strategically arranged against a background of rose-red tiles, dark beams and walls reminiscent of Seville, Mr. Wacey explained: "It used to be just my private house and all my friends came to stay. But there were so many of them and they stayed so long, that, after three years, my wife said: 'Look here, you must choose between this place and me. I want a home, not a hotel, and I want a husband as well.'" Mrs. Wacey is lovely as a Watteau, with something of silver-point delicacy added, so the clever house that is much too comfortably American to be more than stage English, was turned into a Club. Its fortunate members can build their own homes on the island if they like. No effort is required of them. Plans are provided. Walls go up. Roofs go on. 'Tubs' come out from America, but all the water, except the little that you drink, iced, comes out of the sea.

Cat Cay is the perfect place for a holiday and for big-game fishing. From the members' and guests' point of view, there is no flaw. I could not find anything missing in the delicious cottages, where everyone can keep himself as much to himself as he likes, with twentieth-century fittings, but in an atmosphere of grace, security and leisure belonging to more spacious years. Yet nothing has really changed where Mr. Wacey is concerned. All his friends still come to stay. They are legion, and they won't go away. For the owner of Cat Cay has a genius for hospitality.

CHAPTER XXI

KINGS OF THE SEA

"Hurry!" hailed the Bluefish. "Hurry!" called the Skate.
"Hurry!" puffed the Porpoise. "Swim to Barren Key;
There we choose a Ruler—King of all the Sea."

IT happened that the very afternoon we arrived at Bimini, a blue marlin, which seemed to me about the size of a cow or a young elephant, had been caught, after an hour and three-quarters of battle. It weighed 372 pounds, and as we all stared at it respectfully a negro voice behind me murmured: "You's tink dat animal should have four legs, one at each corner. Den you'se could ride him like any oder crittur."

For in the 'out-isles' of the Bahamas, sunlit, lazy, impoverished by drought, where there are only two paces, 'slow' and 'dead-slow,' anything from a whiskered cockroach to 'the horse we met under the gentleman who was riding' is a 'creature.'

Only the sailfish, the marlin, the shark and the giant tuna, rhinoceros of the sea, are occasionally called 'people.'

Do not for a moment believe that you set forth to take on these magnificent and altogether outsize dwellers in the sea in a light-hearted fashion. On the contrary, the campaign has to be as well planned as any of Napoleon's strategic advances, and only a plutocrat can afford it.

First of all you must charter a special boat with a strong engine in it, for you may meet any kind of gale up to a hurricane—the sort that sweeps breast-high across the coral islands and flattens everything upon them, lifting the roofs of church or gaol irrespective of worshippers and prisoners, blowing sixteen-stone men into the branches of trees and then sweeping away the trees themselves as a final joke.

In the stern of your very special boat, which costs about £12 a day, with a captain and a mate and an icebox full of

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bait, are fixed two swivel chairs with strong foot-rests, sockets to hold the ends of the rods and belts to hold *you*, for if a well-hooked tuna decides to go off in the opposite direction, nothing will stop him, certainly not a pair of human arms!

It is, however, the giant sailfish who should be the King of the Sea, for he is fantastic beyond belief. See one of these unbelievable creatures rise suddenly out of a clear, jewel-coloured sea, his sail spread as if he were a schooner with all her canvas set; see him rise higher, a shining silver hull poised upon the water, tail curved upwards as if a rudder had broken loose, gleaming sword poised like the horn of an ocean unicorn, and you must blink.

It can't be real! It just isn't possible for a fish, all silvery-pearl and iridescent, to stand up on its own tail under a fin that puts to shame the mainsail of a full-rigged ship, and walk off about its business!

When you have blinked sufficiently, you look again and see that the elegant creature has his mouth slightly open and an earnest expression under the sword or tusk, which must be very heavy on his nose.

Like all intensely beautiful creatures, he must know the effect he is making, walking like an ancient saint upon the surface of the waters, going, no doubt, to some sea-town where he has business, or pursuing pleasant acquaintance with a lady of his own fabulous species.

The first sailfish to be mentioned in history lived, I believe, in the Indian Ocean, and towards the end of last century there were reports of such sea-giants measuring as much as 25 feet, with a spear two-thirds that length, and weighing anything up to 1,500 pounds.

Imagine the excitement if such a monster burst from a sea of indigo and aquamarine, his purplish sail flung wide like a net, his jaws gaping and his spear swinging from side to side. Down he would go again in a sharp cycle-line of foam and then up, higher still, as if he had broken all laws of gravity, and away skitter-skatter over the top of the waves.

What you actually see is a long, whirling rush, foam flying, and—streaked in the middle of it—a winged torpedo,

silver and Tyrian purple, 'walking on its tail.' Leap after leap, with the abandon of a flame, the ocean trapeze walker flings himself from one element into another.

For centuries [says Myron Gordon, one of the chiefs of America's Zoological Laboratories] swordfishes have been putting on a grand show for fishermen and sailors. They are the largest, strongest, speediest and most pugnacious bony fishes in the sea.

But they are not as beautiful as their fabulous cousins with sails upon their backs. All the same, a swordfish, with a long, broad, solid, hard bone snout as its fighting weapon, can upset a small boat as easily as we knock a saucer off the table.

More than 2,000 years ago the swordfish was acknowledged a worthy opponent by the sailors of Greece and Rome. The famous philosopher, Aristotle, described its prowess as an athlete, but the swordfish or broadbill is really a natural submarine, U-boat and torpedo combined.

Self-directed, self-propelled, with obvious intelligence behind the cruelly effective battering ram they carry at the end of the nose, they are capable of boring into any wooden hull and sending a depressed crew back to port with a leaking ship and stories of 'a wicked explosive.'

A grown-up swordfish is about the fastest swimming thing in the world. Modern engineers, standardising the proportions and principles of streamlining, imitate its body. The greatest thickness appears about a third of the length back from the head, after which the bulk tapers to the tail.

In a British court of law this sea-fighter, ferocious, untamed and undefeated, whose tusk has pierced copper plates and six-inch timbers, was described as having "velocity equal to that of a swivel" (a cannon swinging on a pivot) and being "as dangerous as a heavy artillery projectile."

But the most enchanting description of the swordfish, gangster and racketeer, merciless as any of Chicago's killers, was written by a Dutch mariner in 1615.

Off the coast of Sierra Leone, one William Cornelison Schovten, who discovered a new passage round "the end of the world" (Tierra del Fuego in South America) looked over

the bough of his Ship and saw the Sea all red as if great store

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of blood had been poured into it, whereat he wondered, knowing not what it meant, but afterwards he found that a great Fish or Sea monster having a horne had therewith stricken against the ship with most great strength.

For when we were in Porto Desire and set the Ship on the Strand to make it clean, about seven foot under water, we found a Horne sticking in the Ship, much like for thickness and fashion to a Common Elephant's tooth . . . which had entered into three Plankes . . . that is two thicke Plankes of greene and one of Oken wood . . .

If it had entered between the Ribbes, it would haply have made a greater Hole and have brought both Ship and men in danger to be lost.

Five million pounds' weight of swordfish are caught yearly in U.S.A. waters, chiefly with harpoons. Oil from their livers supplies nourishment more potent than our own family remedy with the picture of a surly cod upon the bottle. An average swordfish may weigh 100 to 300 pounds and a 20-foot giant attains the spectacular weight of 750 pounds.

Naturally, I wanted to have one of these 'ocean gunmen' on my line, but the white-lipped captain from Bimini—his skin flayed with salt and his voice lisping over cuts—told me it was the wrong time of the year. He also told me of the all-in fights between swordfish and whale, with the thrasher-shark weighing in on the side of the former.

"Believe me or not, ma'am, but every sailor'll tell you the same, the swordfish gets under the whale and drives upwards into the belly, so's his enemy's got to come up near the surface. The thrasher's surelee waiting, just under water and soon's he sees the whale, he gets going with his tail.

"The whale ain't got much sense. He's just size, without any dope in his brain, and he gets mighty flustered bein' beaten on top and bored open underneath."

The swordfish does not have it all his own way as boss of the ocean's underworld, for, like his prototypes on Chicago's South Side, where shootings and cuttings are reckoned on a weekly average, he has to feed a host of hangers-on.

Of these, the most unpleasant must be the sucker fishes, who fasten on to the hard surfaces of the wretched monster's cheeks and, apart from having a fast and free ride about the

Atlantic or the Indian Ocean, they get off at times and eat their patron's food.

Nobody knows why the swordfish puts up with such shiftless larceny, but the sucker fish evidently know perfectly well that they are not going to be hurt, for they swim right into the giant's mouth and gulp the delicacy for which they hanker before it goes down into his belly.

The Bimini captain insisted that the swordfish leaps into the air because he is persecuted by a host of parasites, horrible little creatures the size of a spider and in appearance not unlike a scorpion.

"They gets fairlee irritated, ma'am, so's they don't know what they're doing, for there ain't no dentists under the sea."

He grinned delightfully from ear to ear as he let himself go in a description of the sea-gangster's mouth—revolting in a rough sea!—inhabited by all sorts of unscrupulous refugees and providing occasional sanctuary for suckers who might be ten or twelve inches long.

"Swordfish have their troubles as well as us," he concluded, staring at the sea. For we had always to be on the watch for 'feed.'

Where you see, flickering near the surface, an inconsiderable host, herring, mackerel or smaller fry, even the sinuous hound-fish, thin as a blade when not fully grown, you may find a hunting sail- or swordfish. The latter likes eating alone.

He is a dilatory and greedy gentleman who appreciates plenty of food on the table from which he can pick and choose. So off he goes in leisurely fashion after a shoal of mackerel. Inevitable as a cloudburst, he looms up among them, and that is about the last they know.

Right and left and all over the place he bangs about with his great sword and, when the sea is littered with dead, he swirls around and eats about one in twelve.

Nothing living appeals to his brutally fastidious palate, so he will not touch live bait. You have to sink your hook deep in the body of a herring or suchlike fish and trawl it on the surface, not more than thirty or forty feet behind the boat. With a speed of, say, five miles an hour, the bait,

which has spent the night in the best American ice-box, flickers in convincing fashion at the end of the line.

Along comes a swordfish and lays it out, as he thinks, with a good hard knock which you feel trembling up to your fingers. Instantly you must let out more line, so that the bait sinks, for the swordfish invariably swims away, then comes back to be sure his breakfast or supper is dead before he takes it.

"Don't hurry! Give him time," breathes the captain, generally leaning weightily upon you. "He's hit it, all right, but don't strike yet."

Shivering with excitement—and, for my own part, fear, for the boat seemed very small and the fish very large—you wait for a hundred years with your knees knocking together and your feet jerking on the rests.

"Now then! Quick, he's got it! Hit him—hard!"

With fingers that feel like muffs, you throw the drag off your reel. The line comes taut. You strike—and strike again. The wheel screams as the line rushes out at a terrific pace. You feel it will all be gone, 300 yards of it, and you yourself will follow, for you could not let go.

You know that for ever and ever you have got to hold on to that rod. Your arms will be dragged out of their sockets, of course, but you will not let go. You could not let go and face the scarred-lipped captain.

In a great, cleaving splash, the swordfish breaks water, sending a wave ten feet into the air. And—three times out of five—the line goes slack. You reel like mad, but the King of the Sea is gone. You feel sick. The captain tries politely to hide his conviction that you are a congenital idiot with ineffective criminal tendencies.

The tuna is the largest and apparently the most obstinate of big-game fish. He is in fact so large that, if you happen to catch a glimpse of him from the small row-boat in which you sit feeling like a loose crustacean in a cockle-shell, you hope fervently that he will not take the bait you have been senseless enough to offer.

Tuna follow the herring, and you feed them a few live ones before you slip over a fish with a hook in its middle. If the monstrous creature, with armour-plated jaws, takes

the bait, you do not think again for some hours. You are attached, for good and all, to a sea torpedo.

Bracing your feet against the rests, you suffer the most appalling jerks. Your back aches. Your arms ache. Your eyes are blurred and your heart is somewhere in your throat. For ever and for ever, it seems, you let out line and reel it in again.

If the tuna is kind enough, after towing the boat at racing speed all over the bay, to 'sound on you,' i.e. sink to somewhere near the bottom, you are profoundly grateful for the rest and you shudder at the thought of getting him up again.

If he shows beside the gunwale looking like an angry rhino, you are terrified half out of your wits. He could flail the row-boat into scraps; turn it over with his tail. You must be mad to have hooked such a force. You are thankful when he runs out again. At least he is farther away.

Like a sleigh, the boat is dragged across the water and this goes on for hours till the ocean express gets bored and gives up. Then you can gaff the heaving, threshing mass, threatening the side of the boat, and the biggest fish you have seen in your life lies still.

The tuna can weigh over 1,000 pounds. It is one of the earliest fishes to be mentioned in mythology—Pliny writes of a 1,200-pound specimen—and it has undoubtedly low tastes, for it has been captured with an engine rag, smeared with bunker oil, for bait.

Sharks and barracuda are the highwaymen of the Atlantic. On the "stand and deliver" principle, they are not above taking a bite out of swimmers, and if you have anything helpless on your line, they will rush up and tear it to bits.

They are cannibals, too, for if—by moonlight—you have caught a shark, cruel as Satan with his great hammer jaws, and are towing the corpse back behind your boat, you are likely to find nothing left at the end of the journey. For shark eats shark as easily as anything else, yet the blacks of the Bahamas are not afraid of him. They will poke him out of his hiding-places in the coral rock with a crow-bar if they want to do some under-water sponging.

KINGS OF THE SEA

Last, but certainly not least, of the great, stout-hearted sea-dwellers, comes the dolphin, hunter of flying-fish, the bulldog and the playful roly-poly of the sea.

Leaping, twisting, he hurls himself headlong into the air, golden as the sunset, shaking his round head with indignant bewilderment. He is too beautiful to die at the end of an angler's line—see him lift out of the sea, laughing all over his doggy face and race a gull in pursuit of a flying-fish.

I am sure he is tickled to death with the sport and, if he is hooked, he fights with the stalwart persistence of a terrier. He does not know he is beaten till, surprised, he dies.

I do not want to see that rainbow death, for dolphin have been the playmates of all the ships on which I have sailed.

JOURNEY'S END

CHAPTER XXII

“WHEN THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET STOP ITCHING”

FROM the out-islands, I came back to Nassau, with the beginning of an idea in my mind. I rented a small wooden house on Cable Beach. Very suitably it was called The Bluff, for, built on piles, it stood with its toes on the rocks and its eyebrows, in the shape of a porch, hanging over the sea. There, with the colours which had become necessary to me, spread in changing splendour under my windows, I began to write this book. It is, I confess, about myself, as well as about the Bahamas. For, whereas many countries and many cities have made me think—of a historical past or of a post-impressionist future—and a few wide, spacious lands, such as the Steppes of Central Asia, the deserts of Africa and Arabia, or the blue gum plains of Australia have made me feel—so deeply that I did not know whether it was pain or joy—only the out-islands have given back to me the first impressions of my youth.

That is the effect of Lucayan cays. On them you begin to un-learn—I am sorry that I do not know a word more grammatical—all the lessons taught by success and failure. Experience has no longer any value. It is as if you were back at the beginning of time, with an apple-tree and some primitives. Surely Adam and Eve were berry-brown or the colour of China tea. Nothing can have been easy in Eden, for there is no record of tools or transport. If the first man wanted to build himself a house, he must have been faced with even greater difficulties than an enterprising architect on the furthest of the Bahamian out-islands.

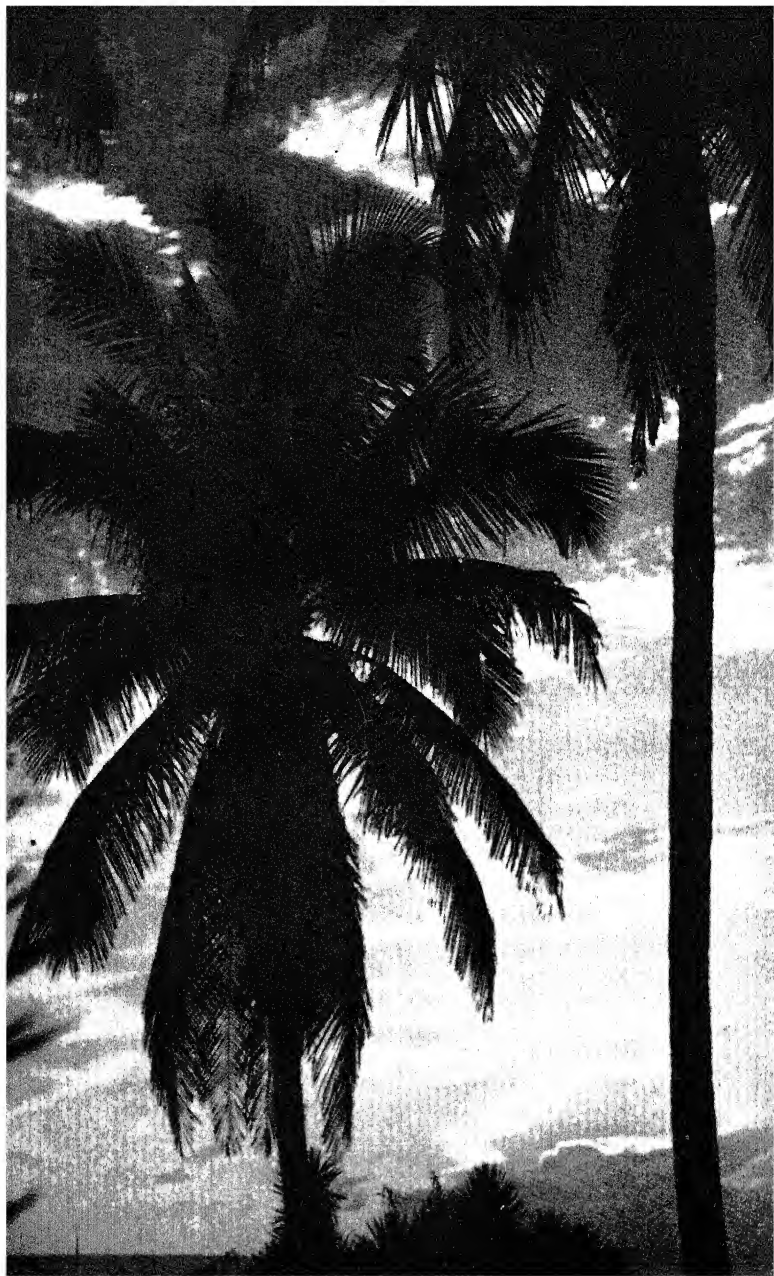
Of such absurd things I thought upon my porch at Cable Beach. All the blues and greens, the purples, browns and

yellows, used by fearless craftsmen of the Renaissance, were poured out below me upon the great sea-canvas painted by sun, wind and cloud. In translucent light, I swam and could not believe it was water. On the white sands I lay and ceased to think at all. Over the wine-dark rocks I climbed and met a quantity of crabs. They were indignant as they scuttled and scraped away. Their eyes popping out of their heads expressed the most evil intentions. Sometimes I sat on the land porch and looked at two long hedges of casuarina, like green smoke drifting out of close-ranged chimney-pots. In front of these were scarlet and pink hibiscus and behind them a great number of palms. The wind always ruffled about in their leaves, which made a cross, scolding sound. The palms were school-teachers and maiden aunts, but in my garden there was peace.

I began to think of the flowers I could plant on Eleuthera, to me the loveliest of all the islands, with a heritage of adventure from William Sayle and his Puritan hundred. In half an hour, I could be at Governor's Harbour. The red, twin-engined Douglas of Bahamian Airways made the brief journey weekly. There was a smaller plane, yellow as a wasp, which I could charter. Surely, it was waste of time, after I had finished my morning's work, to sit on a porch and dream of a unicorn—how it would have startled the first Eleutheran Adventurers, represented in old prints as very much overclothed—instead of finding out exactly where such a beast could be housed.

While I hesitated I made four friends. Two of these were parrots. They gave me a great deal of pleasure, because they flew in regularly every morning to sit on the rail at the bottom of my bed, after which they walked clumsily over the blanket to eat my coffee sugar. At other times, they established themselves on the porch, with feathers ruffled up and an eye to the main chance, represented by bread and honey. After the first weeks they used to patter about after me like puppies, rather clumsy on their feet. But the parrots did not seriously affect my life. This cannot be said of my other two friends, one of whom, John Hughes, is the Chief Commissioner, and the other, Robert





‘ ‘WHEN YOUR FEET STOP ITCHING’ ’

Symonette, a contractor with energy, imagination, and a hotel or two of his own. For, without the help of these men, I should never have found my unicorn!

It happened one day, while we talked of Eleuthera, that I said I would like to have a hill or two of my own, like the absurd skipping hills of Harbour Island. As it has never been my custom to want little, I said I would also like a flock of palm trees and a lake, with the sea and an endless beach on the other side.

“All right,” said Mr. Hughes, “I know where you can get all that.”

Unbelieving, I allowed myself to be placed first in a boat—fortunately upon a calm sea—and then in a car upon a far from placid road. So, in the middle of the night, we came to Governor’s Harbour.

For years, Mr. Hughes, who has an infinite understanding of the out-islands and the out-islanders, had lived on Eleuthera. Next morning, therefore, most of Eleuthera came to talk to him. There was also a car, which, if ancient, did at least appear to comprise most of the usual components. From a throng of gently smiling browns and blacks, Mr. Hughes selected two whose heads contained maps of the countryside. Grandly, we drove away from the grey and white village, looking at its own reflection in the harbour. But our mechanical progress was limited. This time it was not the car which ‘went bad,’ but the road. In fact it came to an end altogether, where someone had heaped together a wall and planted a hedge of cactus across it.

The lighter-skinned of our two henchmen, whose colouring blended admirably with his faded khaki shirt and broad-brimmed felt, said it did not matter, we could walk. So, for a long time, in those comfortable but unresisting shoes which have cork soles and no toes, I followed a boneless figure armed with a machete along a scrap of a path, marked as a government road.

At frequent intervals, I stopped to pluck burrs from where my shoes ended. Less frequently, Mr. Hughes reassured me with the information that we were almost there. We did indeed pass a lake, but it was muddy. “That’s not

yours," said the Chief Commissioner. I liked to think that, already, I had a lake.

When we were very hot and regretting that we had not brought something iced in a thermos, we came to a point with an enormous spike of cactus on the top of it. It thrust headlong into the sea. Rocks and waves were agreeably confused at its foot and beyond there was a tremendous sweep of sand. I don't think I have ever seen such a beach. It looked as if it might go on for ever, and beside it hosts of stubby palm trees climbed up and down the little Solomonic hills which quite obviously employed most of their time when it was cool in 'skipping like young lambs.'

"Come on," said the inexorable Mr. Hughes.

"But aren't we there? Isn't this it?" I asked, with complete lack of grammar.

The Chief Commissioner was already far ahead. He knew the lie of the land and everything that could be grown on it. "Here you'll have citrus trees," he shouted over his shoulder. "This'll be all right for corn and vegetables," and later: "You can plant coco-nuts in this hollow."

Already I felt I possessed not only a garden, but a farm. From the sandhills, covered with thin bush, which could easily be cleared, we came to good soil, red or black, and then to more hillocks. There was no end to these. They rolled away in tossed and wind-blown confusion with the palms which have nothing to do with coco-nuts storming over them like a deep green sea.

Once more we climbed and then I caught my breath. My heart was thumping, but I did not know if it were the result of so much activity, for we had left the nominal road and it is not easy pushing through the mildest of Bahamian bush, or if it were due to the excitement which for a moment made me speechless. For we stood on top of the island, with the Atlantic pouring the richest Tyrian dyes upon the sands of Eden. I could not imagine that any human being had walked that beach. As the fabulous pearls of a Queen who died upon the guillotine, it spread, smooth, pale, and faintly gleaming, to the boulders which closed the horizon. And these were scattered far out into the sea.

‘ ‘ WHEN YOUR FEET STOP ITCHING ’ ’

Rough and dark they looked, in magnificent contrast to the shore.

When I could think of anything but the strange, aching colours of the sea, spilled in utter abandon upon the reef, I realised that on the other side of the hill, sunk between soft-breasted dunes covered with bush, there was a lake. Duck shirred the surface, or settled on it, close as lilies. Good earth rose to the ridge which is the backbone of Eleuthera.

“ Well, you’ve got there, ” said Mr. Hughes, with satisfaction. He looked capable, kind and hot. His brown eyes went well, I thought, with the comfortable, happy island, conscious of so few needs and so many hopes.

“ Has it a name? ” I asked.

“ That, ” said my friend, with a sweep of his arm towards the lake under the hill, “ is called ‘ Grannie Long Pond. ’ ”

“ Oh, how heavenly! ” I gasped, and in the same breath: “ Who will build my house? ” For, if I could have resisted the royal purple far out where the reef gave way to Atlantic breakers, the clear blues and greens of a Perugino landscape, poured into the still water nearer the shore, the inconsequent hills and the tide of palms, there was no more strength left in me when I heard the name of the pond. Obviously, I must live beside it, and my unicorn—when I found him—would just have to make the best of the situation.

So there, on the top of a sandhill, we sat down and longed for iced beer, for we thought we had already walked a sufficient number of miles and our brown and near-brown islanders insisted that we must walk still more in order to reach the main road which had not ‘ gone bad, ’ but which, perversely, I thought, preferred the other side of the ridge.

As to who would build my house, there was no doubt in the mind of Mr. Hughes. “ Symonette is the only man, ” he said. So I made another friend, but that was a day or two later.

Meanwhile the islanders took us by what they called a ‘ private road ’ which nobody but they could see, straight into the heart of the bush. Surprisingly, we came upon fruit trees, sapodilla, oranges and pears. A number of

empty bottles hung upside down from forked sticks. "That's magic," explained one of the brown men, "to keep folk from trespassing," but power must have gone out of such witchcraft, for he offered to pick me fruit if I wanted it.

On we walked, still in the bush, and I was completely happy, thinking, not of my feet with burrs stuck in every toe, but of the house with twin towers and a secret court inside which I would build between sea and lake. The islanders were equally happy, deciding what part they would play in my life. "I better keep your cow," said one. "I knows mos' everything 'bout cows, 'cause mine all died. It'd be simpler if I came to live on your land, then I'd be near." The other had a number of relations, to whom he referred with affection and pity. They would all come and work for me, he said.

Only Mr. Hughes, delighted with what he had done for me, and with what he intended I should do for the island, may have been a trifle perturbed. For, in addition to the work of several men on a multitude of islands, which he was already doing, he had now tacitly agreed to build an improbable house in an equally unlikely place. But he said nothing except that I must need lunch.

Back in Governor's Harbour, we approached, with hope and some trepidation, the maidens, one fair and one brown, who keep the boarding-house. The elder of the two looked disturbed. "Lunch?" she said, as if we had asked for high explosives. "Well, I don't know. What would you be wanting to eat?"

"What is there?" I retorted.

For a moment we stared at each other. Then the girl's face brightened. "Do you like cabbage?" she asked.

There was an awful pause. "Well, not as an entire lunch?" I said in despair.

Eventually, it was discovered that the pilots of the Douglas had not eaten the whole of their ordered chicken. The legs were given to us, with sweet potatoes and guava jelly and hominy paste and tea without milk, because the nearest cows were at Hatchet's Bay.

Comforted, we rowed out to the seaplane and climbed on

“WHEN YOUR FEET STOP ITCHING”

board. There was no wind. We taxied far out of the harbour before we could leave the water. For a short space, I forgot my house which would be built among the skipping hills and thought of all that the Bahamian Airways had done in the one short year of their existence. They had flown 100,000 miles without an accident. In all weathers, Captain Collar, the Chief Pilot, a man of few words but effective action, had set out on the most extraordinary missions. He had brought in prisoners from the out-islands, taken engineers to lighthouses, doctors to sudden accidents, and judges to surprised but not very desperate criminals. All kinds of relief he had brought. If anything unusual happened, from a drought to a hurricane, the out-islanders thought immediately of the seaplane and its laconic pilot. “I guess we’ve done most anything that can be done in the air,” he said. “We’ve flown all sorts of cargo——”

“Have you ever had a corpse on board?” I interrupted, remembering the habits of Costa Rica. There, mountains being high and roads scarce, the coffined dead are carried to a landing-ground, heaped into a plane with all the relatives in their best clothes, and flown to the nearest church. But apparently the Bahamians are not yet on such familiar terms with the air.

During the last weeks I spent in Nassau, the parrots must have been disillusioned. They could no longer count on my undivided attention. For I was busy wasting innumerable sheets of paper. Each of them bore a lopsided drawing of my house. It was supposed to be square, with a court in the middle, but I never could get the sizes of the rooms to balance. When I showed my first plan to Mr. Symonette, he held it upside down and said it was very interesting, but hadn’t I better come and see some of the houses he had just built which contained all the things I had left out of mine. Probably my face fell. So, being a man of understanding, he took me to his hotels, the Shoreham and the Rozelda, both of them charming, one in the town, with a garden, and the other with a swimming-pool looking in at the dining-room windows. With the utmost patience, he walked with me from room to room and asked: “Now, is this what you want?” When we

got to know each other better, he changed the phrase into: "I guess this is what you really want," and he was right.

"Yes, yes!" I said. "Of course, it is—just like that." So we decided on doors which did not intrude a suggestion of imminent departure and the tallest of windows with wide panes through which the sea could look in uninterrupted. We went in search of red tiles for the floors of the porches, which, under Mr. Symonette's supervision, fitted easily, indeed inevitably, into the scheme of the house. And when the Cuban potters assured us in incredibly bad Spanish, that they could not make anything so red, the contractor said: "Nonsense! I'll do it myself!" Upon which, a thin, dark ghost of a youth, dripping sweat, wiped a dusty hand across his face, thereby adding a mask of grey to his shining features, and remembered he had once made a real red. "Do it again," said Mr. Symonette, "I'll give you three minutes." The tile materialised.

We found an architect who, as a friend, in his spare time, put shape—and a great deal else that I had ignored—into my house. He drew enchanting pictures of it, with coloured roofs and grass greener than Eleuthera would ever know, sprouting about the arched porches. He drew the towers with slits of windows climbing upwards, and Mr. Symonette, refusing to be impressed by their Hans Andersen effect, said firmly: "They'll do for my tanks—I've got to have height."

Gradually there emerged from the lumber-room of my imagination, the house which I had always wanted. There would be a living-room, fifty feet long, opening on to a huge porch. There would be no dining-room at all, because I have always hated the formality of meals. The Arab habit of eating wherever you happen to be at the moment is more amusing. It infuses an atmosphere of the unexpected and the adventurous into any meal. At the four corners of my solid, rough-plastered white-washed house, with its nut-brown roof of shingles and its heavy hurricane shutters painted green, there would be the sort of porches which you see in Spanish farms. On any of these I would dine according to the wind's pleasure, or in a corner of the big living-

room, where the fireplace would be large enough to burn palm-trunks instead of logs.

Remembering Virginia Woolf's *A Room of my Own*, I decided that one whole side of the house opening into the court should be my own. There I would have all the space I could use for sleeping and writing and bathing with those gigantic sponges peculiar to Nassau, and for doing nothing at all. There also I would have an infinity of cupboards.

It gave me great pleasure, adding cupboards with the abandon of a Victorian dressmaker doing her worst with buttons. Most of the third side would belong to my husband and he would have a tower as well, while the fourth would be for any guests we could lure across sea or sky from New Providence.

I planned beautiful bathrooms for such adventurers, but forgot all about the kitchen. The men of genius, architect and contractor, firmly insisted on the inclusion of such a necessity, and they trimmed it with pantry and storehouses, so I daresay next year my friends will be fed as well as bathed in delectable tubs.

When everything fitted and even I could understand how to get from room to room, Mr. Symonette and I set off in the yellow wasp plane for Eleuthera. By that time, I had realised why the Chief Commissioner said: "There is only one man . . ." for whereas most Bahamians, whether native or adopted, suggest that watches and calendars are not only unnecessary but ineffective as the Treaty of Versailles, this particular contractor is positively Hitlerian in his determination to get things done as he wants and when he wants.

Just as we were starting, a priest telephoned to ask if we would take a parcel to Governor's Harbour. The telephone made strange noises. I could not hear what he said. I thought I caught the word 'altar-rail.' "How big is it?" I asked nervously.

"It would cost about fourpence to send by post, but I daren't risk its being late."

"Of course we'll take it," I said, and that is how, on my last journey to the adventurous isle, I carried, beside all the paraphernalia of everyday life, food, pencils, sun-

glasses, a compass and patterns of building materials, a small, sealed box. It contained the holy wafers for communion on Easter Sunday.

As we landed in Governor's Harbour, I saw the usual group waiting—a composition in charcoal, slightly smudged, for the car did not seem to be complete and the waiting islanders leaned upon each other and what was left of the machine. With a warmth due to old friends, they welcomed us, pouring out plans for what they were going to do for my house and on my land. The feudal system evidently appealed to them. I could understand the dismay of the Labour Adviser to the Colonial Office. Blacks and browns, or rich, warm, berry-coloured, they did not want unions. They did not want to be organised. "I guess you'll be a godsend, ma'am. We'll all work for you and then we can eat. Everyone of us will be happy."

A child, with stiff pigtailed flaring from her head, stood a little way apart and stared at something she held. While eight people were struggling to fit into the Ford's three seats, she smiled at me and held out her treasure. It was a perfect little sea horse with a horn on his forehead.

"I'll give it to you," she said. Her white teeth split the darkness of her skin. She looked like a fruit and she smelt of sea-weed and earth. Quickly, generously, she thrust the creature into my hand. Its back had the fantastic curves of the beast I had seen so long ago in a German picture. It held its neck as stiffly. Instead of a mane there were spines, but the horn flared proudly as if ready for a fabulous combat. So, at last, I held in my hand, on Eleuthera, a unicorn of the sea.

"When will you settle down and stay in one place?" ask the city-dwellers. "When the soles of my feet stop itching," answers the Bedouin of the great deserts . . .

THE END