

CHAPTER XV--A DISCOURSE ON MANNERS

The days passed, and Tudor seemed loath to leave the hospitality of Berande. Everything was ready for the start, but he lingered on, spending much time in Joan's company and thereby increasing the dislike Sheldon had taken to him. He went swimming with her, in point of rashness exceeding her; and dynamited fish with her, diving among the hungry ground-sharks and contesting with them for possession of the stunned prey, until he earned the approval of the whole Tahitian crew. Arahua challenged him to tear a fish from a shark's jaws, leaving half to the shark and bringing the other half himself to the surface; and Tudor performed the feat, a flip from the sandpaper hide of the astonished shark scraping several inches of skin from his shoulder. And Joan was delighted, while Sheldon, looking on, realized that here was the hero of her adventure-dreams coming true. She did not care for love, but he felt that if ever she did love it would be that sort of a man--"a man who exhibited," was his way of putting it.

He felt himself handicapped in the presence of Tudor, who had the gift of making a show of all his qualities. Sheldon knew himself for a brave man, wherefore he made no advertisement of the fact. He knew that just as readily as the other would he dive among ground-sharks to save a life, but in that fact he could find no sanction for the foolhardy act of diving among sharks for the half of a fish. The difference between them was that he kept the curtain of his shop window down. Life pulsed

steadily and deep in him, and it was not his nature needlessly to agitate the surface so that the world could see the splash he was making. And the effect of the other's amazing exhibitions was to make him retreat more deeply within himself and wrap himself more thickly than ever in the nerveless, stoical calm of his race.

"You are so stupid the last few days," Joan complained to him. "One would think you were sick, or bilious, or something. You don't seem to have an idea in your head above black labour and cocoanuts. What is the matter?"

Sheldon smiled and beat a further retreat within himself, listening the while to Joan and Tudor propounding the theory of the strong arm by which the white man ordered life among the lesser breeds. As he listened Sheldon realized, as by revelation, that that was precisely what he was doing. While they philosophized about it he was living it, placing the strong hand of his race firmly on the shoulders of the lesser breeds that laboured on Berande or menaced it from afar. But why talk about it? he asked himself. It was sufficient to do it and be done with it.

He said as much, dryly and quietly, and found himself involved in a discussion, with Joan and Tudor siding against him, in which a more astounding charge than ever he had dreamed of was made against the very English control and reserve of which he was secretly proud.

"The Yankees talk a lot about what they do and have done," Tudor said,

"and are looked down upon by the English as braggarts. But the Yankee is only a child. He does not know effectually how to brag. He talks about it, you see. But the Englishman goes him one better by not talking about it. The Englishman's proverbial lack of bragging is a subtler form of brag after all. It is really clever, as you will agree."

"I never thought of it before," Joan cried. "Of course. An Englishman performs some terrifically heroic exploit, and is very modest and reserved--refuses to talk about it at all--and the effect is that by his silence he as much as says, 'I do things like this every day. It is as easy as rolling off a log. You ought to see the really heroic things I could do if they ever came my way. But this little thing, this little episode--really, don't you know, I fail to see anything in it remarkable or unusual.' As for me, if I went up in a powder explosion, or saved a hundred lives, I'd want all my friends to hear about it, and their friends as well. I'd be prouder than Lucifer over the affair. Confess, Mr. Sheldon, don't you feel proud down inside when you've done something daring or courageous?"

Sheldon nodded.

"Then," she pressed home the point, "isn't disguising that pride under a mask of careless indifference equivalent to telling a lie?"

"Yes, it is," he admitted. "But we tell similar lies every day. It is a matter of training, and the English are better trained, that is all. Your

countrymen will be trained as well in time. As Mr. Tudor said, the Yankees are young."

"Thank goodness we haven't begun to tell such lies yet!" was Joan's ejaculation.

"Oh, but you have," Sheldon said quickly. "You were telling me a lie of that order only the other day. You remember when you were going up the lantern-halyards hand over hand? Your face was the personification of duplicity."

"It was no such thing."

"Pardon me a moment," he went on. "Your face was as calm and peaceful as though you were reclining in a steamer-chair. To look at your face one would have inferred that carrying the weight of your body up a rope hand over hand was a very commonplace accomplishment--as easy as rolling off a log. And you needn't tell me, Miss Lackland, that you didn't make faces the first time you tried to climb a rope. But, like any circus athlete, you trained yourself out of the face-making period. You trained your face to hide your feelings, to hide the exhausting effort your muscles were making. It was, to quote Mr. Tudor, a subtler exhibition of physical prowess. And that is all our English reserve is--a mere matter of training. Certainly we are proud inside of the things we do and have done, proud as Lucifer--yes, and prouder. But we have grown up, and no longer talk about such things."

"I surrender," Joan cried. "You are not so stupid after all."

"Yes, you have us there," Tudor admitted. "But you wouldn't have had us if you hadn't broken your training rules."

"How do you mean?"

"By talking about it."

Joan clapped her hands in approval. Tudor lighted a fresh cigarette, while Sheldon sat on, imperturbably silent.

"He got you there," Joan challenged. "Why don't you crush him?"

"Really, I can't think of anything to say," Sheldon said. "I know my position is sound, and that is satisfactory enough."

"You might retort," she suggested, "that when an adult is with kindergarten children he must descend to kindergarten idioms in order to make himself intelligible. That was why you broke training rules. It was the only way to make us children understand."

"You've deserted in the heat of the battle, Miss Lackland, and gone over to the enemy," Tudor said plaintively.

But she was not listening. Instead, she was looking intently across the compound and out to sea. They followed her gaze, and saw a green light and the loom of a vessel's sails.

"I wonder if it's the Martha come back," Tudor hazarded.

"No, the sidelight is too low," Joan answered. "Besides, they've got the sweeps out. Don't you hear them? They wouldn't be sweeping a big vessel like the Martha."

"Besides, the Martha has a gasoline engine--twenty-five horse-power," Tudor added.

"Just the sort of a craft for us," Joan said wistfully to Sheldon. "I really must see if I can't get a schooner with an engine. I might get a second-hand engine put in."

"That would mean the additional expense of an engineer's wages," he objected.

"But it would pay for itself by quicker passages," she argued; "and it would be as good as insurance. I know. I've knocked about amongst reefs myself. Besides, if you weren't so mediaeval, I could be skipper and save more than the engineer's wages."

He did not reply to her thrust, and she glanced at him. He was looking

out over the water, and in the lantern light she noted the lines of his face--strong, stern, dogged, the mouth almost chaste but firmer and thinner-lipped than Tudor's. For the first time she realized the quality of his strength, the calm and quiet of it, its simple integrity and reposeful determination. She glanced quickly at Tudor on the other side of her. It was a handsomer face, one that was more immediately pleasing. But she did not like the mouth. It was made for kissing, and she abhorred kisses. This was not a deliberately achieved concept; it came to her in the form of a faint and vaguely intangible repulsion. For the moment she knew a fleeting doubt of the man. Perhaps Sheldon was right in his judgment of the other. She did not know, and it concerned her little; for boats, and the sea, and the things and happenings of the sea were of far more vital interest to her than men, and the next moment she was staring through the warm tropic darkness at the loom of the sails and the steady green of the moving sidelight, and listening eagerly to the click of the sweeps in the rowlocks. In her mind's eye she could see the straining naked forms of black men bending rhythmically to the work, and somewhere on that strange deck she knew was the inevitable master-man, conning the vessel in to its anchorage, peering at the dim tree-line of the shore, judging the deceitful night-distances, feeling on his cheek the first fans of the land breeze that was even then beginning to blow, weighing, thinking, measuring, gauging the score or more of ever-shifting forces, through which, by which, and in spite of which he directed the steady equilibrium of his course. She knew it because she loved it, and she was alive to it as only a sailor could be.

Twice she heard the splash of the lead, and listened intently for the cry that followed. Once a man's voice spoke, low, imperative, issuing an order, and she thrilled with the delight of it. It was only a direction to the man at the wheel to port his helm. She watched the slight altering of the course, and knew that it was for the purpose of enabling the flat-hauled sails to catch those first fans of the land breeze, and she waited for the same low voice to utter the one word "Steady!" And again she thrilled when it did utter it. Once more the lead splashed, and "Eleven fathom" was the resulting cry. "Let go!" the low voice came to her through the darkness, followed by the surging rumble of the anchor-chain. The clicking of the sheaves in the blocks as the sails ran down, head-sails first, was music to her; and she detected on the instant the jamming of a jib-downhaul, and almost saw the impatient jerk with which the sailor must have cleared it. Nor did she take interest in the two men beside her till both lights, red and green, came into view as the anchor checked the onward way.

Sheldon was wondering as to the identity of the craft, while Tudor persisted in believing it might be the Martha.

"It's the Minerva," Joan said decidedly.

"How do you know?" Sheldon asked, sceptical of her certitude.

"It's a ketch to begin with. And besides, I could tell anywhere the rattle of her main peak-blocks--they're too large for the halyard."

A dark figure crossed the compound diagonally from the beach gate, where whoever it was had been watching the vessel.

"Is that you, Utami?" Joan called.

"No, Missie; me Matapuu," was the answer.

"What vessel is it?"

"Me t'ink Minerva."

Joan looked triumphantly at Sheldon, who bowed.

"If Matapuu says so it must be so," he murmured.

"But when Joan Lackland says so, you doubt," she cried, "just as you doubt her ability as a skipper. But never mind, you'll be sorry some day for all your unkindness. There's the boat lowering now, and in five minutes we'll be shaking hands with Christian Young."

Lalaperu brought out the glasses and cigarettes and the eternal whisky and soda, and before the five minutes were past the gate clicked and Christian Young, tawny and golden, gentle of voice and look and hand, came up the bungalow steps and joined them.