

CHAPTER III. THE MISSIONARY.

As I came out on the verandah, the mission-boat was shooting for the mouth of the river. She was a long whale-boat painted white; a bit of an awning astern; a native pastor crouched on the wedge of the poop, steering; some four-and-twenty paddles flashing and dipping, true to the boat-song; and the missionary under the awning, in his white clothes, reading in a book, and set him up! It was pretty to see and hear; there's no smarter sight in the islands than a missionary boat with a good crew and a good pipe to them; and I considered it for half a minute, with a bit of envy perhaps, and then strolled down towards the river.

From the opposite side there was another man aiming for the same place, but he ran and got there first. It was Case; doubtless his idea was to keep me apart from the missionary, who might serve me as interpreter; but my mind was upon other things. I was thinking how he had jockeyed us about the marriage, and tried his hand on Uma before; and at the sight of him rage flew into my nostrils.

"Get out of that, you low, swindling thief!" I cried.

"What's that you say?" says he.

I gave him the word again, and rammed it down with a good oath. "And if ever I catch you within six fathoms of my house," I cried, "I'll clap a

bullet in your measly carcase.”

“You must do as you like about your house,” said he, “where I told you I have no thought of going; but this is a public place.”

“It’s a place where I have private business,” said I. “I have no idea of a hound like you eavesdropping, and I give you notice to clear out.”

“I don’t take it, though,” says Case.

“I’ll show you, then,” said I.

“We’ll have to see about that,” said he.

He was quick with his hands, but he had neither the height nor the weight, being a flimsy creature alongside a man like me, and, besides, I was blazing to that height of wrath that I could have bit into a chisel. I gave him first the one and then the other, so that I could hear his head rattle and crack, and he went down straight.

“Have you had enough?” cried I. But he only looked up white and blank, and the blood spread upon his face like wine upon a napkin. “Have you had enough?” I cried again. “Speak up, and don’t lie malingering there, or I’ll take my feet to you.”

He sat up at that, and held his head—by the look of him you could see it

was spinning—and the blood poured on his pyjamas.

“I’ve had enough for this time,” says he, and he got up staggering, and went off by the way that he had come.

The boat was close in; I saw the missionary had laid his book to one side, and I smiled to myself. “He’ll know I’m a man, anyway,” thinks I.

This was the first time, in all my years in the Pacific, I had ever exchanged two words with any missionary, let alone asked one for a favour. I didn’t like the lot, no trader does; they look down upon us, and make no concealment; and, besides, they’re partly Kanakaised, and suck up with natives instead of with other white men like themselves. I had on a rig of clean striped pyjamas—for, of course, I had dressed decent to go before the chiefs; but when I saw the missionary step out of this boat in the regular uniform, white duck clothes, pith helmet, white shirt and tie, and yellow boots to his feet, I could have binged stones at him. As he came nearer, queering me pretty curious (because of the fight, I suppose), I saw he looked mortal sick, for the truth was he had a fever on, and had just had a chill in the boat.

“Mr. Tarleton, I believe?” says I, for I had got his name.

“And you, I suppose, are the new trader?” says he.

“I want to tell you first that I don’t hold with missions,” I went on,

“and that I think you and the likes of you do a sight of harm, filling up the natives with old wives’ tales and bumptiousness.”

“You are perfectly entitled to your opinions,” says he, looking a bit ugly, “but I have no call to hear them.”

“It so happens that you’ve got to hear them,” I said. “I’m no missionary, nor missionary lover; I’m no Kanaka, nor favourer of Kanakas—I’m just a trader; I’m just a common, low-down, God-damned white man and British subject, the sort you would like to wipe your boots on. I hope that’s plain!”

“Yes, my man,” said he. “It’s more plain than creditable. When you are sober, you’ll be sorry for this.”

He tried to pass on, but I stopped him with my hand. The Kanakas were beginning to growl. Guess they didn’t like my tone, for I spoke to that man as free as I would to you.

“Now, you can’t say I’ve deceived you,” said I, “and I can go on. I want a service—I want two services, in fact; and, if you care to give me them, I’ll perhaps take more stock in what you call your Christianity.”

He was silent for a moment. Then he smiled. “You are rather a strange sort of man,” says he.

“I’m the sort of man God made me,” says I. “I don’t set up to be a gentleman,” I said.

“I am not quite so sure,” said he. “And what can I do for you, Mr.—?”

“Wiltshire,” I says, “though I’m mostly called Welsher; but Wiltshire is the way it’s spelt, if the people on the beach could only get their tongues about it. And what do I want? Well, I’ll tell you the first thing. I’m what you call a sinner—what I call a sweep—and I want you to help me make it up to a person I’ve deceived.”

He turned and spoke to his crew in the native. “And now I am at your service,” said he, “but only for the time my crew are dining. I must be much farther down the coast before night. I was delayed at Papa-Malulu till this morning, and I have an engagement in Fale-alii to-morrow night.”

I led the way to my house in silence, and rather pleased with myself for the way I had managed the talk, for I like a man to keep his self-respect.

“I was sorry to see you fighting,” says he.

“O, that’s part of the yarn I want to tell you,” I said. “That’s service number two. After you’ve heard it you’ll let me know whether you’re

sorry or not.”

We walked right in through the store, and I was surprised to find Uma had cleared away the dinner things. This was so unlike her ways that I saw she had done it out of gratitude, and liked her the better. She and Mr. Tarleton called each other by name, and he was very civil to her seemingly. But I thought little of that; they can always find civility for a Kanaka, it's us white men they lord it over. Besides, I didn't want much Tarleton just them. I was going to do my pitch.

“Uma,” said I, “give us your marriage certificate.” She looked put out.

“Come,” said I, “you can trust me. Hand it up.”

She had it about her person, as usual; I believe she thought it was a pass to heaven, and if she died without having it handy she would go to hell. I couldn't see where she put it the first time, I couldn't see now where she took it from; it seemed to jump into her hand like that Blavatsky business in the papers. But it's the same way with all island women, and I guess they're taught it when young.

“Now,” said I, with the certificate in my hand, “I was married to this girl by Black Jack the negro. The certificate was wrote by Case, and it's a dandy piece of literature, I promise you. Since then I've found that there's a kind of cry in the place against this wife of mine, and so long as I keep her I cannot trade. Now, what would any man do in my place, if he was a man?” I said. “The first thing he would do is this, I

guess.” And I took and tore up the certificate and bunged the pieces on the floor.

“Aué!” {2} cried Uma, and began to clap her hands; but I caught one of them in mine.

“And the second thing that he would do,” said I, “if he was what I would call a man and you would call a man, Mr. Tarleton, is to bring the girl right before you or any other missionary, and to up and say: ‘I was wrong married to this wife of mine, but I think a heap of her, and now I want to be married to her right.’ Fire away, Mr. Tarleton. And I guess you’d better do it in native; it’ll please the old lady,” I said, giving her the proper name of a man’s wife upon the spot.

So we had in two of the crew for to witness, and were spliced in our own house; and the parson prayed a good bit, I must say—but not so long as some—and shook hands with the pair of us.

“Mr. Wiltshire,” he says, when he had made out the lines and packed off the witnesses, “I have to thank you for a very lively pleasure. I have rarely performed the marriage ceremony with more grateful emotions.”

That was what you would call talking. He was going on, besides, with more of it, and I was ready for as much taffy as he had in stock, for I felt good. But Uma had been taken up with something half through the marriage, and cut straight in.

“How your hand he get hurt?” she asked.

“You ask Case’s head, old lady,” says I.

She jumped with joy, and sang out.

“You haven’t made much of a Christian of this one,” says I to Mr. Tarleton.

“We didn’t think her one of our worst,” says he, “when she was at Fale-alii; and if Uma bears malice I shall be tempted to fancy she has good cause.”

“Well, there we are at service number two,” said I. “I want to tell you our yarn, and see if you can let a little daylight in.”

“Is it long?” he asked.

“Yes,” I cried; “it’s a goodish bit of a yarn!”

“Well, I’ll give you all the time I can spare,” says he, looking at his watch. “But I must tell you fairly, I haven’t eaten since five this morning, and, unless you can let me have something I am not likely to eat again before seven or eight to-night.”

“By God, we’ll give you dinner!” I cried.

I was a little caught up at my swearing, just when all was going straight; and so was the missionary, I suppose, but he made believe to look out of the window, and thanked us.

So we ran him up a bit of a meal. I was bound to let the old lady have a hand in it, to show off, so I deputised her to brew the tea. I don’t think I ever met such tea as she turned out. But that was not the worst, for she got round with the salt-box, which she considered an extra European touch, and turned my stew into sea-water. Altogether, Mr. Tarleton had a devil of a dinner of it; but he had plenty entertainment by the way, for all the while that we were cooking, and afterwards, when he was making believe to eat, I kept posting him up on Master Case and the beach of Falesá, and he putting questions that showed he was following close.

“Well,” said he at last, “I am afraid you have a dangerous enemy. This man Case is very clever and seems really wicked. I must tell you I have had my eye on him for nearly a year, and have rather had the worst of our encounters. About the time when the last representative of your firm ran so suddenly away, I had a letter from Namu, the native pastor, begging me to come to Falesá at my earliest convenience, as his flock were all ‘adopting Catholic practices.’ I had great confidence in Namu; I fear it only shows how easily we are deceived. No one could hear him preach and not be persuaded he was a man of extraordinary parts. All our islanders

easily acquire a kind of eloquence, and can roll out and illustrate, with a great deal of vigour and fancy, second-hand sermons; but Namu's sermons are his own, and I cannot deny that I have found them means of grace. Moreover, he has a keen curiosity in secular things, does not fear work, is clever at carpentering, and has made himself so much respected among the neighbouring pastors that we call him, in a jest which is half serious, the Bishop of the East. In short, I was proud of the man; all the more puzzled by his letter, and took an occasion to come this way. The morning before my arrival, Vigours had been sent on board the Lion, and Namu was perfectly at his ease, apparently ashamed of his letter, and quite unwilling to explain it. This, of course, I could not allow, and he ended by confessing that he had been much concerned to find his people using the sign of the cross, but since he had learned the explanation his mind was satisfied. For Vigours had the Evil Eye, a common thing in a country of Europe called Italy, where men were often struck dead by that kind of devil, and it appeared the sign of the cross was a charm against its power.

“And I explain it, Misi,’ said Namu, ‘in this way: The country in Europe is a Popey country, and the devil of the Evil Eye may be a Catholic devil, or, at least, used to Catholic ways. So then I reasoned thus: if this sign of the cross were used in a Popey manner it would be sinful, but when it is used only to protect men from a devil, which is a thing harmless in itself, the sign too must be, as a bottle is neither good nor bad, harmless. For the sign is neither good nor bad. But if the bottle

be full of gin, the gin is bad; and if the sign be made in idolatry bad, so is the idolatry.’ And, very like a native pastor, he had a text apposite about the casting out of devils.

“And who has been telling you about the Evil Eye?’ I asked.

“He admitted it was Case. Now, I am afraid you will think me very narrow, Mr. Wiltshire, but I must tell you I was displeased, and cannot think a trader at all a good man to advise or have an influence upon my pastors. And, besides, there had been some flying talk in the country of old Adams and his being poisoned, to which I had paid no great heed; but it came back to me at the moment.

“And is this Case a man of a sanctified life?’ I asked.

“He admitted he was not; for, though he did not drink, he was profligate with women, and had no religion.

“Then,’ said I, ‘I think the less you have to do with him the better.’

“But it is not easy to have the last word with a man like Namu. He was ready in a moment with an illustration. ‘Misi,’ said he, ‘you have told me there were wise men, not pastors, not even holy, who knew many things useful to be taught—about trees for instance, and beasts, and to print books, and about the stones that are burned to make knives of. Such men teach you in your college, and you learn from them, but take care not to

learn to be unholy. Misi, Case is my college.'

"I knew not what to say. Mr. Vigours had evidently been driven out of Falesá by the machinations of Case and with something not very unlike the collusion of my pastor. I called to mind it was Namu who had reassured me about Adams and traced the rumour to the ill-will of the priest. And I saw I must inform myself more thoroughly from an impartial source. There is an old rascal of a chief here, Faiaso, whom I dare say you saw to-day at the council; he has been all his life turbulent and sly, a great fomenter of rebellions, and a thorn in the side of the mission and the island. For all that he is very shrewd, and, except in politics or about his own misdemeanours, a teller of the truth. I went to his house, told him what I had heard, and besought him to be frank. I do not think I had ever a more painful interview. Perhaps you will understand me, Mr. Wiltshire, if I tell you that I am perfectly serious in these old wives' tales with which you reproached me, and as anxious to do well for these islands as you can be to please and to protect your pretty wife. And you are to remember that I thought Namu a paragon, and was proud of the man as one of the first ripe fruits of the mission. And now I was informed that he had fallen in a sort of dependence upon Case. The beginning of it was not corrupt; it began, doubtless, in fear and respect, produced by trickery and pretence; but I was shocked to find that another element had been lately added, that Namu helped himself in the store, and was believed to be deep in Case's debt. Whatever the trader said, that Namu believed with trembling. He was not alone in this; many in the village lived in a similar subjection; but Namu's case was the most influential,

it was through Namu Case had wrought most evil; and with a certain following among the chiefs, and the pastor in his pocket, the man was as good as master of the village. You know something of Vigours and Adams, but perhaps you have never heard of old Underhill, Adams' predecessor. He was a quiet, mild old fellow, I remember, and we were told he had died suddenly: white men die very suddenly in Falesá. The truth, as I now heard it, made my blood run cold. It seems he was struck with a general palsy, all of him dead but one eye, which he continually winked. Word was started that the helpless old man was now a devil, and this vile fellow Case worked upon the natives' fears, which he professed to share, and pretended he durst not go into the house alone. At last a grave was dug, and the living body buried at the far end of the village. Namu, my pastor, whom I had helped to educate, offered up a prayer at the hateful scene.

"I felt myself in a very difficult position. Perhaps it was my duty to have denounced Namu and had him deposed. Perhaps I think so now, but at the time it seemed less clear. He had a great influence, it might prove greater than mine. The natives are prone to superstition; perhaps by stirring them up I might but ingrain and spread these dangerous fancies. And Namu besides, apart from this novel and accursed influence, was a good pastor, an able man, and spiritually minded. Where should I look for a better? How was I to find as good? At that moment, with Namu's failure fresh in my view, the work of my life appeared a mockery; hope was dead in me. I would rather repair such tools as I had than go abroad

in quest of others that must certainly prove worse; and a scandal is, at the best, a thing to be avoided when humanly possible. Right or wrong, then, I determined on a quiet course. All that night I denounced and reasoned with the erring pastor, twitted him with his ignorance and want of faith, twitted him with his wretched attitude, making clean the outside of the cup and platter, callously helping at a murder, childishly flying in excitement about a few childish, unnecessary, and inconvenient gestures; and long before day I had him on his knees and bathed in the tears of what seemed a genuine repentance. On Sunday I took the pulpit in the morning, and preached from First Kings, nineteenth, on the fire, the earthquake, and the voice, distinguishing the true spiritual power, and referring with such plainness as I dared to recent events in Falesá. The effect produced was great, and it was much increased when Namu rose in his turn and confessed that he had been wanting in faith and conduct, and was convinced of sin. So far, then, all was well; but there was one unfortunate circumstance. It was nearing the time of our 'May' in the island, when the native contributions to the missions are received; it fell in my duty to make a notification on the subject, and this gave my enemy his chance, by which he was not slow to profit.

"News of the whole proceedings must have been carried to Case as soon as church was over, and the same afternoon he made an occasion to meet me in

the midst of the village. He came up with so much intentness and animosity that I felt it would be damaging to avoid him.

“So,’ says he, in native, ‘here is the holy man. He has been preaching against me, but that was not in his heart. He has been preaching upon the love of God; but that was not in his heart, it was between his teeth. Will you know what was in his heart?’—cries he. ‘I will show it you!’ And, making a snatch at my head, he made believe to pluck out a dollar, and held it in the air.

“There went that rumour through the crowd with which Polynesians receive a prodigy. As for myself, I stood amazed. The thing was a common conjuring trick which I have seen performed at home a score of times; but how was I to convince the villagers of that? I wished I had learned legerdemain instead of Hebrew, that I might have paid the fellow out with his own coin. But there I was; I could not stand there silent, and the best I could find to say was weak.

“I will trouble you not to lay hands on me again,’ said I.

“I have no such thought,’ said he, ‘nor will I deprive you of your dollar. Here it is,’ he said, and flung it at my feet. I am told it lay where it fell three days.”

“I must say it was well played, said I.

“O! he is clever,” said Mr. Tarleton, “and you can now see for yourself how dangerous. He was a party to the horrid death of the paralytic; he is accused of poisoning Adams; he drove Vigours out of the place by lies

that might have led to murder; and there is no question but he has now made up his mind to rid himself of you. How he means to try we have no guess; only be sure, it's something new. There is no end to his readiness and invention."

"He gives himself a sight of trouble," says I. "And after all, what for?"

"Why, how many tons of copra may they make in this district?" asked the missionary.

"I daresay as much as sixty tons," says I.

"And what is the profit to the local trader?" he asked.

"You may call it, three pounds," said I.

"Then you can reckon for yourself how much he does it for," said Mr. Tarleton. "But the more important thing is to defeat him. It is clear he spread some report against Uma, in order to isolate and have his wicked will of her. Failing of that, and seeing a new rival come upon the scene, he used her in a different way. Now, the first point to find out is about Namu. Uma, when people began to leave you and your mother alone, what did Namu do?"

"Stop away all-e-same," says Uma.

“I fear the dog has returned to his vomit,” said Mr. Tarleton. “And now what am I to do for you? I will speak to Namu, I will warn him he is observed; it will be strange if he allow anything to go on amiss when he is put upon his guard. At the same time, this precaution may fail, and then you must turn elsewhere. You have two people at hand to whom you might apply. There is, first of all, the priest, who might protect you by the Catholic interest; they are a wretchedly small body, but they count two chiefs. And then there is old Faiaso. Ah! if it had been some years ago you would have needed no one else; but his influence is much reduced, it has gone into Maea’s hands, and Maea, I fear, is one of Case’s jackals. In fine, if the worst comes to the worst, you must send up or come yourself to Fale-alii, and, though I am not due at this end of the island for a month, I will just see what can be done.”

So Mr. Tarleton said farewell; and half an hour later the crew were singing and the paddles flashing in the missionary-boat.