

AT THE NEW HEBRIDES.

SANDWICH (OR VATE) ISLAND.

Rounding the southwest point of the island of Vate the Julia enters a narrow, but deep channel between a range of three small islands on the left and the flat-topped hills of this part of Vate on the right.

The somewhat precipitous sides of these hills are densely clothed with a wonderful variety of shrubs and trees overhung with a rich profusion of vines and parasitic plants. Some huge trees are completely covered with giant creepers that have climbed to the topmost boughs and there fling out long, flexible branches tufted with brilliant blossoms of gold and crimson. Rising proudly above the dense, rounded masses of verdure are splendid palms, whose creamy-white columns bear aloft waving plumes of glittering green. The hill-sides break off at intervals into perpendicular, rocky precipices, and over these hang a thousand delicate vines interlaced and tangled into an undulating curtain of intricate design and inimitable freshness of color. Numerous narrow gorges, deep and dark, with steep sides dank with moisture, break the outlines of the table-land, and more open valleys, into which the grassy uplands melt and roll in softly rounded slopes, open to the view as the vessel glides swiftly on.

Decorating the dense forest growth are gaudy flowers of *Poinciana* and the tree hibiscus. Along the rugged shore, springing from the clefts of every mass of rock close to the sea, are hundreds of the "iron-wood," whose needle-like foliage and graceful, drooping habit contrasts finely with the more massive forms of the trees beyond. Clumps of giant bamboos growing to the height of sixty, eighty or a hundred feet, sway their feathery tops in the fresh breeze, and give lightness to the sombre forest growth around them. In one deep recess, half-way up the hill-side, we catch the flash and glitter of a tiny waterfall, and now and then a gaily feathered parrot drops, like a falling flower from some lofty branch, into the low-lying shrubs below.

The ordinarily bold shore line extends out at intervals into sandy points; on rounding one of which there comes in view a plantation owned by a French company, whose lands are scattered throughout the group. At this place the bluffs recede, and a broad flat extends back some distance from the shore. In the deep, rich, black soil of this plain are growing many thousands of coconut trees, acres of Indian corn, and fruit trees of various kinds. Near the shore is a collection of thatched houses, in which live the laborers; and within the light cane palisade that surrounds these dwellings are long rows of *Poinciana regia* and the *Inca* tree. There are mangoes, papayas, guavas, bananas, oranges, alligator pears, (called here the *Avocado*) and patches of pineapple plants, interspersed with flowering shrubs, such as the scarlet hibiscus, delicate, pink oleanders, and other blossoms in white, and gold, and purple.

On the next point ahead there stands a neat looking dwelling that, from a certain air of exclusiveness (in the form of a high, close, reed palisade) about it, its trim, pretty garden in front, its picturesque and convenient location, and general air of being well cared for, suggest the idea that it is a missionary station, which, indeed, it proves to be. Behind the house is a cluster of native huts, shaded by fine trees; and on the smooth, sandy beach that lies in front are drawn up a number of canoes.

In the doorway of one or two of the huts are standing a few native women dressed in white, while running about the beach are a dozen or more little children in warm-looking, skin-tight fitting suits of golden yellow. It is, at first, a puzzle to know of what material this clothing is made, but afterwards it is discovered that it is powdered tumeric rubbed on the dusky skin. 'Tis a neat fitting suit, but rather gaudy, its chief merit being that should it become frayed or worn 'tis easily repaired.

This tongue of land, with the area of broad fertile plain from which it projects, was selected as a missionary station by the captain of the man-of-war "Havana" when he first visited this harbor, and gave it the name of

the vessel he commanded. The point itself is a long, low sand-spit, on either beach of which boats can be drawn up at any stage of the tide. This beach rises, a few feet back, some eight or ten feet to the level of the plain spoken of, which is heavily wooded near the station, but cleared and affording excellent pasturage further on towards the head of the bay.

Passing Missionary Point, the Julia is brought sharp on the wind and headed at nearly a right angle with her previous course, for the small settlement at the head of the harbor, and, as the breeze is light, time is afforded to study the scenery. The broad, nearly circular bay, enclosed between the curving shores of Vate on one side and those of Deception Island on the other, is very deep even close to the shore, its waters being of the darkest, most transparent blue. From the point around one half the circle to the narrow boat passage between the two islands the land spreads out in a broad plain dotted with palms and some more massive trees. For the most part this plain is covered with maninia grass near the shore, while further inland there springs up after each annual fire a coarse, in-nutritious bunchy grass that in its turn is replaced by thickets—jungles, in fact—of tall, slender reeds. Beyond the plain the hills rise quite abruptly into grassy, treeless table lands. Some sharp ridges extend down from the high lands to the plain, their flanks and the valleys between covered with a heavy forest growth. In the distance the hills loom a dark blue through the smoky haze that hangs over the plains, and the course of one fine stream can be traced as it winds over the level expanse by the rich green of the enshrouding vegetation on its banks.

As the Julia draws near to the anchorage, which is close in shore, the French flag is displayed in front of a large galvanized iron-covered building—half dwelling, half store—where lives McLeod, agent for the French company, one of whose plantations we have had a glimpse of. There are a few thatched huts and small houses grouped about the main building, a few boats are drawn up on the beach, and a cluster of people, natives and foreigners are watching our approach. Lying at anchor are a couple of "labor" vessels—one from Queensland with but few recruits on board, the other bound for Samoa, full. We are immediately boarded by one of the captains and an ancient Frenchman, who has grown old, and in spite of the proverb about "rolling stones," mossy and grey, wandering about these seas. After a brief chat with them, we go ashore, and are welcomed by Captain McLeod. A strong-limbed, rugged, hard-headed, genial man is he. A veteran trader in this group, and as such having about him sundry scars of tomahawk wounds received in hand-to-hand fights with the natives. A Scotchman by birth, though now a naturalized French subject, we found him hospitable and shrewd, unco'gleg and canny, well read, and, as often happens with those who live "far from the madding crowd," rather better informed as to what is taking place in the great centers of civilization than we who have so lately come from one of them. He bids us welcome, introduces us to De la Tour (a Queensland Government Agent), arranges to furnish a guide for a tramp into the "bush" on the morrow; advises us to look out for fever and ague, gives us all the local news, and informs himself of our past movements and future intentions—all in the first half-hour we are with him.

Later in the day the regular monthly mail from all the world, via Noumea, New Caledonia, arrives, as does the missionary packet the Day-Spring, and we are at once eagerly scanning the news contained in newspapers and letters.

After supper we take a quiet stroll along the beach, and fall in with "Jimmy," who has been detailed to act as our guide into the forest. He promises to be on hand at an early hour, and to take good care of us and see that we are not eaten. "No bloody feab," he exclaims. "Bushman he saba me. 'Pose he fool roun' mahsa mahn, my word! me chop 'em bloody head long to my hawk. All same mahsa mahn cabry he 'vojva: so bushman he fool, shoot him five, six fellah maybe"—by which he

meant to intimate that while he was not afraid of the bushmen, it would be as well for us to meet them armed.

Then we meet "Black Harry," and are much interested in him. He is a character in his way. No one, not even he, knows when he left Africa for the West Indies, or when he left there as a sailor; but it was long ago that he landed here, and became a care-taker of some property left by a party who tried cotton-growing on quite an extensive scale, and failed. Harry quietly settled down in the comfortable two-storied house where we found him, and contented himself as best he could with a native "wife" in raising a lot of poultry and small onions, which he bartered for gin, "bahka," a few clothes, &c. Like many of his countrymen, he has a good knowledge of the meaning of English words, and a pronunciation that is curiously dialectic and quite impressive. He has passed through many varied experiences, witnessing scenes of cruelty and bloodshed; now living amongst cannibals who only spared his life from day to day because he was of more use to them living than dead—then slaving amongst the pots and pans of some labor vessel's caboose, from which he was generally paid off with more kicks than halfpence, and finally stranded on the beach in Havana harbor to spend there, probably, the balance of his days. He is short of stature, stout of limb, grey-haired, and having ceased years ago to be astonished, angered, pleased, or surprised at anything that might happen about him, his face wears a stolid look, such as one might see in that of an over-worked, much-abused ox turned out to die. Seated on the upper veranda of his house, where we can look out over the bay, we sound him regarding some of the habits of the New Hebridians. There is no intention on his part of making our flesh creep, but nevertheless he relates so graphically incidents in his life here—cannibal scenes he has witnessed, and stories of cruelty and strife through which he has passed—that we do feel somewhat chilly as we go back to McLeod's in the gathering twilight, and seat ourselves on a pile of bags, filled with beche-le-mer, to enjoy a solitary smoke.

As night comes on, the outlines of the land across the quiet bay grow dim. The high hulk of an old French frigate—that sailed the seas with men and guns half a century ago—looms large at its moorings, a floating storehouse for dried coconut and shark-fins, beche-de-mer, pearl shells, and other South Sea products. Its white figure-head, the life-size effigy of Marquis Schuebert,

"With his old three-cornered hat,
And his pigtail) and all that,"

gleams stark upon the bluff black bows. Still further off the land a tracing of ropes and spars aloft, and two or three bright lantern lights below show where lies a labor vessel from New Britain, filled with a crowd of savages, who thump their log drums, blow rude Pan's pipes, and chant and stamp in unison about the deck.

Along the beach are scattered groups of natives gathered round their little fires whose fitful flames light up their dusky forms, shine on their gleaming teeth and eye-balls, and dance and glitter on the foaming ripple of the rising tide, whose soft, ripple and rhythmic flow fills the tropic night with restful sounds.

Over the northern sky there spreads a lurid glow reflected from the fires of Ambrym's crater; and across this luminous space there sweeps a "flying fox." Its flight is slow and noiseless; its black bat-like wings beating the air with heavy soundless strokes, and as it passes overhead—so close that we can catch the glitter of its bead-like eyes—we see, clinging to its breast, its young, and hear its sharp, quick cry of alarm as we spring to our feet to watch it vanish in the dense foliage of a native chestnut near the house. Gasper, the Captain of a little inter-island schooner, who happens to be here, loads his gun with fine shot, and, knowing the fondness of the flying fox for fruit, keeps watch under the *papaia* trees behind the house, and succeeds in securing both mother and young for us to examine.

These curious creatures are quite abundant here as well as in the Fijis. They are merely large bats, and are good examples of how hideous some

of the "small fry" in the animal world become simply by enlargement. Seen beneath the microscope the forms of animalculae cause a shudder; and in the flying fox we have all that is impish and repulsive in the common bat displayed in such proportions as to excite not only disgust, but almost fear.

There is the intensely black, india-rubber-like, thin membrane stretched in flight, between the immensely elongated forearms and feet, and the much shorter hinder limbs, barely covering, without at all concealing a wonderful arrangement of slender bones and cord-like muscles by which it is expanded and kept in motion.

There is the short, stout, horny hook projecting from each elbow joint, with which the creature suspends itself while sleeping during the day in the darkling forest, in which attitude—upside down—with the loose folds of its wings draped about it, it looks more like a withered mummy of one of Satan's imps than anything else we can imagine.

It has a weazen face, with the short upper lip drawn back so as to show the sharp, yellow teeth; small, black, beady eyes, quick, restless, and formed to see well in the night, while in the daylight they are dull and filmy.

It has a muscular, compact, rat-like body, covered with a dense, dark brown fur, patched on the head and throat with dirty yellow, and swarming with parasitic insects. Finally, it has a repulsive, musk-like odor about it, that it shares in common with the Papuans, who eat its flesh as greedily as they do that of each other.

It is in keeping with the scene before us—the lonely bay, the worn out hulk, the dreary beat of the uncouth drums and melancholy chanting of the savages on board the labor vessel, and the groups of naked, chattering Vate people around their fires upon the shore—that this demoniac creature should come athwart the sulphurous light of the volcano, and it is with a feeling of relief that we leave the veranda and enter the brightly lighted room where McLeod, De la Tour and the Captain are busied with Colonial papers, books and magazines.

We find much said about the annexation of New Guinea by the Queensland Government, and learn that the Imperial Cabinet has thrown cold water on the scheme. The threatened acquisition of the New Hebrides by the French Government is discussed, and we are assured that by the time we have gone through the groups we will be better able to form an opinion of the advisability of such a step. We correct an impression that seems to prevail regarding the *status* of the Hawaiian Kingdom, by explaining that these islands are not a "dependency" of the United States, and at a late hour go on board the Julia again.

A Wonderful Escape.

(A reminiscence of camp life in the woods.)

Darkness had fallen early in the dense woods where we were camped for the night, but in the radiance of the glorious fire, that our guide, a veteran woodsman, had kindled against the rough trunk of a huge prostrate pine, we, having devoured many slices of good fat venison, cut from the haunch of the noble animal that had fallen to the crack of Long John's rifle that morning, drank sundry pots of fragrant coffee, and filled our pipes for a luxuriant smoke, we, I say, cared naught for the gloom about us, but lay on our beds of spiny pine branches and idly talked of home, our friends, politics, barbecues, and finally of things gustable; discussing the merits of canvas-back ducks, rock eods, terrapins, and finally bullfrogs. Our little friend Dumpsie, who had left his store to take care of itself while he joined us on this, his very first hunting expedition, had heard how delicious the white, delicate hind quarter of the *Rana pipiens* were, but had actually never seen one of the animals, being city born and bred. Long John, upon learning this fact, gave him a gloomy description of their size and ferocity, illustrating both characteristics by relating the following:

"Probably one of the finest hunting grounds for the bull frog is found in the Florida swamps. They (the frogs) are to be found in all quarters of the globe, I believe, but in Florida they attain a size and fatness that is unheard of elsewhere. In the moist, warm swamps and bayous of that sunny clime they live and grow

through many years of endless summer, and, having no long periods of cold weather in which their more northern brethren are compelled to hibernate, they lose no fat or strength during their existence. I had heard stories of their wonderful size, how the hind quarter was a load for a pack-horse," (here our guide gave a low whistle, which he hastened to say was only to call the dogs in) "and how 'frog steaks' in the season were sold by the pound, and I was anxious to secure the ears of at least one specimen before I returned North."

"The 'ears' did you say?" queried one of his audience.

"The ears," repeated Long John suavely—"that is the trophy that slayers of the bull frog always secure, if they cannot bring back with them the hind quarters."

I had hunted a good deal in the Everglades for deer with fair success, and had killed many reed-birds, and such small game one the edge of the swamps, but, as yet, had not seen a bull-frog. Often at night, while snug in camp, a low, tremulous roar, like the bellowing of some huge bovine creature had filled the air, and I was told by the shuddering blacks "Dats dem Massa John—dems de bull-frog; but doan' you far go fo' dem in de da'k; dey'll gobble you suah—deys ofal hungry dis time de yeah."

Towards the last of the season I resolved in my mind to capture one of the monsters or perish, and so I used to wander a good deal by myself in the swamp for that purpose, but always without success. Finally, one day, while hastening to the camp—I had been out with my long duck-gun, and the approach of night found me still in the swamp some distance from home), and after stepping for some time cautiously from one hummock to the other, I finally neared the firm land. Before me was a strip of clear water, on the other side of which, at the edge of the land, was what I thought was an immense flat rock, whose broad, slightly rounded surface was of a curious, dull olive-green and dark brown color. I calculated the distance to be about six feet across the strip of water to this rock, and so being, as you know, long of limb, and, I may say, hard to beat on the jump—

"On the stump, did you say?" again interrupted one of the listeners.

"On the 'jump' was what I said," resumed Long John, rather snappishly. "What I meant was, that I was good at jumping, and so I drew back and made a vigorous spring for the rock. While I was in mid-air, I swear to you, gentlemen, I saw that rock split open, and when I landed it was in the bog, as I thought, up to my middle! Instinctively I threw my arms forward, grasping my long duck-gun with both hands, my chest and face coming down flat on the supposed rock, which, to my horror, was soft, flabby, clammy, and alive! Great snakes! didn't I give a yell? You could have (and, in fact, the niggers in camp did) hear me half a mile away, and I began to kick; but, gracious! that didn't do any good. That monster bull-frog (for such it was) had seen me as I sprang into the air and opened his huge jaws just in time to receive my descending form. Then those horrid jaws had closed—(thank God he had no teeth), and, with a silent, but irresistible force, I felt myself drawn into his capacious maw. Again I yelled in agony, but in vain. Deeper and deeper I felt myself being drawn into that slimy, loathsome receptacle, while on either side of me glowed one of the found phosphorescent eyes of the disgusting *Batrachia*. A deadly chill crept over me as his cold jaws drew me down. I struggled wildly, and as my head and shoulders sank below the flexible, cruel lips, I gave a shriek and threw my hands into the air, still convulsively clutching my gun. As I did so, I sank with a sudden plunge still further into the animal's gullet, and then felt my downward course into that fearful living tomb arrested. I realized the situation in a moment; my long gun rested across the junction of the frog's upper and lower jaws, and as long as I could maintain my grasp upon it, so long those jaws could not close over me. This thought gave new vigor to my almost paralyzed energies, and I commenced my struggle anew. But all seemed in vain. The yielding interior of my living prison afforded me no foothold, and I felt that my grasp upon the gun was only prolonging my fearful fate. Despair seized upon me. The reptile's loathsome breath was suffocating me; my senses reeled, and I loosened my grasp upon the gun, when at once I felt the creature writhe and quiver under me, a fierce convulsion seized upon my captor, and the next moment there was a sound as of a deep hoarse cough, and I was projected into the air with frightful violence, falling fortunately upon my back in the