

Forerunners of Empire

By Mortimer O. Wilson

Copyright by the S. S. McClure Company. VERY nearly upon the Tropic of Cancer, but a long way beyond the Sandwich group, there is an island almost unknown to the dwellers in Polynesia. A small boat with two men in it lay off this shore one day and tossed on the long rollers of the Western Pacific.

One of the men in the boat stared across the water with weary, observant eyes. It was three years since Allison had last seen the island, and the years had changed the man, but they had not changed the broad stretch of beach or the grassy hills beyond it. If the planet had been flat one might have looked from this higher ground 8000 miles to South America and passed one's eyes over nothing but the sea waves.

The other man on board wore a red shirt, and he almost covered the chicken-coop of a cabin by reclining on it while he smoked. "What part of the map is it, Jim?" he inquired. "This is the place we're after," Allison replied. "We've fetched it right enough. I used to call it Island of Faraway. Looks lonelier than ever; but there is a village over beyond them palms."

"They took the boat in carefully over the bar and made her fast; but there were no signs of life, except for a few scared sea birds which flew up screaming as the men waded ashore. The odorous trade winds were roaring in the treetops overhead; the never-pausing thunder of the surf lulled the listener's senses, and these sounds and the deep solitude brought back the past to Allison. He walked up to the higher ground and turned to look at the breakers, which rolled in with the weight of the Pacific behind them.

"Seems most like old times," he said to the other man, Holmes. "Many's the hour I've laid right here and watched that everlasting old water-line, wondering whether there might be a ship behind it. Woe! lonely! I'd go almost wild sometimes." He gazed down upon the bay and the little boat at her moorings. A bit of dingy bunting fluttered from the bow; and although it was dingy, and the view insignificant, it had now a kind of haughty meaning, as if to proclaim that an American craft lay there and that a new flag was upon the waters of the world.

The weary eyes of Allison brightened; his careless figure seemed to swell. He put a hand on Holmes' shoulder and pointed one way and the other.

"Look at there, Henry," he said, with a kind of shamed enthusiasm. "Over that way, to our backs, is San Francisco and the States. And down there is the Philippines, where Dewey is. But here on this side we're the farthest out of any American. I tell you it makes a fellow feel responsible!"

"Where's your village?" asked Holmes. "Come on; over this way," and the two trudged heavily inland through the big brilliant ferns. There has been a path through these as Allison remembered, and it has disappeared; but the significance of this fact did not occur to him until they came out before a huddle of moldering huts, with rank grass growing everywhere. Holmes gave a dry whistle.

"This your village?" "Seems to be," replied Allison, ruefully. He looked around him with a feeling of depression at that abandoned place. "Wonder what's become of 'em?" he said, in a whisper, as though he feared to walk among their ghosts. "They were real decent people for niggers, and just like children, too—so innocent."

"Somebody's comin' out of that farthest shanty," Holmes observed. "Well, now, if that ain't old Ben Harrison?" the other said. "Hello, Benjamin!" he added, "where are all the rest of you? Dead?"

The brown, ancient face expressed neither surprise nor emotion. "Some of them are. Rest down yonder—way around New Village there. Lots of new things now."

"I declare, I should think so," Allison remarked. "Can we make the other village tonight?" Holmes asked.

"No, let's stay here. Old Ben Harrison will find us some things to eat and we can go down to the other place in the morning. I ain't got no relish for it now. Seems better to leave these people alone, anyway. What good does it do them for us to come around and try to civilize 'em?"

"Oh, brace up!" said the other, with awkward sympathy. All that night, while they lay in the hut of old Ben Harrison, the rumble of the ocean was present to their ears and the trade winds roared above them in the treetops. Allison did not sleep very soundly, and when he slept he dreamed of a fluttering bit of flag.

For, indeed, he was a dreamer; a man without much culture, but a touch of real imagination. It was possibly this which had brought him back to the Pacific after three years in a Sacramento grocery, and the old mysterious craving which keeps men pushing westward. And on these far-off waters he had vaguely felt a touch of the strange new spirit which was moving over the world. The burning desire of the American was upon him to take a hand in great events and to be a part of them; but these past few hours had made him doubtful. In the morning he and Holmes took their boat around the coast to where the newer village lay.

It lay along the echoing beach and one astonished glance told the newcomers that civilization had arrived. Gin bottles, cork and strips of paper littered the firm, white sand and an old straw hat decorated the pole in front of the house. Before the largest house of all, with natives loitering around, sat three men in the garb of the Caucasian.

"Ben Harrison didn't tell us about this," said Allison, and Holmes' face grew somewhat wolfish. They went up grudgingly to the three, in the guarded fashion of men who meet each other in earth's lonely places.

"Good morning, gentlemen," spoke a German voice, in excellent, precise English. He was a spruce young fellow, with the upturned mustaches of the Second Wilhelm, and his shoulders were squared as though they still wore a uniform of the Prussian marine. "You have, I perceive, found us out in our island."

"I guess, mebbe," said Allison, slowly. "That one of us has been here before you have."

"Truly, these natives have, in fact, endeavored to tell us of a white man once dwelling in this place, who traded a little and seems to have won their hearts."

Allison stared moodily at the speaker, who watched him through half-shut eyes and laughed.

"Pardon me. My name is Von Rosen, and this is my comrade, Herr Eckhardt. And this"—he turned to a surly old pickled mariner with British salt written all over him—"this is Mr. Tibbits, the representative of her Majesty Victoria. Mr. Tibbits, here are some blood relations of yours, it would appear."

Mr. Tibbits sarcastically inspected the new arrivals. "Americans, eh?" he growled.

Holmes nodded briefly. "Just so," he said, and spat upon the sand.

"Long way from home, ain't ye?" inquired the Briton. "Howsoever, I ain't your guardian."

"Too bad about that," responded Holmes. "So hard to do without you. But we'll try to worry along."

"Which, I think, perhaps ye will have to" came back, the ancient mariner, and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Good! Bravo!" cried Von Rosen, with a roar of laughter, and he winked at his companion. Then, with effusive politeness: "You must pardon our friends, Mr. Tibbits, their very proper pride in recent acquisitions. For have they not a brand new navy?"

"And an army," said Eckhardt, "all in nice new uniforms?"

Allison began to speak: "That navy of ours," said he, "is, by last accounts, still a-floating. You have heard, mebbe, about a little happening out in the Philippines?"

"No," said Von Rosen. "Did the most highly renowned Dewey really arrive, then? Did he seek for worlds to conquer? For ye must know that we were set down here some three weeks past and receive not the newspapers."

"You listen," Allison replied; and squatting down in the shade he supplied them with some information. They had heard nothing of it; news travels but slowly in these side places of the Pacific. With a halting eloquence he told of the sea fight of Manila and the death of the ships.

Von Rosen at the end sat and eyed the other with an eye which calculated chances. "Very fine," said he, "exceedingly fine. And now, my good friend, for you have not yet explained it to us, what brings you to this little-known island?"

"The American flushed under his tan. Mebbe it's because I have been here before," said he.

"Exactly. But also—we are here now. You perceive that fact in all its force and grandeur." He took an inventory with his eyes of all the other men.

"You see, all under one roof," grumbled old Tibbits, "isn't it?"

"That's not so bad now," Eckhardt, he hastily corrected himself. "Oh, I suppose Englishmen would have done better," said Holmes, "as you did in the War of 1812. Or the Revolution? Oh, yes."

"Side wars," remarked the venerable Tibbits, "little two-week side wars. Ye blooming infants was never yet in a real foreign conflict."

"Real pity you fellows can't come over and learn us," said Holmes.

"Some day, little man, some day, when you have a few more ships," was Tibbits' repartee.

"Ha, ha, most excellent!" exclaimed Von Rosen, and his face expressed appreciation and much joy. With a rare diplomacy he urged them on to new passages of sarcasm, making force enemies of them; and this was the fine

compliance of one who can hoodwink men. Remarkable Von Rosen—but if only he had comprehended the true inwardness of Anglo-Saxon craft.

Toward evening he seemed to think that the time was ripe for a decisive word.

"Being now here in possession," he said, standing up very erect and twirling those fierce mustaches of his, "and the natural representatives of his Sacred Majesty, we cannot, as you

around to him and found him sitting on the sand, gazing thoughtfully out to sea.

"Down yonder," said he, with a flourish of his pipe, "is the Philippines, and also Australia. And farther up, as everybody knows, lies bloomin' old China. But over there," and starting up, he pointed northward, "over there is Russia! Just beyond them rocks, and with nothing but a little water between, the Bear is a-reachin', reachin' out of his paws, and always gettin' ready. This turn of yours with the Spanish is all very good for amusement; but just ye wait a little if ye want to see true jollity!"

He smacked his lips and leaned forward, peering as though he saw already the giant threatening shadow. He was talking in large terms, much as Allison had done; this little island, so lonely in the sea, seemed favorable to expansive ideas. Presently Tibbits, coming out of his dream, looked around.

"No hard feelin's," said he. "No; of course not," Allison replied.

"They don't understand it," remarked the old tar, "and they can't. Well, I've said enough things in my time about ye Yankee—learned that name from a little Charleston man as was on the Alabama. But the plain fact of it is, he burst forth, and I tell it in confidence, I can't stand these blasted foreigners. Russians, Prussians, Frenchmen and other daggers—they're all alike. What business have they got here anyway? We showed the way into these waters; we showed 'em how to do it.

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Old Tibbits was smoking his pipe at the other side of the rock. They want

fight a ship! Why, I tell ye what," he cried, with a final wave of the pipe, "we may have our family jars now and again, but we ain't foreigners, I hope."

Columbia and the mother country solemnly shook hands all round. Somewhat later the three strode down to the beach, where the Germans were waiting.

"Well?" asked Von Rosen. "Wahl?" replied Holmes. "Mr. Tibbits, late of her Majesty's navy, not being an interested party, is kindly a-goin' to be our diplomatic ambassador."

The ambassador rolled heavily twice and three on his wide-bowed legs. "We'll," said he, "it's this way. My friends here, they think they were first on this bloomin' island, and if anybody has a right to it it's them. They don't exactly claim as they own it, but they do claim as nobody else does."

"Ah!" said Von Rosen. He drew himself again to military erectness and with a contemptuous smile stared over the heads of the three slouching figures. Possibly their awkwardness and hesitation had deceived him. "Most unfortunately," said he, "the former officer of his Sacred Majesty cannot permit himself to be guided by the wishes of two Yankee beachcombers. At sunset, therefore, I shall at this point run up the German flag."

Holmes turned and spoke to his companion in a melancholy voice and with

only a furtive gleam of enjoyment in his eye. "I guess, mebbe," he said, "that there ain't no need for further talkin'."

The other American without a word walked to the water's edge. He waded out to his boat, swung himself aboard and pulled down the American flag at the bow. Then he waded ashore with it and came back up the beach, dripping and short of breath, with the eyes of all upon him. The natives stood around in a big circle, watching with close comprehension. The blue ocean before and the low hills behind, with the placid Pacific sunbathing streaming down, made the setting of a picture in which Allison was the only thing that moved. He marched up front of the hut and drove the flag down into the sand; then falling back a step, removed his hat and gazed upon his handiwork.

"There!" he said.

And Holmes, with the queer, sure instinct of the racer, seized the psychological moment and edged forward.

"That," he remarked, "is about all there is to it. We were here first, we are a kind of sacred majesties ourselves, and our motto is, 'Hands off!' If these niggers have got to have the blessing of civilization, they might as well learn to vote and beg for gin in English. And I guess they'll have to."

"Them docters," said old Tibbits, "awakens here a cordial response. Wherefore and whereas, as I was about to say when interrupted, they won't annex the bloomin' island, but they're goin' to be the suzerain power. And"—with a hand upon his belt—"I backs 'em."

"And now then," said Holmes, looking Von Rosen in the eye, "about that mailed fist?"

The German shrugged his shoulders. "To fight for it?" said he. "This wilderness? Bah!"

White to Eckhardt he said later, with airy indifference: "So, my comrade, we tried what these Yankees themselves term a bluff, and they were too stupid to see it. The greedy pigs! They have not the first idea of why they want this island."

Even old Tibbits, returned again to sarcasm, was grumbling: "Eh, and what will ye do with it now? Make a coaln' station, I suppose, for your man-of-war down yonder."

But none the less that bit of American bunting waved over the beach of Faraway Island.

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"NOW THEN, SAID HOLMES, ABOUT THAT MAILED FIST?"

ART AND INCOME--THEORY vs. PRACTICE

A Fable for the Foolish---By Nicholas Nemo

BENVENUTO C. JONES was an artist. He could draw anything under the sun but a steady income and for that reason nourished a vociferous contempt for those vulgar individuals who can't draw anything like that and do a little business at the savings bank in good years have no real right to live and it is only by the consent of the people with artistic temptations that they are allowed to continue to infect the globe with their presence. But Benvenuto C. went a little beyond that. Not content with bespiling heartless individuals, who pay their debts regularly and know no more of the gay land of Bohemia than is comprehended in an occasional visit to the French table d'hote, where every prospect pleases and only the wine is vile, he heaped a double portion of righteous indignation on the heads of his brother artists who were proud of the fact that they could sell pictures now and then. Benvenuto's proud theory: they were intended to be a solace to the artist and a source of pleasure and inspiration to his fellowmen. Instead of establishing soup kitchens and homes for the aged and houses of correction he would have had art museums opened in every ward so that the poor and the oppressed might go

there and draw mental and spiritual sustenance from the canvases and the more or less cold and unfeeling marble. Were a man cold and hungry, a little call on the work of the late Michaelangelo, or the present Auguste Rodin, would convince him that cold and hunger were but evanescent states that couldn't possibly continue after death, while truth and beauty, sweetness and harmony were immortal and would continue to live long after the bread line had adjourned for the last time. It was a beautiful theory and so practicable. According to it the gentleman who complained that he had received a stone when he had asked for bread didn't know when he was well off. All that the bread could possibly do for him was to keep him alive for a day or two longer, while the stone, if properly carved or painted, would nourish his soul through countless ages. Of course, as against that it might be said that it isn't the countless ages that worry most of us so much as it is the note that is coming due week after next. But artists can't be bothered with coarse, material things like notes, unless they happen to be piano players, and not always then. Whenever any alleged artist was heard to boast in Benvenuto's presence that he had sold a picture the day before for a hundred and fifty dollars' cold cash to Seads, the millionaire, Benvenuto would

shudder softly to himself and murmur to his admiring friends that the commercialism of this age was rapidly rendering it impossible for a really sensitive and artistic person to continue living. Then he would return to his great work, a study of a mayonnaise dressing in the nude. This was intended to teach the waiting world that art for art's sake was the only real thing in the universe. When it was finished he intended to hank it up in his studio and let his friends in on bright days, when the light was right, so that they might let the mayonnaise soak into their souls, souls soaked with mayonnaise are the latest thing in the artistic world. It was fortunate for Benvenuto that his grandfather had got in on the ground floor of a large tract of railroad land in Nebraska which enabled his descendant to live in peace and comfort while his soul disported itself in the other realms of light. It might be suggested that this had something to do with his abhorrence of pictures that could be sold or of artists who painted for hire, and of the higher the better. This is a rude, unfeeling thought and should not be allowed to gain a lodging in the human breast. It is likely that Benvenuto would have permitted himself to starve slowly and gracefully if he could have done it with the proper artistic accompaniments.

It fell out, however, that in the course of his wanderings he ran across a young lady who seemed to him to just fill his requirements for "die ewige Weibliche." The only trouble was that she didn't have any money to speak of, and by this time Benvenuto had done a number of things to his patrimony except to save it. It is generally admitted that the worship of art, when it is all on one side, is a rather expensive procedure, only to be compared with the attempt to get even with the stock exchange for that first five thousand that was lost. In his desire to make up the deficit Benvenuto sold the little Nebraska land that was left to him and invested his capital in what he was assured was a dead sure thing. Therefore the bottom dropped out of the market the next day and Benvenuto found himself with a wife on his hands and nothing in his pockets. Those who have tried this combination pronounce it quite as exhilarating and inspiring in its general effects as a bath in Hudson Bay on the 21st of January. It was up to Benvenuto to choose between his art and the rest of the world and he hesitated at least six minutes, the reason for his hesitation being that he had pawned his hat and had to wait till his wife could borrow one from the janitor. Then Benvenuto sallied forth to the Mayor and laid the case before him. The latter had known Benvenuto's grandfather in the days when land grants were growing on all the trees and he bent his mind to the task of helping the struggling artist keep out of the workhouse. There was a place open on the municipal art commission and it was finally decided that it was a good thing for Benvenuto. The duties consisted in attending a meeting once a month and

making out a voucher on the city treasury once a quarter for fifteen hundred very vulgar dollars. When the commission met the chairman furnished the cigars and the rest of the members sat round and told stories. When they had told all they knew they put the names of the designs for the new lamp posts in a hat and Benvenuto, as the most artistic man on the board, drew out the winner. It was a good way of avoiding disputes and assuring the continuance of a friendly feeling among the commissioners. Furthermore it prevented any charge of favoritism from being brought against them. Whenever Benvenuto had a clever idea for a new door mat at the city hall or an ornamental base burner for police stations they would suspend the ruler and put the order through as emergency business and direct the treasurer to pay double time for overwork. In his off hours, which are at least twenty-three out of the twenty-four, Benvenuto touches up the salad dressing and lectures before the teachers' institute on the holiness of art. Gentle readers must not rise and jump at the rash conclusion that Benvenuto has given the chilly mist to his early ideals. The ideals are still there and in good order, but he has found out that when on ambitious youth "itches his wagon to a star in a wall to be sure that there are enough canned goods in the wagon for a long trip. Besides, all good Americans will testify that working for the city isn't really working for a living.

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