

A Narrative of the Shipwreck, Captivity and Sufferings of Horace Holden and Benj. H. Nute, Who Were Cast Away in the American Ship Mentor, on the Pelew Islands, in the Year 1832; and For Two Years Afterwards were Subjected to Unheard of Sufferings Among the Barbarous Inhabitants of Lord North's Island. Fourth Edition. Boston: Russell Shattuck, and Co., 1836.

CHAPTER VII.

The island, to which they were carried, proves to be Lord North's island, called by the natives *To'bee*.—Account of the island and its inhabitants.—Their manners and customs.

It may now be proper in this place to give some account of the place where our unhappy lot was cast, and of its rude and miserable inhabitants. It will be impossible to convey a correct idea of their ignorance, poverty, and degradation; but some conception may be formed, by imagining what the condition of beings must necessarily be, when wholly separated from the rest of their species, stripped of all the refinements of life, and deprived of all means and opportunities for improvement.

We were now upon the small piece of land called by the natives *To'bee*, but known to navigators by the name of *Lord North's Island*, situated between the third and fourth degrees of north latitude, and in longitude one hundred and thirty-one degrees twenty

minutes east. It is also known by the name of *Nevil's Island* and *Johnston's Island*; and it has been hitherto considered by navigators and others as uninhabited. This is not surprising; as we were told by the natives, that no white man had ever visited the place; though it seemed, from the pieces of iron in their possession, and from other circumstances, that they had had some communication with the Spaniards and Portuguese in that quarter of the world.* Like many other islands in those seas, this is surrounded by a coral reef, which is from an eighth to one half of a mile wide; but outside of the reef the water is apparently fathomless, the water being as blue as it is in the middle of the ocean; and the largest vessels may in many places approach within a quarter of a mile of the beach. The whole island rises so little above the level of the sea, that the swell often rolls up to a

* They occasionally wore a kind of broad hat, called by them *shappo*, and sometimes *shambaráro*; which are evidently derived from the Portuguese *chapeo* (or possibly the French *chapeau*) and the Spanish *sombrero*.— *dit.*

considerable distance inland. It is about three quarters of a mile in length, and not far from half a mile in width. There were upon it three villages, situated on the shores, and containing, in all, between three and four hundred souls, at the time when we were taken there; but the number was considerably diminished by famine and disease before we left.

The inhabitants are in a state of entire barbarism and ignorance. The men wear a sort of girdle or belt made of the bark of a tree. This is girded round the loins so as to leave one end to hang loose behind, the other is brought forward and fastened to the belt in front. This is their only clothing. The females, after arriving at the age of womanhood, wear an apron made of the leaves of a plant, by them called *kurremung*, split into fine strips and plaited. This extends from the loins nearly to the knees. Some few wear rings upon their wrists made of white shells, and some had this kind of ornament made of turtle-shell. In their ears, which are always bored, they sometimes

wear a leaf; and round their necks a necklace made of the shell of the cocoa-nut, and a small white shell, called *keem* shell. The children go entirely naked. The complexion of these islanders is a light copper color; much lighter than the Malays, or the Pelew islanders; which last, however, they resemble in the breadth of their faces, high cheek bones, and broad flattened noses. They do not color their teeth, by chewing any thing, as many of those islanders do; but their teeth are so strong that they can husk a cocoa-nut with them instantly.

Their principal food is the cocoa-nut. They occasionally succeed in procuring fish, though the supply obtained during our residence there was exceedingly small. Their fish-hooks are made of turtle-shell, and not well contrived for the purpose; but we could not induce them to use our hooks, till they had heated them and altered their form so that they would not hold the fish. They did this, because they said that Yarris (God) would be angry with them, if they used our hooks without preparing them according to

their fashion. Sometimes they are so fortunate as to obtain a sea-turtle ; five only were taken during the two years we were there. The turtle, I may add, has something of a sacred character with them. They also raise small quantities of a vegetable somewhat resembling the yam ; but while we were with them they were unsuccessful in cultivating it. These constitute the slender means of their support ; and they are thus barely kept from actual death by famine, but on the very verge of starvation. When any one of them begins to fail, for want of food, so that his death is pretty certain, they inhumanly turn him off from among them, to starve to death.

Their religion is such as might be expected among a people in their condition. Their place of worship is a rudely constructed building, or hut, about fifty feet long and thirty wide. In the centre, suspended from the roof, is a sort of altar, into which they suppose their deity comes to hold converse with the priest. Rudely carved images are placed in different parts of the building, and

are supposed to personate their divinity. As nearly as could be ascertained by us, they supposed that the object of their worship was of like passions with themselves, capricious and revengeful. During the time we were with them, they attributed to his displeasure their want of success in taking fish as they had done in former times, and the unfruitfulness of their bread-fruit and cocoa trees.

Their religious ceremonies are singular. In the commencement the priest walks round the altar and takes from it a mat, devoted to the purpose, which is laid upon the ground. He then seats himself upon it, and begins to hoot, in the mean time throwing himself into a variety of attitudes, for the purpose of calling down the divinity into the altar. At intervals the congregation sing, but immediately stop when the priest breaks out in his devotions. By the side of the altar is always placed a large bowl, and six cocoa-nuts. After the incantation is gone through, and the divinity is supposed to be present, the bowl is turned up, and four of

the nuts are broken and put in it, two being reserved for the exclusive use of a priest by them called also "*yarris.*" As soon as the nuts are broken, one of the company begins to shout, and, rushing to the centre, seizes the bowl, and drinks of the milk of the nut, generally spilling a considerable part of it upon the ground. After this a few pieces are thrown to the images, and the remainder are eaten by the priests. This closes the ceremony; after which they indulge in any recreations that chance to please them best.

While we were on the island several earthquakes happened, and some of them pretty severe. On those occasions the natives were much terrified; they would not let their children speak a word; and they said among themselves—*zahbee'too Yarris, To'bee yet-tah'men*, that is, Yarris (God) is coming and To'bee (the name of the island) will sink. They were also very much alarmed at thunder and lightning; and used to say at such times, *Yarris tee'tree*, God is talking. I do not know how they would be affected by an

eclipse, as none happened, that I noticed, while we remained there.

I will here mention some other things in respect to their customs and usages, as they now occur to me.

Their implements of war are spears and clubs; they have no bows and arrows. Their spears are made of the wood of the cocoa-nut trees; the points of them are set with rows of sharks' teeth; and, being at the same time very heavy and from ten to twenty feet long, are formidable weapons.

Their canoes are made of logs which drift to their island from other places, there being no trees on it large enough for that purpose; they are hollowed out with great labor, and are of very clumsy workmanship; to prevent their oversetting, they are fitted up with outriggers, like those of the Pelew islanders. A sketch of one is given in the accompanying engraving.

They kindle their fires, as they informed me, by rubbing two pieces of wood together, as is common in the islands of the Pacific ocean; and they cook their turtle or

other meat, (when they are so fortunate as to have any,) as well as their vegetables, by covering them with heated stones. I should state, however, that during the whole time we staid among them, fire was always preserved in some part of the island, so that there was no necessity for kindling it in the manner here mentioned.

Like other savage people, they reckon time by moons; I could not learn that they ever reckoned by any other period, except, indeed, when speaking of two or three days.

They take pride in their hair, and are particularly careful about it, washing and cleansing it almost every day. They do not color it, however, as the natives of some islands are said to do; but they moisten it with the juice pressed out from the cocoonut, which gives it a very glossy appearance; and it is frequently so long as to reach down to their waist.

Their mode of salutation is, to clasp each other in their arms, and touch their noses together, as is practised in many other islands.

We found no musical instruments of any

kind among them. They sometimes, on particular occasions, would sing or bawl out something like a rude tune; but we could not understand it. We frequently tried to teach them to whistle, and their awkward attempts to do it amused us; but they never were able to learn how it was done.

In their names, I could not find that they had any thing like a family name, but only a single one, (corresponding to our christian names,) as is the case, I believe, throughout the islands of the Pacific. I could not learn, that the names were significant either of animals or other objects, as the Indian names of America are, and I never found any two persons of the same name. The names of the members of the family with which I lived were as follows:—

Pahrahboo'ah, the father of the family.

Nah'kit, the mother.

Buhwar timar, the eldest child, a son, ten or twelve years old.

Kobaw'ut, the second, a daughter.

Kobahnoo'uk, the third, a daughter.

The children do not address their parents by any word corresponding to father or mother, papa or mamma, but by their names. Their parents treat them on the footing of equality; they are generally well behaved, and are never punished, except occasionally when impatient for their food.

Their language appears to be different from those of the other islands in that quarter; we found that the three natives of the Pelew islands, that accompanied us, could not understand any thing they said; though I observed afterwards, occasionally, a resemblance in two or three words. The reader will, however, be enabled to judge for himself, by means of a short vocabulary of common words which will be found at the end of this narrative. I may add, that the Pelew chiefs had never heard of Lord North's island; but they are acquainted with the *Caroline* islands.

A detail of all that befell us would serve only to give pain to the benevolent, or at most to show how much human beings can endure. I shall attempt but little more than

to describe the sufferings of a day ; observing once for all, that for the term of two long years we experienced the same privations, and were subjected to the same brutal treatment ; life, during all that time, being no better than the constant succession of the most acute sufferings.

This island, unlike the Pelews, is one of the most horrible and wretched on the face of the globe. The only product of its soil worth mentioning is the cocoa-tree ; and those are of so dwarfish and miserable a growth as to bear but very few nuts. These few, however, constitute the food of the inhabitants, with the exception of a species of fish caught occasionally near the shore. The only animals or creeping things known on the island are lizards and mice, and, during our stay there, scarcely a solitary sea-fowl was known to have alighted on the island, and but few fish were taken by the natives.

The character of the inhabitants much resembles that of the island itself. Cowardly and servile, yet most barbarous and cruel, they combine, in their habits, tempers, and

dispositions, the most disgusting and loathsome features that disgrace humanity. And, what may be regarded as remarkable, the female portion of the inhabitants outstrip the men in cruelty and savage depravity; so much so, that we were frequently indebted to the tender mercies of the men for escapes from death at the hands of the women. The indolence of the natives, which not even the fear of starvation itself can rouse to exertion, prevents their undertaking the least toil, although a little labor, well applied, might be made to render them infinitely more comfortable.*

Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that, notwithstanding they are in this miserable condition, with no prospect of its ever being improved, they are of the opinion that they are highly favored. This can be accounted for in no other way than by the fact, that they are entirely ignorant of all that lies beyond the narrow limits of their

* Some of these remarks are taken from the New York Sun of May 30, 1835; for which paper the substance of them was furnished by Mr. Nute and myself.

observation. They know nothing of any other portion of the globe, than the mere speck of barren land upon which by some accident they were thrown, and where they remain, to drag out a wretched existence. Their traditions do not extend further back than to about a hundred years; and, to their simple minds, it seems like a splendid effort of mind to be able to relate, with tolerable accuracy, the time-hallowed stories told them by their parents. Whether they could in any way be improved by instruction, is a question which it would be difficult to answer. They seem to be doomed to remain, as one of the last links in the chain that connects our race with the mere animal part of the creation.