

THE MAN WHO HAD SEEN THEM

THE STRANGE STORY OF AN ADVENTURE WITH THE SUPERNATURAL UPON A TROPIC BEACH

By EDWARD LUCAS WHITE



DO not wonder that you were startled the other day," the first mate said, "when I told you that I had seen the sirens. You must have thought me mad."

I made no reply. It was too dark for him to see my lips and he was deafer than the shears of the third Fate.

He leaned against the rail, sucking at his purring pipe. I lolled back in my steamer chair and gazed up at the multitudinous legions of the tropic stars. The bark was swinging at anchor outside the pocket harbor of Honolulu. Tantalizingly close, only some short miles away, a low streak of twinkling yellow, between the black shadow of Diamond head and the edge of the channel before us, marked the shore from Waikiki to town.

The first mate was an interesting being. He was the deafest man I had ever met, a man whose hearing was not so much impaired as abolished, annihilated, non-existent. Yet he managed to perform, and to perform well, the duties of his post and profession, as I had seen throughout a voyage of eight weeks' duration. Likewise he was plainly no natural seaman, but a gentleman out of luck and at sea for want of something better. I had found this no mere conjecture of mine, but the settled conviction of the entire ship. From many

talks with him I knew that he was not only well born but a man of education and culture. I guessed, and the inference had become a certainty to me, that his background of experiences included years at Oxford or at Cambridge.

He put his pipe into his pocket, leaned toward me, and began a monologue, such as many to which I had listened on successive past nights; a monologue which I could neither question nor interrupt, which I must hear out to its end or break off altogether.

You were astonished (he said) when I told you that I had seen the sirens, but I have. It was about six years ago, in 1879. I was in New York and had had my usual difficulties in getting a ship on account of my deafness. My boarding master tried a Captain George Andrews of the *Joyous Castle*. Andrews looked me over and said he liked me. Then he talked to me alone.

"We are bound on an adventure," he said, "and I want a man who will obey orders and keep his mouth shut."

I told him I was his man for whatever fisk. With a light mixed cargo, hardly more than half a cargo, hardly more than ballast, we cleared for Guam and a market. I was second mate. The first mate was a big Swede named Gustav Obrink. The very first meal I ever sat down to with him he made an

impression on me as one of the greediest men I had ever seen. He not only ate enormously, but he seemed more than half unsatisfied after he had stuffed himself with an amazing quantity of food. He seemed to possess an unbluntable zest in the act of swallowing, an ever fresh gusto for any and every food flavor. I never saw a man relish his food so. He was an equally inordinate drinker, the quantity of coffee he could swill at one meal was amazing. Between meals he was always thirsty and drank incredible quantities of water. He was forever going to the butt by the galley door and drinking from it. And he would smack his lips over it and enjoy it as a connoisseur would a rare wine.

When we came to choose watches Captain Andrews told us to choose a bos'n for each watch. Obrink wanted to know why.

The captain told him it was none of his business to ask questions. The Swede assented and backed down. We chose each an Irishman. Obrink a tall, loose-jointed man named Pat Ryan and I a compact, stocky fellow named Mike Leary. Next day the captain had the boatswains shift their dunnage and bunk and mess aft. They were nearly as great gluttons as Obrink. They fed like animals and the subject of food and drink was the backbone of their conversation.

The crew were hearty eaters as well and Captain Andrews catered to their likings. The *Joyous Castle* was amazingly well found, the cabin fare very abundant and varied, the forecabin food plenty and good.

Soon after Captain Andrews was sure that the crew had entirely sobered up from their shore drinking he called them aft one noon and announced that the steward was to serve grog daily until further notice. Naturally they cheered. After that we had a good, cheap wine daily in the cabin. When Captain Andrews had made up his mind that both mates and both boatswains were sober men he had a bottle of whisky placed on the rack over the table and kept filled. It was a curiosity to watch Obrink, Ryan and Leary patronize that bottle. Not one of the three but was cautious, not one of the three but could have drunk three times as much as he did. But the way they savored every drop they took, the affectionate satisfaction they exhibited over each nip, their eager anticipation of the next made a spectacle.

Captain Andrews kept good discipline; we crossed the line and round the Cape of Good Hope without any event.

When we were off Madagascar, Obrink, going below to get his sextant, missed it from its place. The ship was searched and Captain Andrews held an inquisition. But the sextant was never found, nor any light thrown on how it had disappeared. After that the captain alone took the observations.

Then began a series of erratic changes of our course. We kept on dodging about for six weeks, until the crew talked of nothing else and openly said the captain was trying to lose us; certainly not one of us except the captain could have designated our position. We knew we were south of the line, not ten degrees south of it, and between fifty and one hundred and ten east longitude, but within those limits we might be almost anywhere.

We had had nothing that could be called a storm since we left New York. When a storm struck us it was a storm indeed. When it blew over it left us making water fast. After a day and a night at the pumps, we took to our boats. Captain Andrews had the cook and the cabin boy in his boat, gave each boatswain a dory and two men, and directed us to steer north by east. When Obrink and I asked for our latitude and longitude he said that was his business. He had had the boats provisioned while we pumped and they were well supplied. We left the ship under a clear sky, the wind light after the storm, the ground swell running heavy and slow. We lowered near sunset.

Next morning the captain's boat had vanished, and there we were, two whaleboats, two dories, twenty men in all and no idea of our position.

The third day we sighted land. It was a low atoll, not much more than a mile across, nearly circular as far as we could make out, with the usual cocoa palms all along its ring, the surf breaking on interrupted reefs off shore, and, as we drew nearer, a channel into the lagoon facing us. As we threaded it we saw about the center of the lagoon a steep, narrow, pinkish crag, maybe fifty feet high, with a bit of a flattish island showing behind it. Otherwise the lagoon was unbroken. We made a landing on the atoll near the channel where we had entered, found good water, cocoanuts in abundance and hogs running wild all about, but no traces of human beings. I shot a hog and the men roasted it at once. As they ate they talked of nothing but the short rations they had had in the boats. They were all docile enough and good natured, but I believe every man of them said a dozen

times how much he missed his grog, and Obrink, who had kept himself and his boat-load well in hand, said a score of times how much he would like to serve out grog, but must take care of his small supply. They talked a great deal of their hunger in the boats and of their relish for the pork. They ate an astonishing number of cocoanuts. It seemed to me that they were as greedy a set of men as could be met with.

We cut down five palm trees, and on supports made of the others set one horizontally as a ridge pole. Over this we stretched the sails of the whaleboats. So we camped on the sand beach of the lagoon. I slept utterly. But when I waked I understood the men, one and all, to complain of light and broken sleep, of dreams, of dreaming they heard a queer noise like music, of seeming to continue to hear it after they woke. They breakfasted on another hog and on more cocoanuts.

Then Obrink told me to take charge of the camp. I agreed. He had everything removed from his whaleboat and into it piled all the men, except a little Frenchman who went by no name save "Frenchy," a New Englander named Peddicord, a short, red-headed Irishman named Mullen, Ryan, my boatswain and myself. Those of my watch who wanted to go, I let go. They rowed off, across the lagoon toward the pink crag.

After Obrink and the men were gone I meant to take stock of our stores. I sent Ryan with Frenchy around the atoll in one direction, and Peddicord, who had sense for a foremast hand, with Mullen, in the other direction. I then went over the stores. Fairly promising for twenty men they were, even for a random boat voyage in the Indian ocean. With unlimited cocoanuts and abundant hogs they were a handsome provision, and need only be safeguarded from the omnipresent rats.

Very shortly my four men returned, the two parties nearly at the same time. It was nearly noon, and no sign of Obrink or the boat. I had followed the whaleboat with my glass till it rounded the pink crag, a short half mile away, and disappeared. Ryan asked my permission to take one dory and go join the rest on the crag. I readily agreed, for I had not yet cached the spirits. They rowed off as the others had.

I made use of their welcome absence to conceal the liquor in four different places, carefully writing, in my notebook, the marks by which I was to find the caches again. I did the like with most of the ammunition. I had

no idea of trying to get the upper hand of Obrink, I meant to tell him of my proceedings and expected him to approve.

I expected the men back about two hours before sunset. No sign of them appeared. No sign of them near sunset, nor at sunset. Of course I had waited inactive till it was too late for me to venture alone on the unknown lagoon at night, and there would have been no sense in one man going to look for nineteen, anyhow. Moreover, I must protect our stores from hogs and rats. I turned over in my mind a thousand conjectures and slept little.

Next morning I slung what I could of our stores from our jury ridgepole, out of the reach of hogs and rats, made sure that the remaining whaleboat would not get adrift, prepared the remaining dory with cocoanuts, biscuits, a keg of water, liquor, some miscellaneous stores, medicine, ammunition, repeating rifle, my glass and my compass. I carried two revolvers. I knew by this time something was wrong and I rowed warily across the placid lagoon toward the pink crag.

As I approached it I could not but remark the peacefulness and beauty of my surroundings. The sky was deep tropic blue, the sun not an hour high, the wind a mild breeze, hardly more than rippling the lagoon; my horizon was all the tops of palms on the atoll except the one glimpse of white surf on the reef beyond the channel where we had entered.

I rowed slowly, for the dory was heavy, and kept looking over my shoulder.

The crag rose sheer out of deep water. It might have been granite, but I could not tell what sort of stone it was. It was very pink and nothing grew on it, not anything whatever. It was just sheer naked rock. As I rounded it I could see the flattish island beyond. There was not a tree on it and I could see nothing but the even beach of it rising some six or eight feet above high-water mark. Nothing was visible beyond the crest of the beach. I knew our men had meant to land on it and I stopped and considered. Then I rowed around the base of the crag. Facing the flat islet was a sort of a shelf of the pink rock, half submerged, half out of the water, sloping very gently and just the place to make a landing. I rowed the dory carefully till its bottom grated on the flat top of this shelf, the bow in, say, a foot of water, the stern over water maybe sixty fathom deep, for I could see no bottom to its limpid blue. I stepped out and drew the dory well up on the shelf. Then I essayed to climb the crag.

I succeeded at once, but it was none too easy and I had no leisure to look behind me till I reached the top. Once on the fairly flat top, which might have been thirty feet across, I turned and looked over the islet.

Then I sat down heavily and took out my flask. I took a big drink, shut my eyes, said a prayer, I think, and looked again. I saw just what I had seen before.

There was about a ship's length of water between the crag and the islet, which might have been four ship's lengths across and was nearly circular. All round it was a white beach of clean coral sand, sloping evenly and rising perhaps ten feet at most above high-water mark. The rest of the island was a meadow, nearly level but cupping ever so little from the crest of the beach. It was covered with short, soft-looking grass, of a bright pale green, a green like that of an English lawn in spring. In the center of the island and of the meadow was an oval slab of pinkish stone, the same stone, apparently, as made up the crag on which I sat. On it were two shapes of living creatures, but shapes which I rubbed my eyes to look at. Midway between the slab and the crest of the beach a long windrow heap of something white swept in a circle round the slab, maybe ten fathom from it. I did not surely make out what the windrow was composed of until I took my glasses to it.

But it needed no glass to see our men, all nineteen of them, all sitting, some just inside the white windrow, some just outside of it, some on it or in it. Their faces were turned to the slab.

I took my glass out of my pocket, trembling so I could hardly adjust it. With it I saw clearly, the windrow as I had guessed, the shapes on the slab as I had seemed to see them with my unaided eyes.

The windrow was all of human bones, I could see them clearly through the glass.

The two creatures on the slab were shaped like full-bodied young women. Except their faces nothing of their flesh was visible. They were clad in something close-fitting, and pearly gray, which clung to every part of them, and revealed every curve of their forms, as it were a tight-fitting envelopment of fine moleskin or chinchilla. But it slumbered in the sunlight more like eiderdown.

And their hair! I rubbed my eyes. I took out my handkerchief and rubbed the lenses of my glass. I looked again. I saw as before. Their hair was abundant, and fell in curly waves to their hips. But it seemed a deep

dark blue, or a dull intense shot green or both at once or both together. I could not see it any other way.

And their faces!

Their faces were those of white women, of European women, of young, handsome gentlewomen.

One of them lay on the slab half on her side, her knees a little drawn up, her head on one bent arm, her face toward me, as if asleep. The other sat, supporting herself by one straight arm. Her mouth was open, her lips moved, her face was the face of a woman singing. I dared not look any more. It was so real and so incredible.

I scanned our men through my glass. I could see their shoulders heave as they breathed, otherwise not one moved a muscle, while I looked at him.

I shut my glass and put it in my pocket. I shouted. Not a man turned. I fixed my gaze so as to observe the whole group at once. I shouted again. Not a man moved. I took my revolver from its holster and fired in the air. Not a man turned.

Then I started to clamber down the crag. I had to turn my back on the islet, regard the far horizon, fix my gaze on the camp, discernible by the white patch where the white sails were stretched over the palm trunk and try to realize the reality of things before I could gather myself together to climb down.

I made it, but I nearly lost my hold a dozen times.

I pushed off the dory, rowed to the islet, and beached the dory between the other and the whaleboat. Both were half adrift and I hauled them up as well as I could.

Then I went up the beach. When I came to its crest and saw the backs of our men I shouted again. Not a man turned his head. I approached them, their faces were set immovably toward the rock and the two appearances on it.

Peddicord was nearest to me, the windrow of bones in front of him was not wide nor high. He stared across it. I caught him by the shoulders and shook him; then he did turn his head and look up at me, just a glance, the glance of a peevish, protesting child disturbed at some absorbing play, an unintelligent, vacuous glance, unrecognizing and uncomprehending.

The glance startled me enough, for Peddicord had been a hard-headed, sensible Yankee. But the change in his face, since yesterday, startled me more. Of a sudden I realized that

Peddicord, Ryan, Mullen and Frenchy had been without food or water since I last saw them, that they had been just where I found them since soon after they left me, had been exposed the day before to a tropical sun for some six hours, had sat all night also without moving, or sleeping. At the same instant I realized that the rest had been in the same state for some hours longer, some hours of a burning, morning tropical sun. The realization of it lost my head completely. I ran from man to man, I yelled, I pulled them, I struck them.

Not one struck back, or answered, or looked at me twice. Each shook me off impatiently and relapsed into his intent posture, even Obrink.

Obrink, it is true, partially opened his mouth, as if to speak.

I saw his tongue!

I ran to the boat, took a handful of ship biscuit and a pan of water, with these I returned to the men.

Not one would notice the biscuit, not one showed any interest in the water, not one looked at it as if he saw it when I held it before his face, not one tried to drink, not one would drink when I tried to force it on him.

I emptied my flask into the water; with that I went from man to man. Not even the smell of the whisky roused them. Each pushed the pan from before his face, each resisted me, each shoved me away.

I went back to the boat, filled a tin cup with raw whisky and went the round with that. Not one would regard it, much less swallow it.

Then I myself turned to the slab of stone.

There sat the sirens. Well I recognized now what they were. Both were awake now and both singing. What I had seen through the glass was visible more clearly, more intelligibly. They were indeed shaped like young, healthy women; like well-matured Caucasian women. They were covered all over with close, soft plumage, like the breast of a dove, colored like the breast of a dove, a pale, delicate, iridescent, pinkish gray. As a woman's long hair might trail to her hips, there trailed from their heads a mass of long, dark strands. Imagine single strands of ostrich feathers, a yard long or more, curling spirally or at random, colored the deep, shot-blue green of the eye of a peacock feather or of a gamecock's hackles. That was what grew from their heads, as I seemed to see it.

I stepped over the windrow of bones. Some were mere dust; some leached gray by sun,

wind and rain; some white. Skulls were there, five or six I saw in as many yards of the windrow near me and more beyond. In some places the windrow was ten feet wide and three feet deep in the middle. It was made up of the skeletons of hundreds of thousands of victims.

I took out my other revolver, spun the cylinder, and strode toward the slab.

Forty feet from it I stopped. I was determined to abolish the superhuman monsters. I was resolute. I was not afraid. But I stopped. Again and again I strove to go nearer, I braced my resolutions. I tried to go nearer, I could not.

Then I tried moving sideways. I was able to step. I made the circuit of the slab, some forty feet from it. Nearer I could not go. It was as if a glass wall were between me and the sirens.

Standing at my distance, once I found I could go no nearer, I essayed to aim my revolver at them. My muscles, my nerves refused to obey me. I tried in various ways. I might have been paralyzed. I tried other movements, I was capable of any other movement. But aim at them I could not.

I regarded them. Especially their faces, their wonderful faces.

Their investiture of opalescent plumelets covered their throats. Between it and the deep, dark chevelure above, their faces showed ivory-smooth, delicately tinted. I could see their ears, too; shell-like ears, entirely human in form, peeping from under the glossy shade of their miraculous tresses.

They were as like each other as any twin sisters.

Their faces were oval, their features small, clean-cut, regular and shapely, their foreheads were wide and low, their brows were separate, arched, penciled and definite, not of hair, but of tiny feathers, of a gold-shot, black, blue-green like the color of their ringlets, but far darker. I took out my binoculars and coned their brows. Their eyes were dark blue-gray, bright and young, their noses were small and straight, low between the eyes, neither wide nor narrow, and with molded nostrils, rolled and fine. Their upper lips were short, both lips crimson red and curved about their small mouths, their teeth were very white, their chins round and babyish. They were beautiful and the act of singing did not mar their beauty. Their mouths did not strain open, but their lips parted easily into an opening. Their throats seemed to ripple like the throat

of a trilling canary bird. They sang with zest and the zest made them all the more beautiful. But it was not so much their beauty that impressed me, it was the nobility of their faces.

Some years before I had been an officer on the private steam yacht of a very wealthy nobleman. He was of a family fanatically devoted to the church of Rome and all its interests. Some Austrian nuns, of an order made up exclusively of noblewomen, were about to go to Rome for an audience with the Pope. My employer placed his yacht at their disposal and we took them on at Trieste. They several times sat on deck during the voyage and the return. I watched them as much as I could, for I never had seen such human faces, and I had seen many sorts. Their faces seemed to tell of a long lineage of men all brave and honorable, women gentle and pure. There was not a trace on their faces of any sort of evil in themselves or in anything that had ever really influenced them. They were really saintly faces, the faces of ideal nuns.

Well, the sirens' faces were like that, only more ineffably perfect. There was no guile or cruelty in them, no delight in the exercise of their power, no consciousness of it, no consciousness of my proximity, or of the spell-bound men, or of the uncountable skeletons of their myriad victims. Their faces expressed but one emotion: utter absorption in the ecstasy of singing, the infinite preoccupation of artists in their art.

I walked all round them, gazing now with all my eyes, now through my short-focused glass. Their coat of feathers was as if very short and close like sealskin fur and covered them entirely, from the throat down to the ends of their fingers and the soles of their feet. They did not move except to sit up to sing or lie down to sleep. Sometimes both sang together, sometimes alternately, but if one slept the other sang on and on without ceasing.

I of course could not hear their music, but the mere sight of them fascinated me so that I forgot my weariness from anxiety and loss of sleep, forgot the vertical sun, forgot food and drink, forgot my shipmates, forgot everything.

But as I could not hear this state was transitory. I began to look elsewhere than at the sirens. My gaze turned again upon the men. Again I made futile efforts to reach the sirens, to shoot at them, to aim at them. I could not.

I returned to my dory and drank a great deal of water. I ate a ship biscuit or two.

I then made the round of the men, and tried on each food, water and spirits. They were oblivious to everything except the longing to listen, to listen, to listen.

I walked round the windrow of bones. With the skulls and collapsing rib-arches, I found leather boots, several leather belts, case-knives, kreeses, guns of various patterns, pistols, watches, gold and jeweled finger-rings and coins, many coins, copper, silver and gold. The grass was short, not three inches deep and the earth under it smooth as a rolled lawn.

The bones were of various ages, but all old, except two skeletons, entire, side by side, just beyond the windrow at the portion opposite where the men sat. There was long fine golden hair on one skull. Women, too!

I went back to the dory, rowed to the camp, shot a hog, roasted it, wrapped the steaming meat in fresh leaves and rowed back to the islet. It was not far from sunset.

Not a man heeded the savory meat, still warm. They just sat and gazed and listened.

I was free of the spell, I could do them no good by staying. I rowed back to camp before sunset and slept, yes, I slept all night long.

The sun woke me. I shot and cooked another hog, took every bit of rope or marline I could find and rowed back to the islet.

You are to understand that the men had by then been more than forty hours, all of them, without moving or swallowing anything. If I was to save any it must be quickly.

I found them as they had been, but with an appalling change in themselves. The day before they had been uncannily unaware of their sufferings, to-day they were hideously conscious of them.

Once I had a pet terrier, a neat, trim, intelligent little beast. He ran under a moving train and had both his hind legs cut off. He dragged himself to me, and the appealing gaze of his eyes expressed at once his inability to comprehend what had happened to him, his bewilderment at pain, the first really excruciating pain he had ever known in all his little life, and his dumb wonder that I did not help him, that it could be possible he could be with me and his trouble continue.

Once I had the misfortune to see a lovely child, a beautiful little girl, not six years old, frightfully burned. Her look haunted me with the like incomprehension of what had befallen her, the like incredulity at the violence of her suffering, the like amazement at our failure to relieve her.

Well, out of the staring, blood-shot eyes of those bewitched men I saw the same look of helpless wonderment and mute appeal.

Strange, but I never thought of knocking them senseless. I had an idea of trying them one by one, carrying or dragging them to the dory and ferrying my captives to camp.

I began on Frenchy, he was nearest the boat and smallest.

He fought like a demon. After all that sleeplessness and fasting he was stronger than I. Our tussle wore me out, but moved him not at all.

I tried them with the warm, juicy, savory pork. They paid no heed to it and pushed me away. I tried them with biscuit, water and liquor. Not one heeded. I tried Obrink particularly. Again he opened his lips. His tongue was black, hard, and swelled till it filled his mouth.

Then I lost count of time, of what I did, of what happened. I do not know whether it was on that day or the next that the first man died. He was Jack Register, a New York wharf rat. The next died a few hours later, a Philadelphia seaman he was, named Tom Smith.

They putrefied with a rapidity surpassing anything I ever saw, even in a horse dropped dead of overdriving.

The rest sat there by the carrion of their comrades, rocking with weakness, crazed by sleeplessness, racked by tortures inexpressible, the gray of death deepening on their faces, listening, listening, listening.

As I said, I had lost consciousness of time. I do not know how many days Obrink lived, and he was the last to die. I do not know how long it was after his death before I came to myself.

I made one last effort to put an end to the enchantresses. The same spell possessed me. I could not aim, much less pull trigger; I could not approach nearer than before.

When I was myself I made haste to leave the accursed isle. I made ready the second whaleboat with all the best stores she could carry and spare sails. I stepped the mast and steered across the lagoon, for the wind was southerly and there was a wider channel at the north of the atoll.

As I passed the islet, I could see nothing but the white sand beach that ringed it. For all my horror I could not resist landing once more for one last look.

Under the afternoon sun I saw the green meadow, the white curve of bones, the rotting corpses, the pink slab, the feathered sirens, their sweet serene faces uplifted, singing on in a rapt trance.

I took but the one look. I fled. The whaleboat passed the outlet of the lagoon. North by east I steered.

Parts of the Indian ocean are almost free of storms. The atoll was apparently in one of those parts. I soon passed out of it. Three storms blew me about, I lost my dead-reckoning, I lost count of the days. Between the storms I lashed the tiller amidships, double-reefed the sail and slept as I needed sleep. Through the storms I baled furiously, the whaleboat riding at a sea-anchor of oars and sails. I had been at sea alone for all of twenty-one days when I was rescued, not three hundred miles from Ceylon, by a tramp steamer out of Colombo bound for Adelaide.

Here he broke off, stood up and for the rest of the watch maintained his sentry-go by the break of the poop.

Next day we towed into the harbor of Honolulu, then still the capital of an island kingdom, and maintaining an opera-bouffe court. I hastened to go ashore. When my boat was ready the deaf mate was forward, superintending the sealing of the hatches.

After some days of comparative isolation at the hotel, I found a harborage with five jolly bachelors, housekeeping in a delightful villa up Nuuanu way. The *Bennington* was in the harbor and I thought I knew a lieutenant on her and went off one day to visit him. After my visit my boatman landed me at the Red Steps. As I trod up the steps a man came down. He was English all over, irreproachably shod, trousered, coated, gloved, hatted and monocled. Behind him two porters carried big, new portmanteaux. I recognized the man whom I had known as John Wilson of Liverpool, second mate of the *Medorus*, the man who had seen the sirens.

Not only did I recognize him, but he recognized me. He gave me no far-off British stare. His eyes lit, even the monocled eye. He held out his hand.

"I am going home," he said, nodding toward a steamer at anchor. "I am glad we met. I enjoyed our talks. Perhaps we may meet again."

He shook hands without any more words. I stood at the top of the steps and watched his boat put off, watched it as it receded. As I

watched a bit of paper on a lower step caught my eye. I went down and picked it up. It was an empty envelope, with an English stamp and postmark, addressed:

Geoffrey Cecil, Esq.,
In care of Swanwick & Co.,
54 Kaahumanu Street,
Honolulu,
Hawaiian Islands.

I looked after the distant boat, I could barely make him out as he sat in the stern. I never saw him again.

Naturally I asked every Englishman I ever met if he had ever heard of a deaf man named Geoffrey Cecil. For more than ten years I elicited no response. Then at lunch, in the Hotel Victoria at Interlaken, I happened to be seated opposite a stout, elderly Briton. He perceived that I was an American and became affable and agreeable. I never saw him after that lunch and never learned his name. But through our brief meal together we conversed freely.

At a suitable opportunity I put my usual query.

"Geoffrey Cecil?" he said. "Deaf Geoffrey Cecil? Of course I know of him. Knew

him, too. He was, or is earl of Aldersmere."

"Was or is?" I queried.

"It was this way," my interlocutor explained. "The ninth earl of Aldersmere had three sons. All predeceased him and each left one son. Geoffrey was the heir. He had wanted to go into the navy, but his deafness cut him off from that. When he quarreled with his father he naturally ran away to sea. Track of him was lost. He was supposed dead. That was years before his father's death. When his father died nothing had been heard of him for ten years. But when his grandfather died and his cousin Roger supposed himself earl, some firm of solicitors interposed, claiming that Geoffrey was alive. That was in 1885. It was a full six months before Geoffrey turned up. Roger was no end disappointed. Geoffrey paid no attention to anything but buying or chartering a steam yacht. She sailed as soon as possible, passed the canal, touched at Aden, and has never been heard of since. That was nine years ago."

"Is Roger Cecil alive?" I asked.

"Very much alive," affirmed my informant.

"You may tell him from me," I declared, "that he is now the eleventh earl of Aldersmere."