

The Boston Sunday Globe

THE BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE—FEBRUARY 8, 1920—SEVENTY-SIX PAGES

FOUGHT SAVAGE MUTINEERS WITH FISTS AS ONLY WEAPONS

Malden Boy, Only White Man on Christmas Island, Caught by Rebellious Natives While Without A Weapon—His Desperate Battle For Life



NATHANIEL "SANTA CLAUS" ROUGIER



"TAMA"
The Kanaka Boy Who Drove Joseph English's Automobile

By JAMES H. POWERS

The Globe last Sunday introduced its readers to Joseph English of Malden, who has a story of adventures in the South Sea more thrilling than that told by the hero of the immortal romance of Robinson Crusoe. And, unlike Crusoe, he has documents to prove the truth of his story.

In last Sunday's instalment Mr English told of his first visit to Christmas Island, his appointment as manager and the veiled hostility shown by Morgan, the manager he was to supersede. Today he resumes his story at the point when he returned to the island to take charge. The account of the voyage has been omitted as not essential to the story.

JOSEPH ENGLISH'S STORY

On a bright morning in mid-October the Ysabel May made the island landfall. Shortly before noon we nosed across the Strait, past Cooks Island, fair in the middle of the lagoon entrance and named after the famous navigator, who was the first to visit the atoll.

We went into mooring at the Point, below London House, and I stepped ashore again upon Christmas Island, manager, monarch, emperor, what you will. Here my word was to be law, and here on this mere speck of cocoanut groves and coral I had the power of life and death.

Morgan was there to meet us, and with him, as before, a large gathering of natives. He seemed to have a strong influence with the savage islanders, who were brought to Christmas Island to work the plantations in the absence of all natives on the place.

As we talked the former manager took little pains to hide his hostility toward me. The same curtness and sarcasm of speech that had come into being with the orders appointing me manager, over his head, was at once apparent.

Rediscovering His Grudge

But I paid little heed to all this. For was he not going to leave within a couple of days on the Ysabel May? I felt that it would be foolish to wrangle with him, hardly worth while, and least of all before the natives with whom I was to live for months on end.

So I swallowed my anger and went with the captain and Morgan into the house.

For all his jealousy, Morgan was at no pains whatever to hide his rejoicing at the approach of his return to the civilized world, and at times his delight got the better of him to such an extent that he became pleasant for hours together. Then he would suddenly rediscover his grudge and turn sullen, like a child.

So the first day passed, and our little company at London House began to feel somewhat at home.

The captain was busy directing the landing of the cargo of supplies and I superintended the storing of the provisions in the shacks near the house.

Before many hours had passed I noticed that the natives were eyeing me askance. Plainly the new manager was a subject of much speculation among the help, especially as they were all of them just casuals on the island, under my direction as long as I remained in charge.

The First Test

There was no end of alacrity when Morgan asked for a thing. But when I issued any order the blacks obeyed sullenly, I fancied, and certainly in utter silence.

It grew evident that they were biding their time to make a test of the new manager, and I sensed this immediately, but I continued to supervise the stowing away of the cargo and waited.

The test came sooner than I dreamed. When I went out after breakfast the next morning, Pakoi, a huge naked black, was mixed in a wild tussle with Tuaane, who worked about the house. A number of others were standing about, watching the fight.

When I put in an appearance the jabbered comments on the battle stopped at once and everyone eyed me to see what I should do.

I went up to the two battling savages and ordered them to stop. At first they paid no attention to me. Then I laid hands on the nearest one and gave him a thrust that sent him staggering a few feet over the sand.

With a rush both he and his late enemy threw themselves upon me. It was a short fray. The long cruise in the Ysabel May had bottled up considerable energy and as this was the first opportunity, I let it out.

With one clean swing to the jaw I sent Pakoi sprawling again. A second blow disposed of Tuaane's ambitions.

Had Gone Far Enough

They both stood off, very sheepish, and looked at me, while the onlookers jabbered excitedly and laughed at them. They were as simple minded as children, those natives, in some ways, and their approval turned lightly from one side to the other as the odds became apparent.

But, although I had quelled the initial row, I had started something which was nearly to prove my undoing.

Morgan was looking on with an ironical grin on his face and a that moment there flashed over me the sudden conviction that he was at the bottom of it all.

Ordering the natives to work and sending Tuaane to the house to wait for me, I turned to the ex-manager. It had gone far enough and I felt that I could not stand much more of his underhand plotting and unpleasantness.

The irony of his tongue I did not mind, but the sudden suspicion that he had been trying to create trouble for me among the natives carried me beyond prudence.

"Is there anything particular that you're looking for?" I demanded fully aroused.

He stared at me insolently and answered: "No, nothing in particular."

"Then you had better go aboard ship, Mr Morgan," says I. "I've stood about all that I'm going to ---"

He shrugged his shoulders and turned upon his heel, walking toward the Point, where the Ysabel May was discharging cargo. And, except for two or three glimpses and a meal that passed in utter silence, that was the last I saw of him.

Shaking Off the Spell

Early next morning, all supplies being discharged, the schooner put to sea. I watched her fade into the distance, and a tumult of thoughts possessed me, thoughts of 'Frisco, from which I was now shut off completely; thoughts of my utter isolation here, where I was the sole white man among more than a hundred South Sea Islanders; thoughts of the condition of cocoanut plantations, which I had not viewed for months, and of old "Santa Claus" Rougier, whose far-reaching hand had stretched forth and gathered myself and the natives together here, for copra.

I shook off the spell that had been cast over me by that departing schooner and I turned to my work. I was manager of an island and had a vast deal to do, and no time for dreaming and speculation.

The problem of visiting the plantations of cocoanuts, which were spread about on the different parts of the island, was simplified by a trio of automobiles, although but one of the machines could be operated. It was an ancient affair indeed, a rickety, noisy discouraging affair, which demanded constant attention and tinkering.

Automobiling on Christmas Island

The beach roads ran from one end of Christmas Island to the other, and they were fairly passable. With the rattling old machine I managed to make all the rounds in a single day.

Tiaran who showed an aptness toward machinery, I decided to make my mechanic, and soon had him busy with the motorboat off the point. Next he turned his hand to the automobile, and with excellent results.

To try him out, I put him to work on the copra, but he made very poor progress, and I shifted him back again. Morgan had told me that he was a copra worker.

Then I turned to and began operations in the plantations. The cocoanut palms were very beautiful and lofty, growing to the height of 60 to 100 feet, with a cylindrical stem which sometimes would measure as much as two feet in diameter.

The leaf, which frequently measured 20 feet in length, had numerous sharp leaflets that sprung from the main rib, and this gave the whole thing the appearance of a gigantic feather.

The flowers were on branching spikes, 5 or 6 feet long, inclosed in a tough covering, and when the fruits matured they grew in bunches of from 10 to 20; these branches were oblong in maturity and triangular in cross section, measuring sometimes 18 or 20 inches wide. The true nut was inclosed in a tough fibrous covering, and it contained the milky white liquid which everyone knows as cocoanut milk.

How Cocoanuts are grown

The work of enlarging the plantations, caring for the groves and keeping a keen eye upon the nurseries was no small job in spite of our force, for we were beset by heavy winds, which bowed over whole swathes of the groves.

Pests of all manner and sort came into the nurseries and destroyed the seedlings. The sun glared down upon the newly set plantlings and wilted them unless one kept fetching water.

And even the blue and deadly waters of the grand lagoon sent forth hordes of crabs to cut down the small plants.

First of all, the nuts would be planted in mud or wet sand in the nurseries, with the soft spore upward. The seedlings grew through the spores.

The nuts in the nurseries were placed in squares, about 400 nuts to a square, and covered an inch deep with seaweed and sand, or mud. They were then watered plentifully.

Usually the nuts put down in April would grow enough to be ready for plating in the groves before the rains of September. There they were each one in a hole, about three feet deep, which was lined with seaweed to help hold the tree roots.

Coverings of palm had to be kept over the newly set nurslings, to protect them from the sun. The trees did not begin to bear fruit until about the fifth year.

Diving Forces

One of the discoveries that I first made was that over in the Paris house there was a store of wine, and, as the natives were not any too enthusiastic as the days went on and the work increased, I decided to get rid of it by auction to them, and thus remove what might become a danger to the welfare of the plantation.

One day's celebration by all, I felt, would be preferable to persistent and continual drunkenness on the part of two or three workers, a situation which might harm the morale of the entire colony.

When the rains came, and sickness, and I was laid up with a fever, I repented of my earlier sagacity, however.

The ravages of the pests became so bad that I finally decided to execute a master stroke of policy. As it turned out, I acted better than I knew in the matter.

For when I split the working force in halves, and sent Tama to Malden plantation with the first crew, on the lower edge of the Grand Lagoon, I had reduced the force with which I had to deal by 50 percent. And the force, as I could not help noticing as the days passed, was becoming noticeably sullen.

Not Like the Old Manager

Everywhere I turned I found the hand of the departed Morgan before me. When I ordered a thin done, the blacks would stand up and tell me that I wasn't doing things the way my predecessor had done them.

"I am manager now," I had to keep repeating; but the repetition did not have any noticeable effect in quelling the disaffection. And so, soon, I dismissed it from my mind.

I had learned their language by this time, and they did not dare to make remarks about me within hearing. So they would go to work in silence, with an exasperating lack of interest, until I was on the verge of losing my temper again.

This would have been fatal. So I determined to keep up a cold front and not to give in an inch.

Things went on and the days of October lazied past. The coral roads cut the tires of the auto frightfully. Tiarin was forever repairing and repairing until that auto became a veritable nightmare.

The spare parts which the captain had not delivered would have proved a godsend, and I bitterly regretted the easy giving over of the search in the schooner's hold before she had left.

False Security

The plantation was working finely. The gang on the lower side of the Isle, toiling under the watchful eye of Tama during work hours, seemed to be making genuine progress.

And, secure in the daily monotony of routine, the visits to the groves and nurseries, the struggles of Tiarin over the recalcitrant auto, the cruising about the Grand Lagoon in the power boat, spearing fish, or catching the vicious sharks that infested its waters, the making and storing of the copra, in the little shack over at the Paris house, and the wagering of endless battles with crabs and other pests, secure in all this I became gradually indifferent to the moods of the sea island descendants of the cannibals who were working for me.

I thought that the struggle was over. My disillusioning was to be abrupt and sudden and complete.

November came. Terrific thunder storms and buffeting tempests of wind and rain lashed Christmas Island from reef to reef's end. The surf roared like muffled thunder along the straits, and Cook's Isle was a crashing drift of spume.

Out of invisible might skies the lightning spurted. The shacks in the plantation and even London house, swayed and moaned as if the end of the world were nigh.

The Schooner's Return

Then there would come days of astonishing clarity, when we would find trees from our groves littered all over the roadway. On one such occasion, as the men were at work clearing the way, a tactless mention of Morgan's methods by one of the blacks brought him into violent contact with my toe.

Then I forgot the matter in the rush to get the copra conditioned and bagged and stored against the coming of the schooner.

The month drew to an end. The work on the copra was progressing at top speed, when I fell sick and fought my way through a nasty fever with only Tama to lend me aid, and he but a boy of 18 years, But I managed to pull through, and again set to work cleaning up the copra.

On the 15th came the schooner, and we had a couple of days' diversion after the load was shipped. She left on the 18th.

Then we began to carry out seed, to get ready for planting. We were just about started when the blow fell.

If I had not become by this time accustomed to the island savages, I should, perhaps, have noticed something was going wrong. Even my sense of security did not prevent me, early on the morning of the 30th of December, from noticing that two hands sneaked away without my permission to Motu Manu.

Trouble Comes

The queer look on the faces of the workers also roused my curiosity, but I did not suspect what was really brewing. I thought it was all the usual grumbling and the temporary sullenness brought on by the arriving of the planting season and the prospect of hard work.

That night, I had come down from London House with Tama in the auto, to the Plantation House below Eric Basin. I was travelling light, as usual, and had no weapons.

I had never carried weapons on Christmas Island since my arrival, save on the occasion of a hunting trip, or when I went exploring down toward the South East Cape.

It was about 8 o'clock at night and I was sitting inside the plantation house, telling Tama stories, when I heard a sound of voices. Tama's face went white. Several natives crowded in at the doorway. They wanted to know whether they would finish work when they had plated 100 coconuts.

That brought me to my feet. "You will all of you plant 200 nuts and finish when you have planted them each day. You know that," I answered.

They did not budge. They would not work so hard, they said. Morgan had treated them better. He had told them all about me, how they would have to work when I came. I was a bad manager. I had no feeling whatever for poor men Morgan

Without a Weapon

If Morgan had been at my elbow that moment I am sure that I would have killed him with my bare hands. I made a move toward the door and the crowd pushed and scrambled through it into the open. They came to a halt at a short distance..

I stood in the threshold and shouted: "You are under contract to work nine hours a day. Now you shall work nine hours a day"

They wanted to start work later, but I refused. At that they sang out to Tama to leave me, and the boy turned a scared face toward the door, half a mind to escape to them, and avoid the battle.

"You stay with me, Tama," said I.

Again he wavered "It is very bad," he whispered, his knees shaking.

"That'll be all right," I responded.

"We will go to London House."

And, though the fear of death was upon his countenance, he stood by me. I scented serious trouble and determined to make my escape before it broke. So, with Tama at my side, I strode boldly out to the automobile.

And now I cursed my folly for wandering about in a fool's paradise and leaving my revolver and shotgun behind me. Supposing they sent some one ahead of me and stole my weapons. I would be defenseless.

But there was no use in regrets. We must get out of this. The crowd gave way to the right and left before us. We climbed into the auto. Tama tried to start the motor.

It balked. He got out and looked.

Every wire connection on the automobile had been broken.

The Death Chant

While Tama was trying to fix the wires, Teri A. Fa and Teiva, two huge black brutes, started to jeer at him for remaining with the master.

I seized a piece of board and started for them, to put an end to the affair once for all. I was frightened myself, worse than I have ever been frightened before.

No sooner had I left the chauffeur than the crowd descended upon him like an avalanche. Clubs appeared as if by magic. Knives were flourished. Several of the crowd began to pick up boulders. Others turned and ran for whatever they could see as weapons.

Shrill cries arose from scores of throats, and in spite of the wild din I could make out their chant:

"Ariana ahoe pohe" "Ariana ohoe pohe" "Pretty soon dead, pretty soon dead." And I knew that they meant business.

Cries from Tama caused me to turn to his aid. He was being beaten insensible, and even as I tore down upon the swirling mass besides the automobile he fell to the sand.

I turned and faced them, keeping my back to the machine. In every eye that glowered at me from that snarling and enraged mob there shone the age-old savagery of the South Sea Islands. There was death in every one of their faces.

Fighting For His Life

Tama, under my feet, lay still, while I beat off the first rush. My fists whirled and battered so steadily that I felt the strain and it seemed as if they were being run mechanically. I was punching and dimly wondering how long I would last, in the unequal battle.

My clothes were torn from my back, leaving me with nothing but the ruins of my last pair of trousers to cover me. Knives came hurtling past my ears and I had to duck them, or ward them off with my bare hands.

Blood was streaming down from a cut in my forehead into my eyes, and the sting of boards and rocks upon my body began to weaken me.

Desperately I tried to think of an expedient to get away. It looked hopeless. In a vast yelling circle, that converged again and again to the attack, the Pacific Island savages had surrounded me.

And, urged by some dumb instinct to get clear or die at once, I started to batter my way toward the road slope.

This thrilling story of mutiny and battle will be continued in next Sunday's Globe