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CLASS C. FIRST PRIZE, 1929. C137

"Time and tide wait for no man."

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### Island Life in the Pacific.

I am awakened by the roar of the breakers on the coral reef. It is five o'clock. Donning my bathing costume, I rush down to the placid lagoon. The brilliant sunshine makes the fine sand sparkle. How cool the water is! Beyond the reef I see a number of canoes — the native pearl-fishing fleet. The day's work has commenced. As I revel in my bath I remember the steamer that calls twice a year is due today.

I hurry back and dress, to find my breakfast being served by my "boy" and as I enjoy my meal I wonder if our lonely island — our nearest English neighbours live on an island thirty miles away! — will ever become a refuelling station when the Empire air service from England to Australia commences. Breakfast over, I go out to help my father in the only "shop" on this island. And what a strange shop it is! We "sell" everything from a rifle or gramophone to a pin; we "buy" only copra and mother of pearl shell. And all our trade is done without money.

"How much for this feller copra 'sar?" asks a brawny native. "That feller stick of 'bacca and this big feller piece of cloth," I answer, and the exchange is made.

On looking out to sea I notice a wisp of smoke — "The steamer!" I exclaim. Everyone is excited. There is already a crowd of natives on the shore. In a few minutes our canoe is fairly flying towards the steamer under the steady work of the oars.

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Through the opening in the reef we glide, and as we near the steamer a rope ladder drops from her deck, and we clamber up. There is a batch of letters for me and I hurriedly tear the envelopes open and read their contents. Koko, our "boy", who knows almost every inch of our small island's coast, takes charge of the steamer. Skillfully he steers her into the lagoon and she drops anchor almost opposite our bungalow. The captain comes ashore for he is going to stay today, and up anchor tomorrow morning. While we are preparing our lunch the house-boys are carrying the new stock from the ship to the stores. They are watched by the excited islanders. After lunch we go into the stores to barter, prepared for a busy afternoon. What an interesting crowd the bustling natives are! The first thing I notice about them is their shiny, white teeth. Their fuzzy, black hair matches their tanned bodies. They wear scarcely any clothing but they are adorned with beads. The cannibalism in them has long died out but they still practice their war-dances on special occasions.

As one native is served another takes his place. There is no rest this afternoon! The rifles are soon "sold" for the natives are keen sportsmen. But they take away a fair share of our other Birmingham goods and our stock of copra and pearl-shell rapidly mounts up.

When we go into tea we "switch on" the wireless and hear music from far-off Sydney. We do appreciate this change from the "pidgin english" we are accustomed to.

As our meal proceeds, the captain tells us that one of his passengers is an Englishman who

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is bound for another of the Solomon Islands (for we are on one of the Solomons). He left his store only eighteen months ago but he could not settle down in England. There is a charm in these islands that cannot be resisted and most of those traders who go home, soon return.

We go out into the shop again. After another two hours' gruelling work we are about to shut up the "stores" when Koko rushes up and informs us that the natives are having a war-dance and a huge fire. We finish locking up the stores and led by Koko we and the captain head towards the native village. The natives are dressed up as of old and at one side of the fire a few islanders are tuning their weird musical instruments. The "band" begins to play and the natives stand up.

Crack! Fizz! Crack! The great fire begins to blaze. The dancers start shouting and singing. Round and round the fire they skip, shouting in a language I don't understand. They advance towards the fire and retreat. This peculiar "dance" goes on for quite a long time.

We then walk back to the bungalow and begin to read the papers which the ship has brought us.

To pass the time away we have plenty of games and when without a visitor we play chess.

Father announces that it is time for the "news" so we "switch on" the wireless again. Our clock is two minutes fast by the time signal - our only means of keeping the right time. We are told by the "skipper" that he has seen many different sunsets but never such a beautiful one as ours. I quite agree with him: the sunset - a mass of changing

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colours, makes the lovely palm trees look even more majestic.

But we feel that in these lonely outposts, we, as well as those who live in the great Empire cities or those who work on the great wheatfields of Canada, are doing our duty to our Empire. We realise that we are "ambassadors" of a sort and ~~by~~<sup>from</sup> our conduct, our fellow-islanders form their opinion of the British race. So here, among these beautiful palms, we try to "play the game." By our kindness and honesty in our dealings with the natives and, what is more, by our own personal conduct, we do our bit to maintain the greatest Empire the world has ever known.

### Sources of Information

"Wireless" lectures at Elementary School.

Lecture by Mr. Clifford Collinson.

"The World and Its People." (Nelson).