

The Stingaree in Sunflower Bay

By LLOYD OSBOURNE

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It was the Sandfly, Capt. Toombs, that brought the news to Sydney and intercepted her majesty's third-class cruiser Stingaree, as she lay in Man-of-War Cove, with her boats hoisted in and a deck-load of coal as high as her bulwarks, on the eve of a long trip into the western Pacific. It was the same old story—another white man sent to his last account in the inhospitable Solomons, where if the climate does not kill you the black man soon will. "Thomas Hyslop Biggar, commonly known as 'Capt. Tom,' aged 46; British subject; occupation, trader in coprah; place of residence, Sunflower bay, island of Guadalcanar; murdered by the natives in September, 1888, between the seventh and the twenty-fourth, and his station looted and burned." There was trouble in store for Sunflower bay; they had killed Collins in 1884, and Casseroles, the Frenchman, in 1887, and had drawn upon themselves an ominous attention by firing into the Meg Merrilies in the course of the same year. Murder was becoming too frequent in Sunflower bay, and Capt. Casement, while policing those sweltering seas, was asked to "conduct an inquiry into the alleged murder of T. H. Biggar, and take what punitive measures he judged to be necessary."

After a roundabout cruise through the pleasant groups of Fiji, Tongataboo and Samoa, with little to occupy him save official dinners, tennis parties, and an occasional dance ashore, Capt. Casement headed his ship for the wild western islands and picked out a course for Sunflower bay.

There was no visible beach, for the mangroves ran to the water's edge, save where it had been partially cleared away by the man whose murder they had come to avenge; nor did the closest scrutiny with the glass betray any telltale smoke or the least sign of habitation. Capt. Casement surveyed the place with his keen, practiced eyes, and the longer he looked the less he liked it. The desolation jarred upon his nerves, and his heart felt a little as the blow-hole burst hoarsely under the ship's quarter, and the everlasting breakers on the outer reef drowned their note of menace and alarm.

"Goodness gracious!" he said, in his abrupt, impatient fashion, as he stood beside Facey on the bridge and superintended the laying of the kedje. "I don't half like the look of it, Mr. Facey; it's a damned nasty-looking place."

"Am I to go, sir?" asked the lieutenant. "Yes," said Casement. "You must take Pickthorn and 25 men in the first cutter. Send Burder in the second, with 20 more, to cover your landing. And for God's sake, Facey, keep cool and neither get flustered nor over-friendly! Don't shoot unless you have to; and always remember they are the most treacherous savages in the world. Be gentle and firm, and do everything with as little fuss and as great a show of confidence as you can."

"All right, sir," said Facey. Half an hour later, Facey, with 25 well-armed men, had vanished into the mangroves.

Hour after hour passed and brought never a sound from the melancholy woods. Just as things were looking desperate and all began to fear the very worst, a sudden shout roused the ship, and the shore party, noisy and triumphant, were seen streaming down to the beach. A few moments later the two boats pulled slowly off to the ship, Facey's company the richer by a black man, whose costume consisted of little more than the ropes he was bound with. As a shouting cheer hailed them with a sweltering under the stern and drew up at the starboard gangway, and Facey was soon reporting himself on the bridge.

"Well, how did you make out?" asked the captain. "We landed at the trader's house," began Facey, "followed a path that led inland, and reached some Kanaka huts. Not a soul in 'em; clean gone, every man jack. Followed along a well beaten path which led us into the next bay, bearing north-northeast half-east, keeping the liveliest lookout all the time. Three miles along we ran into another village, check-a-block with niggers. It looked a nasty go; lots of guns and spears, and everybody pretty skittish, kind of they wouldn't! I recollected your orders and went slow; you know what I mean, sir—worked off the presents, and smoked my pipe leisurely. By and by they came round, tricky as the devil, on to make friends or to eat us alive; whichever seemed the more promising. I let out what I wanted, and bit by bit found out that all the Sunflower bay crowd were there, even to old Jibberik, the chief—him Toombs said was the biggest scoundrel of the lot. He looked pretty sick and knew mighty well what we were after. I talked broadsides to that old man, and put it to him that he had better give up the chaps who had killed the trader than waltz back to the ship and be shot instanter himself—for somebody had to go, I said; and just as soon as I got the old codger alongside of me I gave him to understand that he was my bird, and kept my cocked pistol pointed at his belly. After no end of a fuss, and lots of frothing and loud talk, with things looking precious ugly now and again, we ended by coming out on top. Then they dragged along a young nigger named Billy, a returned labor-boy from the Queensland plantations, they said, and handed him over to me as the murderer."

"You've done well, Mr. Facey," said Casement, as his lieutenant drew to a close, "and I tell you the story shan't lose when I report it to the admiral. You had better go now and get your clothes off," he added.

Facey jumped to his feet. "I am sure I am awfully obliged to you, sir," he said.

"Ugh, that's all right," said Casement, in his testy way. "What have you done with the prisoner?"

"Turned him over to the sergeant for safekeeping, sir," returned the officer.

"Leg-ions," asked Casement. "Leg-ions, handcuffs and a dog chain," returned Facey, with a grin. "He's cost too much to take any chances of his getting off."

The first thing next morning, old Jibberik was brought aboard with his two companions. He was a disgusting old gorilla of a man, with a hairy chest and a bold, leering eye—a mere scarecrow of humanity, of a type incredibly cruel and debased.

Four bells was the time set for the court martial; at nine o'clock Casement sent for Facey and told him he must prepare to defend the prisoner.

"Burder will prosecute for the queen," he said. "Pickthorn will act as clerk. Sennett, Roche and I will compose the court."

The first lieutenant was overcome. "I don't think I can, sir," he said feebly. "I never did such a thing in my life; I wouldn't know where to begin, or to leave off, for that matter."

"You can leave off when we hang your prisoner," Casement returned, with his bull-dogish air. "Of course, it's all a damned fiasco," he went on. "Somebody's got to act for the nigger; it's printed that way in the book."

"Billy," said Facey, "they are going to make judge and jury for you by and by; and I am to talky-talky for you."

"I believe you appear for the defense, Mr. Facey," said Casement, as the queen's prosecutor took his seat.

"I do, sir," returned the first lieutenant, nervously.

"I should like to say, first of all," he began, "that I will not cross-ex-

take the prisoner outside the heads we will soon get the gag off his mouth, and learn a good deal more about this ugly business. Under old Jib's searchlight he's got to keep a close lip; but take him out to sea, and I answer for it he won't be so reticent."

A dead silence fell upon the court when Facey drew his case to a close and resumed his seat. Nothing could be heard but the scratching of Pickthorn's pen and the reverberating growl of the blow-hole as it fretted and fumed within for the screaming blast which was soon to follow. Casement rapped his hands deeper into his pockets, gnawed his tawny mustache, and protruded his chin. At last, with a start, he awoke from his reverie, and barked out:

"Mr. Sennett, as the youngest member, it is for you to speak first."

"I think he's guilty, sir," said Sennett.

Casement turned his quick glance on Roche.

"Same here," said the doctor.

"The finding of the court," said the captain after another pause, "is that the prisoner Billy is guilty of the murder of T. H.—what's his name?—Biggar, at Sunflower bay, on the blank day of September, 1888, and is condemned to be shot as an example to the island. Sentence to be deferred until I get the ship back from New Ireland, where I've to look into that Carbutt business and the outrage at MacCarthy's inlet, on the chance of the prisoner making a further confession and implicating others in his crime. The court is dismissed."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Pickthorn, looking up from his writing as the others rose to their feet. "What am I to call the case—the Queen versus Billy what?"

"Billy nothing," said the captain, savagely. "Call him William Pickthorn if you think it sounds better."

The verdict of the court was explained to Jibberik, and the old rogue and his pair of friends were landed in the cove, the boat returning to find the ship with anchor weighed and the loosened sails flapping on the yards. In a few minutes she was steaming out to sea, and every one grew confident that Billy's tongue would soon

be behind him. But the dogged savage

burdered the trader or not," said the captain.

"White fellow no good; I kill him," quavered the prisoner.

"Pleads guilty," said Casement to the clerk.

"What did you do it for?" demanded the court.

Billy reiterated his stock phrase. "Take him away," said the captain.

Jibberik was the next witness. He kissed the book as though it were his long-lost brother, and looked almost unashamed enough to beg it of Pickthorn. I shall not weary the reader with his labored English, that lingua Franca of the isles which in the western Pacific is known as Beach da Mar. He told a pretty plain story: Billy and the trader had always been on bad terms. One night, crazy with palm-toddy, Billy had sneaked down to Capt. Tom's house and shot him through the body as he was reading a book at supper. As to the subsequent burning and looting of the station the old savage was none so clear, sheltering himself in the unintelligibility of which he was a master.

Then rose Burder for the queen. He was a cheeky youngster, with pink cheeks, a glib tongue, and no end of assurance.

"I don't propose to waste the time of the honorable court," he began; "but if ever there was a flat-footed, self-confessed murderer, I would say it is the dusky gentleman in the dock. The blood of Biggar cries aloud for vengeance, and it would be a shame if a cried in vain," he said.

"Stick to the prisoner," cried the court.

"I bow to correction, sir," went on Burder. "I say again, this is no time for half-measures; and I say that Sunflower bay will be a better place to live in without Mr. Billy. I leave it to the honorable court, with every confidence, to vindicate justice in these islands by condemning the prisoner to the extreme penalty of the law. The case for the queen is closed, gentlemen."

"I believe you appear for the defense, Mr. Facey," said Casement, as the queen's prosecutor took his seat.

"I do, sir," returned the first lieutenant, nervously.

"I should like to say, first of all," he began, "that I will not cross-ex-

amine these dirty old savages who have given evidence against my client. I quite agree with everything my honorable friend has said regarding them, and I cannot think that the court will attach undue importance to any evidence they may have given. We've been told that the Kanakas are losing all respect for whites, and that if we don't take some strong measures there will be the deuce to pay in these islands. Perhaps there will be; but is that the British justice we're so proud of, or is it fair play, gentlemen, to the unfortunate wretch who is trembling before you? From what I've seen of the whites in this group, I can say emphatically that I'm in a line with the Kanakas. Now, as to this Billy: What is there against him but his own confession? and that, I beg leave to point out, ought not to be taken as conclusive. As like as not he is the scapegoat for the whole bay, and has been coached up to tell this story under the screw. Just look one moment at old Jib there, and see how his friends wince when his eyes fall their way. For all we know to the contrary, his gibberish and creak-click may be to the tune of 'Billy, you son of a gun, I'll cut you into 40 pieces, or flay you alive if you don't stick to what I've told you.' After all, what have we learned from Billy? Nothing more than this: 'White fellow no good; I kill him.' Is that what anybody would call a full confession? Does it give any clew or any details as to the motive or the carrying out of this murder? It may be, indeed, that Billy is a monomaniac with a confirmed delusion that he has killed Biggar; the court may smile, but I think I am right in stating that such things have occurred and have even led to miscarriages of justice in the past. I tell you, gentlemen, I believe it was the whole blooming bay that killed Biggar, and that Billy was just as guilty or just as innocent as the rest. And there is one thing I feel mortal sure about: That if we

stuck to his tale, he led but one reply to all inquiries, to all probing and pumping for further particulars of the murder. On his side the conversation began and ended with: "White fellow no good; I kill him."

On other topics he could be drawn out at will, and proved himself a most tractable, sweet-tempered, and far from unintelligent fellow. The men got to like him immensely, keeping him in perpetual tobacco and providing him with more good than was quite good for him. In the fo'c'st'le it was rank heresy to call him a murderer or to express any doubts regarding his innocence. He became at once the pet and the mystery of the ship, and his canvas cleft the rallying point for all the little gayeries on board. He played cards well, was an apt pupil on the accordion, and at checkers he was the master of the ship! And he not only beat you, but he beat you handsomely, shaking hands before and after the event, like a prize fighter in the ring.

Billy's artless ways and boundless good humor had won the whole wardrobe to his side; and his grim determination to die, at once bewildered and exasperated every soul on board. The strange spectacle offered of a hundred men at work to persuade their prisoner to recall his damning confession, and on pins and needles to save him from a fate he himself seemed not to fear.

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Then old Quinn got after him—wild-eyed, tangle-haired old Quinn, the gunner, who was half cracked on religion. He prayed and blubbered beside the wretched boy, overwhelming him with red-hot appeals and perfunctory oratory. Billy became an instant convert, and got to love old Quinn as a dog his master.

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As the days passed, and the ship made her way from bay to bay, from island to island in the course of her policing cruise among those lawless

whites and more than savage blacks, the captain grew desperate with the problem of Billy. They all said that Casement looked ten years older, and that something would soon happen to the "old man" if Billy did not soon skip out; and the "old man" showed all the desire in the world to bring about so desirable a consummation.

Then the captain determined upon new measures. He passed a hint to Facey, and Facey passed it to the mess, and the mess to the blue-jackets, that they were making things too comfortable for their prisoner. For a while Billy's easy life came to an abrupt conclusion. His best friends began to kick and cuff him without mercy. He was rope-ended by the boat's mate, and the cook threw boiling water over his naked skin. The boy's heart almost broke at this, and he went about dejected and unhappy for the first time since he had come aboard. But no harsh usage, no foul words, could drive him to desert. It was on the bridge, to Facey, when the ship had just dropped anchor in Port McGuire, not 40 miles from Sunflower bay.

"Mr. Facey," he said, "send Mr. Burder ashore with an armed party; tell him just to show himself a bit and come off again."

"Yes, sir," said Facey.

"I am thinking they might take that fellow Billy to translate for them," he went on, shamefacedly.

The first lieutenant turned to go.

"Hold on," said the captain, suddenly lowering his voice and drawing his subordinate close to him. "Just you pass it on to Burder that wouldn't skin him alive—you know what I mean—if, well, suppose that black fellow cut his lucky altogether—"

Facey smiled.

"Of course," rasped out the captain. "I can't tolerate any dereliction of duty; but if the young devil made a break for it—"

"Ay, ay, sir," returned the first lieutenant, and darted down the brass steps three at a time. He called Burder aside and gave his instructions to that discreet youngster, who was sharp to see the point without the need for awkward explanations.

A couple of hours later Burder embarked again and headed for the ship in a tearing hurry. A chuckle ran along the decks as not a sign of Billy could be made out, and the nearing boat soon put the last doubt at rest. There was no black boy among the blue-jackets.

Burder skipped up the steps and saluted the captain on the bridge.

"I have to report the escape of Billy, sir," he said, with infinitely gravity and assurance. "I scarcely know how it came to happen, sir, but he managed to bolt as he was walking between Miller and Cracroft."

"This is a very serious matter," said the captain, with ill-concealed cheerfulness. "I don't know but what it is my duty to reprimand you very severely for your carelessness. However, if he's gone, he's gone, I suppose. I hope you took measures to recapture him?"

"Yes, sir," returned Burder. "Looked for him high and low, sir."

"Poor Billy!" said the captain, with a smile that spoke volumes. "We'll say no more about it, Mr. Burder; it may be all for the best; but remember, sir, it mustn't happen again."

"No, sir," said Burder.

"How did you manage it, old man?" was the eager question that met the youngster as he took shelter in the wardroom and ordered "a beer."

All his messmates were round him, save Facey, who was officer of the deck and could not do more than hang in the doorway.

"I tell you it wasn't easy," said the boy. "We promenade all round the place, and I tried like fun to shake him off. I sent him errands and hid behind trees, and talked of how we were going to shoot him to-morrow—but it was all no blooming good! I was at my wits' end at last, and had almost made up my mind to tie him to a tree and run for it, when I got a bright idea. I pretended I had dropped my canteen under a banyan a mile behind the town, a kind of cemetery banyan, full of dead men's bones—a rummy place, I can tell you. And when we got down near the boat, I took the nigger on one side and bade him go and fetch it. 'And don't you come back without it,' Billy said. 'I'll be dismissed from the service if I can't account for that canteen!' Then he asked how long I was going to stay, and I said a week; and he went off like a lamb, while we squared away for the ship. Didn't you see the jokers pull?"

It had been the merest pretense that

truded above the rippling bosom of the bay, and two frantic arms were seen driving a familiar dark countenance on a course towards the vessel. It was Billy indeed, his honest face marked with anguish and despair as he fought his way to regain his prison.

Casement groaned. And for this he had been holding the cruiser two long weeks in those Godforsaken islands, and had invented one excuse upon another to delay his return to Sunflower bay! Billy had been given a hundred chances to escape, and now,

like a bad penny, here he was again, ready to precipitate the catastrophe which could no longer be postponed.

A great laugh went up when Billy presented himself on deck, exhausted, dripping like a spaniel, and sorely hurt in spirit. He began at once to blurt out the story of the canteen, and made a bee-line for Burder; but that intrepid youngster could afford to listen to no explanations, and in self-defense had to order Billy into the hands of the marines, who led him away protesting.

Casement's patience was now quite at an end. He headed the ship for Sunflower bay, and spared no coal to bring her there in short order. Three hours after they had passed out of the heads of Port McGuire the Stingaree was at anchor off the blow-hole.

Facey was drinking a whisky-and-soda, and preparing himself, as best he could, for the ordeal he knew to be before him, when the captain's servant entered the wardroom and requested his presence in the cabin.

"Mr. Facey," said the captain, "take the doctor and the pay and 40 men well armed from the ship, and when you've assembled the village take that Billy and shoot him."

"Yes, sir," said the lieutenant, turning very pale.

"Faugh," rasped Casement, "it makes me sick. Damn the boy, why couldn't he cut? Well, be off with you, and kill him as decently as you know how."

Billy did not at first realize how seriously he was involved in the plans of the shore party that was making ready. He dropped into one of the boats light-heartedly enough, and took his place cheerfully between two marines with loaded rifles. But the mournful hush of all about him, the eyes that turned and would not meet his own, the tenderness and sorrow which was expressed in every movement, in every furtive look, of his whitom comrades, all stirred and shook him with consternation. No one laughed at his little antics. He tickled the man next him, and nudged him, his friend Tommy, who could whistle like a blackbird and do amazing tricks with cards; but instead of an answering grin, Tommy's eyes filled with tears and he stared straight in front of him. Billy was whimpering before they were half ashore, and some understanding of the fate in store for him began to struggle through his thick head.

There was no need to assemble the village. It was there to meet them, old Jibberik and all, silent, funereal, and expectant. The men were marched up to the charred remains of the trader's house and formed up on three sides of a square, leaving the fourth open to the sea. To this space Billy was led by Facey and old Quinn, the gunner. The negro looked about him like a frightened child and clung to the old man.

"Will you give the prisoner a minute to make his peace with God?" asked old Quinn.

Facey nodded.

Quinn plunged down on his knees, Billy beside him. For a brief space the gunner pattered prayers thick and fast, like a man with no time to lose.

"Billy," he said at last, "as you stand on the brink of that river we all must cross, as the few seconds run out that you have still to live and breathe and make your final and everlasting peace with the God you have so grievously offended, let me implore you to show some sorrow, some contrition, for the awful act that has brought you to this! Billy, tell God you are sorry you killed Biggar."

For a moment Billy made no answer. At last, in a husky voice, he said:

"You mean Cap'n Tom, who live here before?"

"Him you hurled into eternity with all his sins hot on him. Yes, Cap'n Tom, the trader."

"No!" cried Billy, with a strangled cry. "Me no sorry. White fellow no good. I kill him."

"Quinn," cried Facey, "your time's up." The first lieutenant's face was livid, and his hands trembled as he bound Billy's eyes with a silk handkerchief.

"Stand right there, Billy," said the officer, turning the prisoner round to face the firing party, that was already drawn up.

"Good-by, Missy Facey and gentlemen all," whimpered the boy.

"Good-by, Billy," returned the other. "Now, men," he added, as he ran his eye along the faltering faces, "no damned squeamishness; if you want to help the nigger, you'll shoot straight. For God's sake don't mangle him."

"Fire!"



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NEBRASKA IN BRIEF

NEWS NOTES OF INTEREST FROM VARIOUS SECTIONS.

ALL SUBJECTS TOUCHED UPON

Religious, Social, Agricultural, Political and Other Matters Given Due Consideration.

Admiral Evans made a little talk to the people of Fremont as he passed through that city.

Petitions are being circulated in Valentine for an early closing of the stores during the summer.

Fourteen members of the Douglas county association of Nebraska pioneers have died the past year.

The new Congregational church at Cambridge has been dedicated. It was completed at a cost of \$20,000.

A strong wind played havoc with buildings in Nemaha City. Much damage was also done in the country thereabouts.

There are thirteen to graduate from the Wymore high school this year. Four are boys and nine girls. The exercises will be held May 27.

Kennison, the man who killed Editor Cox of Minature last December, is having his second trial in accordance with a decree of the supreme court.

The body of W. J. IMF was brought to Nebraska City from Atchison, Kan., where he died at the home of his son. He was a resident of Nebraska City for many years and was engaged in business there.

It is rumored that a tract of land of the Union Pacific, comprising about 21,000 acres lying a few miles northwest of Sutherland, has been placed upon the market, and that a syndicate of Omaha men are negotiating for it.

Oscola is down on the list of towns in the state that will hold a Chautauqua during the coming season, and while the exact date has not been definitely decided it is now thought that it will be held during the first week of July.

The pure food commission has received reports of the successful prosecution of Haller Haller & Johnson of Sidney for the adulteration of meat and the collection of fines from F. L. Van Garder and Greeley & Benson of Sidney for the sale of unbranded butter.

THE MIDWEST LIFE OF Lincoln, Nebraska, an old line Nebraska Company, wants local agents to represent it in every town in the state. The Midwest Life issues all kinds of life policies and they are liberal and along the best lines in life insurance. Write to the home office at Lincoln for additional information.

At Beatrice, while temporarily insane and imagining that some one was trying to kill him, Charles M. Krogh of Omaha, a draftsman who has been employed by a R. W. Grant for several years, made an unsuccessful attempt upon the life of his wife and then committed suicide by stabbing himself in the heart with a pocket-knife.

Considerable local excitement has been developed in Scott's Bluff county by the announcement of the new issue of Union Pacific bonds and Mr. Harriman's statement that part of the issue would be for the construction of new lines. It is regarded as certain that the Union Pacific will now go ahead and complete the cut-off from O'Fallon, Neb., to Medicine Bow, Wyo.

A Washington dispatch says that in the public building bill as passed in the house, Nebraska towns face thus: Columbus, \$65,000; Plattsmouth, \$50,000; for building and site; Fairbury, \$50,000; Holdrege, \$80,000; North Platte, \$110,000, and McCook, \$8,000 for site. In addition to this, it is the understanding that when the bill gets to the senate an appropriation for Kearney will be put in.

State Engineer Dobson has sent his assistant, George Bates, to Niobrara to establish the sixth water gauging station in Nebraska. The government pays half the expenses of such stations. Records kept for a long period of years are valuable to persons who desire to promote irrigation or water power projects. For several years there has been talk of a large power plant at the mouth of the Niobrara river.

Photographs of a man and