

The Adventure Of Elizabeth Morey, of New York

1901

Louis Becke



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**THE ADVENTURE OF
ELIZABETH MOREY,
OF NEW YORK**

From "The Tapu Of Banderah and Other Stories"

By Louis Becke

C. Arthur Pearson Ltd.

1901

In the sea story of Australia, from the days of Captain Phillip in 1788, to the end of the "fifties" in the present century, American ships and seamen have no little part. First they came into the harbour of Sydney Cove as traders carrying provisions for sale to the half-starved settlers, then as whalers, and before another thirty years had passed, the starry banner might be met with anywhere in the Pacific, from the sterile shores of the Aleutian Islands to the coasts of New Zealand and Tasmania.

Early one morning in October, 1804, the American ship *Union* sailed in through Sydney Heads, and dropped anchor in the Cove. She was last from Tongatabu, the principal island of the Friendly Group. As soon as she had been boarded by the naval officer in charge of the port, and her papers examined, the master stated that he had had a very exciting adventure with the Tongatabu natives, who had attempted to cut off the ship, and that there was then on board a young woman named Elizabeth Morey, whom he had rescued from captivity among the savages.

In a few minutes the young woman made her appearance in the main cabin, and was introduced to the officer. Her age was about six-and-twenty, and her manners "extremely engaging;" yet whilst she expressed her willingness to tell the story of her adventures among the islanders, she declined to say anything of her birth or parentage beyond the fact that she was a native of New York, and some years previously had made her way to the Cape of Good Hope.

Her extraordinary narrative was borne out in all details as far as her rescue was concerned by the master of the *Union*, who, she said, had treated her with undeviating kindness and respect.

This is her story:—

In February of the year 1802, when she was living at the Cape of Good Hope, she made the acquaintance of a Captain Melton, the master of the American ship *Portland*. His dashing appearance, his command of apparently unlimited money, and his protestations of affection for the unfortunate girl soon led her to respond to his advances, and ultimately to consent to accompany him on a voyage to the islands of the South Pacific.

After a prosperous voyage the *Portland* arrived at what is now known as Nukualofa Harbour, on the Island of Tongatabu. Within a few hours after anchoring, Captain Melton received a note from a white man named Doyle, who was the only European living on the island, asking him to come on shore and visit the chief, who particularly wished to see him and secure his aid in repelling an invasion from the neighbouring group of islands known as Haabai. Had Melton known that this man Doyle was an escaped convict from Van Dieman's Land, he would at least have been careful; had he known that the man was, in addition, a treacherous and bloodthirsty villain, he would have hove-up anchor, and, sailing away, escaped his fate. But Doyle, in his note, enumerated the advantages that would accrue to him (Melton) by assisting the chief, and the seaman fell into the trap. "You must try," said the writer of the letter, "to send at least one boat's crew well armed."

Melton was a man with an elastic conscience. Without troubling his head as to the right or wrong side of this quarrel among savages, he promptly complied with the request of the beachcomber, and called for volunteers; the whole of the ship's company responded. The chief mate, Gibson, picked four men; Anderson, the second officer, eight men, and these were at once despatched on shore by the captain.

The engagement came off on the following day, and the American allies of the chief (whom Miss Morey calls Ducara) inflicted fearful slaughter upon the enemy, and returned to the ship highly satisfied with themselves, and their native friends, who promised them every indulgence likely to gratify their tastes.

In the evening Ducara himself came on board, and politely thanked the captain for his assistance. He slept all night in the cuddy, attended by Doyle, his minister of destruction, and took his leave early in the morning, promising to send ample refreshments on board in part return for favours received, and requesting that boats should be sent that evening to convey his gifts to the ship. Within a few hours after the chief had returned to the shore, many hundreds of stalwart natives were seen carrying baskets of provisions down to the beach, and piling them in heaps in readiness for the boats. Melton, at this stage, seemed to

have some sort of suspicion in his mind about sending the boats ashore after dark, for he gave the mate instructions not to despatch them until he gave orders. The mate, however, who had been smitten by the beauty of a Tongan girl who had expressed her unqualified approval of his fighting capabilities in a very unconventional manner, had the utmost confidence in the good will of the natives, and took it upon himself to disobey his captain's commands; consequently two boats were sent off just as daylight was breaking, and whilst the skipper lay asleep in his cabin.

Within a couple of hours the smaller of the two boats returned, loaded with yams, "gnatu" (tappa cloth), baked pigs, and fish. She was steered by the beachcomber, Doyle, and was rowed by two of the ship's boys, instead of the four men who had taken her ashore; these boys, it must be mentioned, had formed part of the crew of the larger boat, and had remained on the beach whilst the men had gone into the village at the invitation of Doyle and his fellow-conspirators. They, therefore, knew nothing of what had kept their shipmates from returning to the boats, when Doyle appeared and said he wished to go off to the ship, and that the others would follow later on.

Accompanying the boat was a flotilla of canoes, filled with hundreds of savages, who were allowed to come alongside, though the girl Morey was so terrified by their savage aspect that she begged her lover to instantly recall the rest of his men and heave up anchor. Melton, however, although he was now in a state of suspense owing to the non-appearance of his boats' crews, answered her calmly enough.

"The two boys and Doyle say that the hands went up to the chiefs house to see a native dance," he said. "I'll punish them for it when they return."

Meanwhile the boat was unloaded, and again sent on shore with the two boys, and Doyle's native friends clambered up on board from any accessible part of the ship. The beachcomber himself, a wild-looking, dark-skinned ruffian, who had clothed himself in a shirt and trousers, now came aft and again assured the captain that he need feel no alarm at the great number of naked savages who now thronged the deck, from the windlass right aft to the wheel. Perhaps, however, the villain had some feeling of humanity in his vile heart, for seeing the terrified face of the girl Morey, he suggested that she should go below until the natives had returned to the shore.

But so impressed was she with a sense of imminent peril that she refused to leave the poop, and begged Melton earnestly, "for God's sake to take heed, and not thrust himself among the savages on the main deck."

The beachcomber gave her a glance—half rage, half pity; then with his left hand he suddenly dashed her aside, and with a ferocious yell sprang at Melton and thrust a dagger into the throat of the unfortunate man. In an instant his savage followers began their work of slaughter, and Mr. Gibson, the chief mate, the boatswain, and four seamen were soon lying dead upon the bloodstained decks, their heads battered out of all human semblance by the clubs of the islanders.

Two lads, Miss Morey, and her negro servant-woman, were spared, but hurried down below.

The bodies of the murdered men were at once thrown overboard to the sharks by Doyle's orders, and he then directed the natives to clear the decks.

Elizabeth Morey, terrified out of her senses at the dreadful scenes she had witnessed, attempted to spring overboard, but the beachcomber caught her as she came on deck, urged her not to be frightened, and promised her "in the name of the Virgin" that no harm should come to her. As soon as the decks had been ridden of all traces of the bloody work just completed, the half-unconscious girl was lifted over the side, placed in a canoe, taken on shore, and handed over to the care of a chiefs wife.

When she came to her senses she learnt from Doyle that all who were left alive of the ship's company were herself and servant, a Malay seaman, five boys, and an old sailor, who was a dwarf; the latter had evidently been spared, either on account of the natives ranking him as a boy, or from their aversion to inflict injuries upon any one physically or mentally afflicted.

The following three days were spent by the natives in unloading the ship, the work being carried on in the most systematic manner under the command of Doyle, the survivors of the crew being compelled to assist in the task. The cargo, which consisted mainly of bales of cotton, was got on shore in something less than a week; then the islanders began to dismantle the ill-fated ship. By the eighth day all the sails except the fore and main topsails were unbent and taken ashore.

On the afternoon of this day but half a dozen natives were on board; they, with the five "boys" (probably lads under eighteen years of age), and the dwarf sailor before mentioned, were "spelling" for an hour or so before beginning to unbend the topsails, when, noticing that their captors were off their guard, the brave little man determined to retake the ship. In a few minutes he gained over his youthful shipmates to the attempt; they promised to stand by him to the last. Quietly arming themselves with axes, with iron belaying pins, with handspikes, with

anything heavy and deadly they could lay their hands upon, they waited for the signal to begin the attack. Doyle, the bloodstained murderer, lay upon the skylight under the awning, half asleep and unsuspecting of danger; his native associates either slept or lounged about the main deck.

A few hurried, whispered words passed between the six whites; then the dwarf, carrying an axe negligently in his hand, ascended to the poop and laid it down on the deck. Then he turned, and his quick seaman's eye took in the surroundings. The trade wind was blowing freshly, the ship (she was a full-rigged ship, though under five hundred tons), was straining at her hempen cable, and the low, palm-clad shore was nearly two miles away. He picked up the axe and running towards Doyle, buried the weapon to the head in his bosom!

In less than five minutes the dreadful work was done, and Doyle and the six Tongans were weltering in their gore upon the very deck which was still stained by the traces of their own crimes. Before the natives on shore could realise what had happened, the cable was cut, the topsails loosed and sheeted home, and the *Portland* standing out to sea through the dangerous network of reefs which surrounded the harbour. Her recapture was a bloody deed, but the law of self-preservation is inexorable under such circumstances.

Elizabeth Morey, aroused from a troubled slumber by the cries of her captors, came to the doorway of the chiefs house, and stood watching the ship, which, though only under her fore and main topsails, was fast slipping through the water. In two hours the *Portland* was safe, and the broken-hearted girl sank upon her knees and wept. She was now utterly alone, for her negro servant woman had gone on board the ship with Doyle to get some of her clothing, and had been carried off. The only remaining member of the *Portland's* crew was a Malay—a man of whom she had an instinctive dread; for, since the massacre of the ship's company he had one day asked her with a mocking grin if she could not "clean his coat." His coat was Melton's white duck jacket, and the ensanguined garment brought all the horror of her lover's death before her again.

Then followed fifteen long, long months of horror, misery, and agony. She was a woman, and her terrible fate evokes the warmest pity. Whatever may have been her past before she met Captain Melton and accompanied him on his fateful voyage, her sufferings during those fifteen dreadful months may be imagined but not written of nor suggested, except by the neurotic "new woman" writer, who loves to dwell upon things vile, degrading, terrifying, and abhorrent to the clean and healthy mind.

In August, 1804, the American whaler *Union*, of Nantucket, after having

refreshed at Sydney Cove, as Port Jackson was then called, sailed on a sperm-whaling cruise among the South Sea Islands. She arrived at Tongatabu on the last day of September. As soon as the anchor was let go a fleet of canoes appeared, and the occupants made the most friendly demonstrations towards Captain Pendleton and his officers. In the leading canoe was a man whom the captain took to be a Malay, and upon being questioned this surmise proved to be correct. In broken English he informed Pendleton that the ship would be provided with plenty of fresh food, water, and wood, if the ship's boats were sent ashore. The captain's boat was thereupon swung out and lowered, and manned by six men, the captain and Mr. John Boston, the supercargo, going with them. These people were armed with six muskets and two cutlasses.

As soon as the boat was well clear of the ship the natives became very troublesome, clambering up the chain plates, and forcing themselves on board in great numbers. The chief mate, Daniel Wright, seems to have shown more sense than most of the poor fools who, by their own negligence, brought about—and still bring about even to the present day—these South Sea tragedies. He got his men together and tried to drive off the intruders, but despite his endeavours thirty or forty of them kept to the deck, and their countrymen in the canoes alongside rapidly passed them up a number of war-clubs.

Wright, with the greatest tact, and with apparently good-humoured force, at last succeeded in clearing the decks and bustling all the natives except the chief, over the side into their canoes. He (Wright) was a big, brawny, New Englander, had served in the American Navy before he had taken to whaling, and knew the value of coolness and discipline in an emergency, though he felt much inclined to pistol the chief, who all this time had been pretending to support his authority, though actually telling his people to be "more patient, as the time had not yet come."

This chief, whose name is not given in the *Sydney Gazette* of 1804, but who may have been the same "Ducara" of the *Portland* massacre, or one of Ducara's *matabulis*, at last took his leave with the usual protestations of regard so natural to even the present Christianised Tongan native of this year of grace 1900, when he means mischief, even in the minor matter of cheating or defrauding his white creditor. Descending into his canoe, he led the whole flotilla to the beach. Then the mate hoisted the ensign, and fired a gun as a warning to those of the ship's company on shore to return.

No notice was taken of the signal, and presently through his glass Mr. Wright saw that the captain's boat was lying broadside on to the beach, surrounded by a crowd of islanders, and without a boat-keeper. This was sufficiently alarming. It

was now late in the afternoon, and Captain Pendleton had been absent five hours. He at once came to the conclusion that the people who had gone ashore in the boat were either prisoners or had been murdered. To send another boat after them, he felt sure, would only lead to the destruction of the whole ship's company in detail, and the ultimate loss of the ship without there being the least chance of effecting any good. So he called the hands aft, explained the situation, and began to prepare to resist capture. All the available firearms were loaded, heavy stones which formed the ship's ballast, were placed along the waterways fore and aft in readiness to smash the canoes which he anticipated would come alongside, the trying-out works fires were lighted, and the huge try-pots filled with water, which when boiling would add to their means of defence, by pouring it down in bucketsful upon the savages; the cable was prepared for slipping, sails loosened, and every other precaution which suggested itself to him made.

The sun dropped into the western sea-rim, and there was still no sign of the captain's boat. On the shore an ominous silence prevailed, though now and then it would be broken by the weird, resonant boom of a conch-shell. The night was passed in the greatest anxiety by all on board, every man, musket in hand, keeping a keen lookout.

Almost as the dawn broke, two canoes were seen to put off from Nukualofa beach, and come towards the ship. They were manned by young Tongan "bucks" who, in reply to the mate's questions as to the whereabouts of the captain and his crew, answered him with gestures which the ship's company rightly enough construed as meaning that their comrades had all been killed, and that *their* turn would come shortly. This so enraged the seamen that they tried to induce Mr. Wright to open fire on the canoes, destroy them, and get the ship away before worse happened. But the mate, hoping that his people on shore were still alive, and that he could yet rescue them, refused to comply, and the whole of that day and night passed without further happening.

On the following morning several canoes came within hail and then lay-to. In one of them was the Malay, who asked the mate to come ashore, as the captain and the supercargo wished to see him. The mate temporised and requested the Malay to come on board and explain matters, but he refused and returned to the shore.

In a few hours he reappeared at the head of a fleet of canoes, and then, to Mr. Wright's intense astonishment, he saw that the Malay was accompanied by a young white woman, who was sitting on the forward outrigger of the canoe of which the Malay was steersman. The flotilla brought to within pistol-shot of the ship, and the woman stood up and called to him in English—

"Come on shore and see the captain. He wants to speak to you."

The mate made no answer, but beckoned to the fleet of canoes to come nearer. And then, mercifully, as he took another look at the white woman, he saw her, when the surrounding savages were not watching, shake her head vehemently to him not to comply with the request she had made.

The flotilla came still nearer, and again Elizabeth Morey was made to repeat the request for him to "come on shore and see the captain." Wright, surmising that she was acting under coercion, appeared to give little heed to her request, but told the Malay, who seemed to direct the natives, that he would wait for the captain. Then the fleet of canoes turned, and headed for the shore, and the captive white woman gave the mate a despairing, agonised look that not only filled him with the deepest commiseration for her, but almost convinced him that poor Pendleton and the others were dead.

Another night of wearing anxiety passed, and again with the dawn a single canoe came off, manned by half a dozen armed natives steered by the Malay and carrying Miss Morey. This canoe was followed by many others, but the leading one alone came close enough to the whaleship to communicate. Little by little her savage crew drew nearer, watching every movement of those on board with the utmost suspicion; the mate, who was standing at the break of the poop on the starboard side, desired them to come closer, holding in his hand a loaf of bread, which he said he wanted to give to the white woman. The loaf was enclosed in a piece of white paper, on which he had written these words—

"I fear that all on shore are murdered. I will wait here a few days in the hope that you may be able to escape to us."

For some minutes the savages watched the white man, who, apparently disgusted with his attempts to induce them to come closer and take the loaf of bread, placed it on the rail and lit his pipe. The Malay again urged him to come ashore and "see the captain" but Wright made an impatient gesture and told him he must come closer if he wanted to talk. The scoundrel did bring the canoe a few fathoms nearer, and then stopped her way.

Then the girl, unable to restrain herself any longer, stood up and cried out—

"All your friends on shore have been killed," then she leapt into the water and swam towards the ship.

A yell of rage burst from the natives in the canoes, but it was answered by the fire of musketry from the ship and the thunder of two car-ronades, which, loaded with iron nuts and bolts, had been in readiness, one on the poop, the other on the topgallant fore-castle—and the girl succeeded in reaching the ship's side in time

to take hold of a life-buoy secured to a line which was thrown to her, and Wright, jumping overboard, helped the poor creature up over the side into safety.

Then began a desperate and furious assault to capture the ship. The savages, led by the renegade Malay, made three successive attempts to board, but were each time beaten back by Wright and his gallant seamen, and the crystal water around the *Union* was soon reddened to a deep hue. Meanwhile the cable had been slipped, and, like the *Portland*, the *Union's* company were saved from death by the freshness of the trade-wind alone. In half an hour after the last attack had been repelled, the ship was out of danger from pursuit. As soon as the vessel had cleared the passage Wright hove her to, and went down below to Miss Morey, who, exhausted and almost hysterical as she was, yet answered his questions readily.

"You must forgive me, madam, but it is my duty to at once ask you an important question. Are you *sure* that Captain Pendleton and the supercargo are dead? I cannot take the ship away if there is any uncertainty about their fate."

"I beseech you, sir, to have no doubts. I saw the two gentlemen beaten to death by clubs before my eyes.... They were sitting down to eat when they were murdered. One was killed by the Malay man, the other by an old *matabuli*,{*}... Oh, for God's sake, sir, do not delay! The natives have been planning to capture this ship and murder her people for the past three days."

Then as she became more collected she satisfied him that all of Captain Pendleton's party had been cruelly and treacherously murdered, and also told him her own terrible story previous to the arrival of the *Union*.

The destruction of poor Pendleton and Mr. Boston had been planned, she said, by the Malay; and when he and his native friends found that they could not induce Mr. Wright to further weaken his ship's company by sending another boat's crew on shore, so that the *Union* might the more easily be captured, she was ordered under the most awful threats to act as decoy. Resolved to upset their diabolical plan, or die in the attempt, she gave an apparently cheerful assent to the meditated scheme of murder, and hence her appearance in the canoe with the treacherous Malay.

Under the kindly care of Mr. (now Captain) Wright, the young woman soon regained her health and strength in a great measure and her delight knew no bounds when he announced to her his intention of returning to Sydney Cove to refit before proceeding home to America. The *Union*, as we have before stated, entered Sydney harbour in October, 1804, and before that time the simple gratitude of the rescued girl to her rescuer had changed into a deeper and

tenderer feeling. But we must not anticipate.

As soon as Captain Wright had made his report to the New South Wales authorities, Miss Morey went on shore, where she was treated most hospitably by the wives of some of the military officers, whilst Wright was refitting his ship.

A few days afterwards there arrived in Sydney Harbour an East India ship, the captain of which gave Wright some interesting particulars concerning the *Portland* and Captain Melton. The latter had had a peculiar history. At the end of the year 1800 he appeared in Manila, where he was entrusted with the command of a brig belonging to a Mr. John Stewart Kerr, the American Consul of that city. His orders were to proceed to Batavia, and there dispose of his cargo, bringing in return saleable goods for the Manila market. He was given also a letter of credit for \$20,000 the better to load the vessel. On arrival at Batavia he sold the cargo and the brig into the bargain, and purchased in her place the *Portland*, a ship of about 400 tons. From Batavia he wrote to Kerr—he seemed to have been the Captain "Bully" Hayes of his time—informed him of what he had done and mentioned that as he intended to make "a long pleasure cruise" among the islands of the South Pacific, he did not expect to return to Manila for some considerable time!

He also, it is needless to say, duly cashed his letter of credit for \$20,000, which six months afterwards was duly presented and taken up by Mr. Kerr.

The *Portland* was then chartered by a firm of Dutch merchants at Batavia to proceed to Serra Bay to load rice and return to Batavia. Melton sailed to Serra Bay, loaded his cargo of rice, and instead of returning to Batavia, went to the Isle of France and there cheerfully sold it. The next account of him received at Manila was that he was having a "real good time" at the Cape of Good Hope, where his fascinating manners and command of money (Kerr's money) made him many friends. Suddenly, however, he and the *Portland* disappeared, and Elizabeth Morey, as we have mentioned, accompanied him. He had given out that he was bound for the North-west coast of America, to enter into the fur trade, but, beyond that rumour, nothing more was heard of him until the *Union* arrived at Port Jackson, and Elizabeth Morey told the tale of his dreadful end.

No further mention of the names of Captain Daniel Wright, Elizabeth Morey, or the good ship *Union* appear in the early Sydney records after 1806; but that the girl's rescue by the gallant mate of the whaleship led to her ultimate happiness we can safely assume, for in the year 1836 there were married in Honolulu, Sandwich Islands, one "Marie Kaiulani Shepherd, daughter of John

Shepherd, to Daniel Morey Wright, master of the ship *Patience*, of New Bedford, and son of Daniel and Elizabeth Wright, of Salem, U.S.A."

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