

A Weekend in a Tahitian home.

The office door is closed with a bang. Thank goodness Friday afternoon has come at last. Now for a wonderful rest in the country away from the heat, dust and hubbub of the town. Peace, fun and happiness unadulterated by the noise of telephone and typewriter.

The road round the coast is not tarsealed but is of crushed coral, which makes for a comfortable car ride. High speed is impossible and unwanted as we wend our way for some thirty miles round the lovely bays. The sea never far on one side and bush covered hills on the other.

Only a few more miles to go and we shall reach our destination. Another village or two with their profuse and varied coloured canals along the road-side and we shall be there.

Round the last bend and there are our host and hostess, with their grown up children. They have been waiting for possibly an hour to catch the first glimpse of the car as it turned the last corner.

The warmth of the welcome is overwhelming. Shouts of "Iorana. maitai Oe"; to which the reply is "Maitai roa". Kissed and hugged by old and young. What a welcome, sincere, warm and spontaneous.

In the country, time seems to float over you. There is no time for anything but the present. We get up when we have had enough sleep. We eat our main meal when the sun is up there. We go to sleep when we feel sleepy.

There is an old clock hanging on the veranda wall, which has not ceased to go for many a year. It strikes the hour at twenty minutes past, and then the correct time may be calculated as twenty minutes to the hour struck minus seven. Time! Bah! An invention of the devil.

After all the excitement of my arrival, and the exchange of news from town and country, everybody is tired, so after a light meal early to bed.

At daybreak, the sleeper is made aware that another day is about to begin by the lusty crowing of roosters and the laughter of children's voices.

The lady of the house is about to make coffee. Real coffee. Coffee that smells and ~~tastes~~ looks like coffee. The best coffee I have tasted anywhere in the world. The beans which were grown on the plantation and thoroughly matured were first fried in butter over a charcoal fire until a golden brown. Then roasted by being kept in continual motion, until a purple colour, in a frying pan kept for the purpose. Then ground to the right consistency in a hand propelled coffee mill. In the meantime one of the children had been busy making coconut cream.

A ripe nut is split open with a machette and the white nut rasped to shreds on the teeth of an iron bar arrangement stuck in the ground. The shredded nut is now put into a muslin cloth and wound tight. Out comes snow white coconut cream.

The welcome cry is heard from the kitchen, "le café" and all take their places at table.

The conversation is on the important subject of "What shall we do ~~do~~ during the week-end", the only diversity of opinion being as to the order in which the activities shall be enjoyed.

The possibles and therefore probables are:- 1) Catching shrimps in the stream running through the plantation. These live under stones or floating weed near the banks of the stream and are as large as european prawns. Extreme caution of approach is necessary, for they jump backwards or sideways with flashing rapidity when disturbed.

The tyro thinks himself lucky if he catches two or three after an hour's hard work. In the meantime the experts have caught a basket full either by hand, or in a small net, or with a homemade tiny three pronged spear.

The method of eating these, when fried in butter, is to pull off the head and tail and prise off the the outer shell with a quick action of the thumb. Here is food for the gods.

2) Harpooning fish in a foot or two of water flowing over the reef as the rising tide reaches the inner water of the lagoon. The visitor can but watch the artistry as the boys of all ages hurl their harpoons homemade harpoons at the shadows moving some twenty feet away. In all matters of skill, the old adage that practice makes perfect is manifest to the full. The younger ones average a kill once in every ten throws. The older ones would average one in five. The grownups however, after years of patient practice would rarely ever miss. Great disgust from the latter if a fish were hit in the ~~de~~ tail. Hit in the body, no comment. Hit in the head, great satisfaction. Hit in the eye, loud applause from all and sundry as that part of the body constitutes the bull's eye of the target.

The individual's harpoon was the treasured possession of the hunter. He alone knows its particular traits. Cut out of the bush, it always has an inclination to wobble, which had^s to be compensated for in relation to the refraction of the fish in the water. The five inch nail bound to the head had frequently to be straightened and sharpened.

3) Putting on our bathing costumes and going up the stream, splashing through the shallows, and swimming across the pools until there it was, a beautiful waterfall plunging into fairly land through the virgin bush from a height of about three hundred feet.

4) Out in a large canoe through the pass from ^{the} lagoon into the open sea to watch the approach of a ^ething mass of whitebait. here it was, nature's defence against the denizens of the deep. At first sight, at a depth ^{of} perhaps ~~of~~ ten feet, an enormous fish of which any known species of shark would be ^cscared, and thus immune from attack. We followed in our canoe as the hoard approached and soon passed through the opening reef in the reef. The great fish then disintegrated, each part making for its own ^{de} individual stream where it was born. Many thousands would reach their destination. Many thousands would not, as the calm surface of the lagoon now boiled with fish of all shapes and sizes, as

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they bored in to the attack, seeking to devour the lot.

with laughter and gaiety, in anticipation of the coming banquet of fried whitebait fritters, we made for the lower reaches of our stream. The canoe was pulled out of the water as we awaited the approach of those that had escaped the slaughter, armed with a deep circular net^{at} attached to a long handle. At last there they were swimming along the bottom of the estuary. Now and again, for no apparent reason, the seething mass swirled to the surface. In a flash, in would go the net to be quickly withdrawn with enough silvery whitebait to fill a basket. When sufficient had been caught for our own needs, as well as those of the fowls, back to the house to await the evening meal. More food fit for the gods.

At the end of the day all are happily tired. A little soft music on a guitar, subdued conversation on the events of the day and all prepare for a long night's rest. Our hostess reaches for her bible, and in almost an undertone reads a passage of her choosing, usually from the psalms.

A fitting text for this lovely weekend might well be, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters".
