

TRANSCRIPT OF FULL ARTICLE:

## **A Sale of Souls**

Inside History of the Slaving Cruise of the "Blackbird" Steamer Montserrat; An Examiner Reporter Ships on the Slaver and Exposes an Infamous Trade; A Hideous Traffic Conducted Under the "legitimate" Plea of Supplying Laborers by Contract; Ignorant Gilbert Islanders Lured From Their Homes To Die In Fever-Infected Plantation

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On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of last April the tramp steamer Montserrat left San Francisco for the ostensible purpose of a trading voyage among the South Sea islands, but in reality, as was suspected at the time, to go on a slave-trading expedition. Her purpose was to make laboring contracts with the simple people of the islands to work on the plantations of the fever-stricken west coast of Guatemala for five years. On the face of it, the contract is legitimate, but when it is known that for little or not pay these people leave their beautiful island home, go into a strange country, among a people whose language they do not understand, live like dogs and die like sheep in the cane-covered marshes, and under the burning suns of tropical Guatemala, the cruelty of such deportation becomes apparent. Such traffic in the South Seas has gone on for years under the familiar name of "blackbirding," but the ships that come out of the Western Pacific, packed with the half-garbed natives of the islands, are no less slavers than those swift barks that in other days sailed from the west coast of Africa to the southern shores of America. This enterprise was under the joint management of San Francisco and Central American capital. The manager-in-chief of the expedition was W.H. Ferguson, whose connection with a similar slave ship, the ill-fated Tahiti, in which 400 natives were drowned, will be remembered. In command of the Montserrat was Captain Blackburn. Dr. R.J. McGittigen of San Francisco, a graduate of the Cooper Medical College, accompanied the expedition as surgeon, and James S. Osborne, a young San Franciscan, went along as passenger. With a full crew, provisions and supplies to last four months the vessel sailed, and after visiting eleven islands of the Gilbert group carried 388 imprisoned laborers to San Jose de Guatemala, and there delivered them to the wealthy Spanish plantation owners, who lodged them upon their sugar plantations along the coast to labor out the five years of their contract or to die with the infectious diseases coming to that marsh district. On board the Montserrat was a reporter of the "Examiner" in the guise of and performing the functions of a sailor. His vivid story of the methods used to secure the laborers, their weary voyage of twenty-three days from their sea-girt (?) home to Guatemala's coast, their painful journeys overland to the plantations in the interior is told below.

The steamer Montserrat is a slave ship. Yesterday she dropped anchor in San Francisco bay and ended a six month voyage. She sailed through the Golden Gate bound outward on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of last April. I was aboard her as a sailor before the mast. Acting under instructions from the editor of the EXAMINER, I had applied for a berth when the vessel was fitting out and, after much difficulty, was taken on as an "able seaman" and afterward promoted to be a quartermaster.

My duties gave me the fullest opportunity to observe everything that was going on, but there were tremendous difficulties in the way of keeping a record of events without exciting suspicion and having my mission discovered. I had taken a Kodak, but was for a long time obliged to conceal it, though subsequently I was able to make good use of it, explaining to my messmates and the officers who questioned me that I was taking pictures for my own amusement. Had my real object been discovered I should have had short shrift. The least that I might expect was to be put ashore on some convenient island and left to shift for myself. But there would, doubtless, have been some ungentle treatment connected with my exit. Before we left San Francisco our mission was generally known, but for the sake of eluding the authorities we had taken out papers for Nansimo [??], and thence for a trading voyage to the islands lying in the Western Pacific below the Equatorial line.

### **A royal passenger**

We had on board the King of Butaritari and his small company of attendants, who knew the object of our journey, and who had taken passage with us for home, without the slightest fear for their personal safety, and without comment upon the objects or the outcome of the voyage. In the hold was stored provisions sufficient to feed 500 men for three months. At Nanalmo, we took on coal to last for the same length of time, and then the Montserrat turned her prow to the southwestward and the real journey was begun. The days between Nanaimo and Honolulu were monotonous. Once outside the port of Nanimo, all attempt at concealment of the objects of the journey was abandoned, and in the cabin and in the fore-castle were discussed the chances of getting a big load of "niggers," and of the profits that would accrue if the journey was successful.

We arrived at Honolulu May 13<sup>th</sup> and remained in port for 24 hours. No particular incident occurred to relieve the monotony of the journey until we reached Butaritari, where, with the peculiar and picturesque ceremony of the south seas, the King was received by his people. Butaritari is the touching island of the Gilbert group, called the touching island because it is the nearest one of the group at which the Australian steamers can call in. We sighted it on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, and on the afternoon of the same day the Montserrat, weaving her way carefully through the narrow reef passages, with the wheel going hard up and hard down, and the line men forward keeping the lead wet with sounding, she swung up alongside of the primitive little wharf, and the King and his party accompanied by Captains Ferguson and Blackburn, went ashore.

### **Looking for Prey**

I need not describe how the ladies had marshaled themselves, clad in the abbreviated garments of the tropical islands to welcome their monarch. We were looking for "niggers." We lay at Butaritari ten days and secured three laborers, one of whom was an interpreter who knew the tongues of a dozen islands, and could speak English. A white man was also employed there, named Peter Garrick, whose usefulness had been demonstrated in numerous journeys with other slave traders. He was considered one of the best men in the group for this work, and from his long experience had acquired the native tongues perfectly, and knew the manner and the methods of gaining their confidence. He boasted with pride that during this stay of fifteen years in the islands he had taken by force and sent to various places in other parts of the world no

fewer than 900 natives. He was the most valuable man on this expedition.

“Niggers” do not always leave their wave-washed home in the southern seas to go into unknown countries of their own will. Where the roseate promises of a man like Garrick are not sufficient to get them aboard the vessel other means are used, and Garrick was employed because of his facility of invention.

Setting sail from Butaritari, after bidding the King good-by, we headed for the island of Maraki (Markie), another of the Gilbert group, where our first draft of “blackbirds” was made. Dropping anchor in the little reef-protected harbor, the first step to be taken was to visit the King and get his permission to take off the natives should they be found willing to leave. Then the missionary must be seen because he generally has great influence with the people, and they will oftentimes follow his suggestions without question. Captain Ferguson and Garrick presented themselves to the King, whom they found sitting on his bed cross-legged smoking an old clay pipe. Bending themselves in mock humility they crept on hands and knees across the floor to where his Highness sat, and the guards brought mats for them to sit upon. Word had been passed through the villages that a Captain from a strange steamer was in the King’s hut and the natives came swarming from all directions and surrounded the place, none venturing into the august presence of their King, and they crowded around the opening so thick that all daylight was almost shut out.

#### **“My People Are Drowned.”**

Garrick presented Ferguson to his Majesty and asked him if he did not remember him. That remark was hardly a suggestion from Ferguson, but he had to account to the King for the 400 flesh-bare bones that are lying at the bottom of the sea where the Tahiti was found mast downward. Ferguson was the genius who engineered that fearful and fatal enterprise.

“This man,” said Garrick, “was here last year and took some of your people away to Mexico on the Tahiti.”

The King did not remember Ferguson. He looked at him a moment and slowly said: “He took my people away and they were drowned.”

Garrick looked hurriedly at Ferguson with an interrogation in his face. “Tell the King his people were not drowned – not one of them. They are working in Mexico and are well and happy. How could I be here now if the ship Tahiti was lost?”

The King puffed slowly away at his pipe. Ferguson and Garrick crouched on their mats, surrounded by a horde of natives who needed but a sign from their King to do any deed possible to mortal hands and without compunction of conscience or regard for the person, watched eagerly the face of the smoking monarch to find some answer to their reply. The dusky monarch gave it slowly and forcibly.

“I think you lie. Black Tom and many others all say the Tahiti turned over and then was drowned. If my people are in Mexico, why don’t I hear from them? Before they left here they promised to write to me and my friends and they are all good people and do not die. Did the Tahiti turn over?”

“Yes, she did capsize, but was seen by a passing vessel that brought the news to San Francisco and a man-of-war was sent out and we were all picked up. I got another vessel and we continued the voyage and arrived safely in Mexico. The people have been there one year in two more years their time will be up and they will return.”

The King looked Ferguson straight in the face and slowly asked him.  
“Are you telling me the truth?”

Ferguson replied instantly. “Why, yes; why should I lie to you? Why should I be here if everyone one was drowned/ I cannot swim, while your people can live in the water.”

This argument seemed to convince the King. At any rate it satisfied the crowd outside, who showed their gladness at the supposed safety of their friends and relatives by shouting and clapping their hands in glee. Seeing that his story had held water with the King, Ferguson snapped up the favorable opportunity and told the monarch that he had come for more laborers and wanted the King to allow his people to leave. The King replied that he would not interfere: IF they wanted to go, all right, if they did not want to go, all right; he would not ask them either to go or to stay. That ended the audience, and once they were outside the palace Ferguson and Garrick congratulated themselves upon the dexterity with which they had wormed themselves out of a close place.

“So Black Tom is interfering in my business, is he? That nigger had better keep quiet or I will kill him on sight,” said Ferguson. Black Tom is an immense “nigger,” and before we got through with him he caused no end of trouble to the expedition. He went around among the natives, telling them that they had better stay at home, the Montserrat might capsize just as the Tahiti did; if they did not die by drowning they surely would with fever as Mexico was full of it, there was nothing but hard work and abuse and if they left their homes they would never return.

### **Patethic Scenes**

When the new went around the village that the Tahiti crowd were not lost, anxious parents and friends rushed after Ferguson and Garrick and plied them with a manner of pathetic questions – concerning the absent ones who would never return. One poor old woman approached Ferguson and asked about her son – was he well, and would he be home soon? “Yes,” said Ferguson, “he is well and happy and has grown taller than I am. He will be back in about two years with lots of money, and will buy you some land.” The poor old soul bent down in an attitude of humility and gratitude, and taking Ferguson’s hand in hers she stroked it again and again, while the tears of joy were streaming down her wrinkled cheeks, heartwarmed in the knowledge that one whom she had mourned for dead was still alive, and was so soon to come back to her again. That was one scene among a dozen as the two “blackbirders” stalked down the avenue with the crowd following. Straight from the King’s residence the pair went to the missionary, and to him the same story of life and happiness to the deported natives on the ill-fated Tahiti was told.

### **Some Preliminary Diplomacy**

Ferguson invited the King and the missionary on board to dinner, and after serving to them the

best that the larder afforded he conducted them about the vessel, showing them the natives' quarters and the clothes they would get as soon as they signed, and pulling out some calico and underwear he presented them with various garments, and invited them to drink. At first they refused but being pressed the temptation was too strong and the natives' stomachs were soon filled with gin. Half-drunk from the liquor plied to them, they were in a condition to listen to Ferguson's overtures. Talking for quite a while about Guatemala as a grand country of beauty and wealth and health and sunshine, and all of the things that go to make up the dreamy life of the South Sea Islander, he asked the direct question if they would not urge their people to come on board and sign. Drunk with the gin and bought with the bundles of clothing which they had under their arms, they promised anything that he demanded, and they were taken ashore.

Then the real work of securing natives was begun. Garrick and the native interpreter went ashore every day: one worked at the north end of the island and the other at the south end. The boats were manned by Kanaka crews, but in charge of white men. Ferguson employed his time with the white traders, who informed him that the best way to proceed was to get all the young people that he could and then their parents and relatives would accompany them rather than part with them.

### **Stealing the Child to Get the Parents**

One of the traders induced four boys to leave home and locked them in his house to await the arrival of a boat. Pulling off to the vessel he told Ferguson about the boys and added:

“If you can only get them on board and make them sign you are sure of their parents.”

That night the boat was sent ashore and the men in charge were told to get the boys and pull right away.

“If their people interfere with you,” said Ferguson, “put them back in the house and I will send off another boat, and between you you can stand them off.”

When the men reached the house only one boy was there. The other three had become alarmed and jumped through the window. The trembling prisoner was hurried into the boat and taken to the ship, where in fear he signed. His parents soon missed him and came out to the ship, demanding his release. They were derisively laughed at and told that since he had signed he could not be given up. In tears the mother asked to see her boy. She was refused. Ferguson fearing that she would persuade him to jump overboard at night and swim ashore.

Crouched down in the boat the bereaved mother pulled her hair in agony and cried out in piteous tones; the father of the boy, standing by in stolid silence, hid his grief behind the tense lines of his dusky face. The mother renewed her entreaties, but the same bluff refusal was again given. The next day the boat came alongside and the mother and the father rather than stand on the shore and watch the ship go down behind the horizon to a far-off port and unknown world, with their boy aboard, signed the articles and laid down their fate with his. The blackbirders were in great glee when the father and mother signed, and thereafter they directed their best efforts toward securing the young boys of the island.

## **Grief-stricken Mothers**

Two or three times when a boy had come aboard, deluded by some bright false story, or trapped by some representation of Garrick and his men, we would see from the decks the mother standing on the sand, holding her arms out toward the vessel, bewailing with the agony of a broken heart, clamoring to be taken aboard, rather than love her child, but held back by her husband and friends, who were powerless to rescue the boy, but who could prevent her going to a similar fate. These scenes were enacted over and over again at every island which the Montserrat visited. While the boat would be on the beach groups of natives would come alongside and question the kanaka crew, a boy would make up his mind to go, run up to his hut, pack his few trinkets and come back to the boat; but before he could climb in the older natives would make a rush at him, and some would grab his clothes, while the others would drag him back onto the beach and explain and to him the danger in which he was going.

At one place a woman got into the boat, but before the crew could get out their oars her husband and a number of friends dragged her out, and after carrying her up the beach her lord gave her a severe beating. The crew were too cowardly to help her, because those brown men up there had murder in their faces and instruments in the shape of knives, clubs and stones to do the murder, if they were interfered with. But even with these difficulties between the friendly traders, the missionaries and the interpreters, forty laborers were secured at Maraki.

## **The Trader's Explanation**

It may seem peculiar that the traders would be willing to use their influence on the people who are their customers, but it was explained to me very readily by one of the traders himself, who said that the [?] vessel is a godsend to the trader. "We would like to see you take half the population away and keep them away. They are like horses, and every nut they eat is one less for the trader. The patch their clothes so often that sometimes we see a coat of nothing but patches. They buy very little, the principal thing being tobacco. [?] labor vessels coming here years ago and taking them away by the hundreds. That was the time we made money, raising the price of everything 100 percent, and tobacco even more, because that is a thing they cannot be without. You can depend on the traders through [?] through the group to help you."

## **Threatened to Murder "Black Tom"**

The idea of laying for fourteen days on the islands and getting only forty-three natives did not please Ferguson and he laid the blame for it on "Black Tom," against whom many threats were made from time to time. This "Black Tom" was a "nigger" sailor, who had been at sea in English vessels and had spent some time on a Mexican plantation as a laborer and was thoroughly familiar with the hardships of the life. He was in sympathy with the natives and traveling from island to island in advance of the Montserrat used every endeavor to prevent the natives from leaving their homes. He presented them with a truthful statement of the ---ing of the labor class in Mexico and was the means of keeping many hundreds home who would otherwise have signed a contract after listening to the stories of Ferguson and his corps of interpreters. Ferguson became furious and boasted a dozen times that when he [?] "Black Tom" he would murder him but he did meet him in Apiang, where "Black tom" ---lessly told him he

would do all he could to prevent the natives embarking, yet Ferguson went silent.

The next island visited was Apiang. Garrick's home was here and, as he was known, Ferguson was certain that he would get at least 150 natives to sign, but he was disappointed, for Garrick returned to work [?] his own island. He explained to Ferguson that nearly every native there was in debt to [?] and knowing the small chance they had of returning to the island, should they not, did not want to take chances of [?] \$2500, which they owed him. So the [blackbird recruiters?] confined themselves to the south side of the island, and after a stay of five days, in which the scenes at Maraki were repeated over and over again, we secured forty laborers.

### **From Apiang to Parawa.**

From Apiang we sailed to Parawa. The British man-of-war Royalist happened to be in the harbor there and they came aboard inquiring the business of the Montserrat. The Royalist was badly in need of coal and Captains Ferguson and Blackburn were glad enough to share their own stock in order that inquiry might not be too closely made by Captain Davis of the Royalist. We remained in the harbor [x?] days and in that time, six laborers came aboard. Under the eyes of the man-of-war, Ferguson was afraid to follow the methods [?] we had put in practice at the other islands.

At Miani., the fifth stopping place, another interpreter was employed, a Mr. McMurdoch. He was a well educated man of long residence on the island. He had never been to Mexico, and thinking Ferguson as truthful as himself, believed everything that was told about the [?]. He was informed that his duties were to [?] labor and to assist in managing them during the trip, at the expiration of which he could {go to?} work on the plantation as interpreter or just as he saw fit, but in any case he would be required to sign articles. If he [--- ---] the country, he would be free to return to the island. Placing his business in charge of other parties, he worked night and day and secured sixty-eight men and women: former customers [xxx?].

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his preparation to leave, thought if Mexico would warrant him in going from an island where he was making a good living, it was good enough for them to leave for it, and knowing they would work under him they readily consented to go.

### **Children Separated from their Parents**

But it was one thing to make up their minds to go and another to embark. When the time came for parting with their friends and relatives only sixty-eight of 100 had the fortitude to go aboard. But in the feverish desire to load the ship as rapidly as possible children were taken away without their parents' knowledge and wives from their husbands. Mothers and fathers who were willing to accompany their children rather than lose them were refused on account of deformity or some disease that would render them unfit for work. Others covered with sores, contagious alike to white man and native, were signed. Old men and women who were bent almost over with age, and whose hair was almost white, and who were so feeble that it seemed

to them torture to walk up the gangplank, others perfectly helpless, their limbs hanging limp by their sides, all were taken and sold from the ship at \$100 a head, like range cattle herded into the butcher pens of a Chicago packing-house the money received for them coming under the head of passage money.

At Nanouti, the natives came alongside in their canoes in a perfect fleet and remained from sunrise to sunset. Seeing those on board well dressed and apparently happy, with plenty to eat and drink, a great many volunteered to sign without asking. These, with the number enticed by the four interpreters, brought the total at that island up to 170, the largest obtained at any single island visited.

### **A Deal with a Pirate**

Before leaving Nanouti, the Montserrat was boarded by the famous Captain Jergerson, who was trading among the islands with a small schooner for Crawford & Co. he is known as the South Sea pirate, Earl of Nanouti, Duke of Tabitoui, and many other titles. He is a tall raw-boned Swede, with a large head and lantern [jaws?] and a pair of staring eyes that give his face the impression of an imbecile rather than that of a sane person. He has figured in the Australian papers many times, as well as those of Hawaii, where quite a lengthy article appeared describing his deportation at various places. He is quite a pirate and makes no secret of the number of lives he has taken. While wandering around among the natives on board his eye fell upon a girl, an old flame of his, whom he had known years before, and who, during one of his absences, had left Nanouti and all trace of her had been lost. Going to Ferguson he told the story and asked what he could have for her. Ferguson replied: "If you get me some laborers I will make the exchange, if the girl is willing."

This was satisfactory, and the pirate hurried away in his schooner. After an absence of two days he returned with nine natives. He made another journey and returned with thirteen more. Then, going up to the girl, he proposed that she should accompany him on board his schooner. She refused, and the pirate appealed to Ferguson, who told her that she need not go unless she desired to.

### **Pirate Jergerson Kidnaped Children.**

At Peru – the Island of Peru – the pirate went ashore for more laborers, taking one of the ship's crew with him. His method, as described by the sailor, is like this: He stuck his belt full of pistols, called his dog, and , jumping into a skiff, pulled away. His ferocious appearance struck terror to the hearts of the natives, who ran away from him. Walking up the beach, he went from house to house, but could not prevail upon any one to accompany him. Returning to the beach, he was followed by a number of native children, and he enticed them into the boat and was about to pull off when their parents came rushing into the water, screaming and shouting. Some picked up rocks and threw them at the boat. Jergerson ceased pulling and took out his pistols and fired several shots at them, which made them run. Whether he intended to kill is not known, but his shots only [bored?] holes in the air. Returning to the ship, he carried the children on board. Not one of them was more than nine years of age, a clear case of kidnapping. Ferguson looked at the children and asked the pirate what he meant by bringing

them on board. Mr. Murdoch told Ferguson he had better return those children at once, or there would be trouble. Murdoch put the little ones in a boat and took them ashore and apologized to their [---?] parents for having taken them away and promising to keep the pirate on the ship after that. Seeing that the pirate was not [---] at labor-getting, Ferguson discharged him.

### **The Total from Eleven Islands**

From island to island the Montserrat traveled, going to Tabiteuea, Peru, Nikanau, Arorae and Tamana, securing in batches a total of 388 men, women, and children from eleven islands. The missionaries on these islands made no attempts to prevent the people going, but they did evince some interest in their spiritual welfare. At two of the islands white missionaries came on board and held service. Before leaving the vessel, they spoke to Ferguson in regard to the religious of the people and were very anxious to know if any arrangements had been made so they could have a clergyman to perform service at the country at which they were to work. Ferguson replied blandly that they need not fear about that, as he had already engaged the services of both nuns and brothers to look after them. Other questions were frequently put to him about the well-being of those who went out on the Tahiti, and to the priests the same story was told that the king of Marakei had heard. Once the people were in the power of Ferguson, who seemed to be engineering the labor-getting, while Captain Blackburn ran the ship, he was the embodiment of a domineering devil, and all the cruel traits in his character came out in bold contrast to the suavity with which he received the missionaries and island Kings when they came to inquire of their people.

### **Did Not See Their Boy Again**

It is the custom of the natives to send off fruit, fish and other articles to their friends who are leaving. At Apiang, a young man signed who was the son of a great chief. The day before the Montserrat sailed the chief and his wife and family came off in a large canoe to bid the boy good-bye and to bring him the cry presents. Ferguson was looking over the rail at them, and noticing the young cocoanuts in the canoe, told an interpreter to buy them for him. When everything had been placed on board, the interpreter told the chief that he wanted the cocoanuts. The chief refused to sell them, saying that he had brought them for his boy, and they were carried to the boy's quarters. When Ferguson was informed that the chief would not sell the nuts, he became furious with anger, and when the chief was landing his family up the gangplank, Ferguson drove them back into their boat. The interpreter told Ferguson that they had come to visit their son. "Well, I don't care whom they come to visit," he said, with an oath, "you cut their boat adrift, and I will let them see that when I want anything I must have it." The chief asked Ferguson to allow his family on board and he would go ashore and bring off some nuts. Ferguson told him that he didn't want them then, and finally got the chief in the boat and cut the line. As the boat left the ship, the mother and child were crying bitterly. Orders were given to the men stationed at the gangway that should the boat return not to allow the people aboard. They tried to get aboard at the other gangway, but were driven off and did not see their boy again.

### **Shooting at a Fugitive**

Before leaving Nukunau two men attempted to leave the ship by swimming ashore. Some one saw the men in the water swimming rapidly towards the beach and gave the alarm. Ferguson rushed up from his room with a rifle and fired at the man farthest away. The bullet cut the water a few inches from his head. Turning around and seeing Ferguson with the rifle still to his shoulder, the man threw up his hands to imply surrender and both swam back to the ship. After that a strict watch was kept to prevent any of them from leaving the vessel. The next day, when the steamer was leaving the island, the poor fellows stood forward on the deck and watched their palm-grown home sink down into the waves forever.

These were not the only attempts at escape. Several natives at one time and another got to shore but were captured by sending the ship's crew in boats after them. Others who feared to risk swimming for fear of Ferguson's rifle would offer all they possessed to the men at the gangway to be allowed to go. All they had to offer were a few strings of beads and a hair necklace, which would take from their necks and hold out, piteously, to the men. Some escaped by sliding down a rope into the native boats alongside, and when no one was watching would pull away to the shore.

Familiar with the treacheries of the white men who go through the southern seas for labor, it may seem strange that these people could be so easily deluded, but the arguments presented them are very strong. The older people are in debt to the white traders and want to get where they can make money. The traders trust them with goods equal to the value of their land. The King is responsible for the native debts, and, being pressed, he takes the land from them and turns it over to the traders. Rather than lose their land they are willing to go away and earn enough to square their accounts.

Another reason is that the young people are becoming, in a measure, educated and are beginning to realize that beyond the limited line of their vision there other countries – wonderful countries – of which they hear strange things from the Kanaka crews who have gone away in trading steamers and from the white men who come down to them in ships with bright beads and brilliant stones and guns and fish lines to sell.

### **What the King Saw in San Francisco**

When one of the native crews returns to the island after a visit to San Francisco he entertains his friends night after night with the tales of the things he saw. The King of Butaritari had an audience of many hundred people, to whom he related the incidents of his visit to civilization, of the houses he saw three or four times higher than the cocoanut trees, of other houses that moved quickly up and down the street with no one pulling or pushes, sometimes going up the steepest hills and other times coming down without an increased speed, horses filling the streets attached to other houses in which people reclined, places where by paying money, you can see one man kill another; such stories as these fill the young people with a desire to see the world, and by presenting the argument of money to the old and that of novelty to the young, together with an immediate reward of plenty of clothing, nothing to do and plenty of food, the victory is won.

## **Cutting Down the Water Rations**

From the stories that I have heard of the treatment of native laborers aboard ship I am inclined to believe that they received kinder usage on the Montserrat than they had been accustomed to get. While we were among the islands, where a desperate attempt at escape might result successfully, the natives were clothed well, fed well, given all the water they could drink and allowed the use of the lower decks and the hold. It was all holiday then – nothing but play and sightseeing, with the white men in the cabin furnishing everything needed to make the natives lives happy, even to plugs of dearly beloved tobacco. But once the prow of the Montserrat was turned out to sea, and the last dim line of the coral islands had faded from view, there was a change. The first hardship for the poor captives was the closing of the water tanks. During the voyages between the islands the tanks were kept filled with water; the condensers were kept going night and day. A native can no more do without a plentiful supply of air. The first thing to do after the ship stood out to sea was to close the tank lid and put a limit on the water supply. The tubes were screwed into the tank above the water level, which on the inside reached to the bottom of the tank and on the outside protruded a few inches. When people wanted drink, they sucked the water through these tubes. They demurred a great deal, saying that when they wanted water at night they had to leave their places in the hold and come on deck for it, and that their children could not reach the mouths of the tubes, being too small.

When the little ones cried for water the mothers had to suck the water up through the tubes and empty it from their mouths into a cup and give it to the children. Their complaints were not heeded. One little fellow was noticed one day going to the tank frequently, filling his cup by sucking the water to his mouth and then going below. Watching him to see what he did with the water he was followed into the hold and was seen giving it to his mother, who was too ill to come on deck. It is a custom among the elderly people to rinse their mouths with water after eating. Ferguson stopped that and put a watchman on the tank night and day. They would try to rinse their mouths when no one was watching but with little success. In a short time their clothing became foul-smelling and filthy beyond description. They had no water to wash them. Ashore a cleaner lot of people never lived than the South Sea natives. Sometimes they would steal water to wash the infants' clothes, but they had to do it at night and very stealthily. A watchman one day noticed a dozen of them in line waiting their turn at the tube, and as soon as they drank walking over to the other side of the vessel and returning for another drink. He followed them and saw them empty the water from their mouths into a bucket. By the time he discovered it the bucket was half-filled, and with the cruelty of a fiend he picked the bucket up and threw the water overboard.

## **Welcome Rain Squalls**

When a rain squall came it was hailed with the wildest delight. The women and children would run up and down the deck and act mad, calling up those who were sleeping below and bringing their tin cups, plates and cocoanut shells and bottles to catch the water. Sometimes the squalls would last for hours and they would stand there chilled through to the bone in the rain, such was their desire to be rid of the filth that covered their bodies. When the rain cleared they would huddle together shivering from the cold, while the sun dried them and their garments. They had few amusements aboard ship. They sang or played cards, but at 10 o'clock at night all noise had

to cease on board and in the course of time the limit was put down to 8:30. At first the lights were left burning until 10 and then they, too, were put out at 8:30. Of course there were fits – many of them – but as there were no weapons among them, no one was ever hurt.

### **Women Handcuffed to the Mast**

Ferguson made all sorts of threats against them if he caught them fighting, and one day after he had issued his orders two women became involved in a broil. Ferguson brought them aft, dragging them along by the arms and sending for a pair of irons he handcuffed them to a mast with their arms extended above their heads as high as they could reach. Then he went below and watched them with a sardonic grin upon his face, sipping his wine and smoking his cigars with a jolly company in the cabin. The two women were trembling with fear and pain and thinking that their death hour had come they kissed each other farewell. Ferguson saw the caress and coming on deck he released them, thinking that their kiss had meant a settlement of their differences and a deference to his wishes.

Men and women, married and single, were huddled together in the hold indiscriminately and no attempt was made on the part of the officers of the vessel to prevent the association of the sexes. During the voyage nine marriages took place aboard the vessel. Three of them were performed by a missionary who had taken passage on the vessel for Honolulu.

### **Arriving at Guatemala**

The Montserrat left Tamana, the last island on the 9th of August, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September dropped anchor in the port of San Jose de Guatemala. A voyage of twenty-three days out of sight of land is something the native mind cannot grasp. His environment has never taught him that the world is that large. They had grown tired and irritable with the long monotonous days' confinement in their bunks in the hold, and the narrow walks of the deck, and they began to think like Columbus' sailors, that land would never be reached. Just before sighting the continent the natives smelt the vegetation. They hoisted their noses in the air like hunting dogs and took long whiffs of the breeze that came sweeping outward, and then talked among one another excitedly of the unknown country to which they were going. As soon as the first hills crept above the horizon the dock was a pandemonium. The men clambored aloft and shouted down to those below. The mountains were very high and it was several hours before the lowlands came into view, and the half-crazed people on deck walked uneasily up and down, and hung over the rails to satisfy themselves that the ship was really moving. Dropping anchor in the harbor many visitors came aboard. Then there was a festal time among the natives. Their treatment was quite different then from what it had been at sea. Ferguson had some of them perform war dances for the gratification of the villagers, and then, a sham fight was participated in by two warriors armed with long spears, dressed in the native coats of mail.

### **Inspecting the Human Cargo**

On the next day after the arrival Ferguson went to the City of Guatemala, sixty miles away and returned with Eugene de Sabia, and wife. De Sabia was loud in his praise of the appearance of

the people, who he was sure would make first-class laborers. The first lot of natives were for Ssenor Samayoa, whose plantation is at the base of the mountains forty miles from the City of Guatemala. He wanted to inspect each individual, so they were marshaled in the after part of the ship, and as each name was called the owner of it would answer and walk slowly past the group on deck, closely scrutinized by the planter, who put a check opposite the name to reject or accept him. Presently a man with three old women passed for inspection. Samayoa smiled as he looked them over and told Ferguson that they would be of no use to him, they were too old. "They are not as old as they look," offered Ferguson.

"Now, you would probably take that women," pointing at one of the three, "to be forty years old, but –"

"No, I would say she was seventy or seventy-five," broke in Samayoa.

Ferguson applied to the interpreter, who said that she could not possibly be over forty, and then she was turned around and about and felt of here and there, and the Spanish slave-owner shook his head doubtfully.

Ferguson tried to assure him that they were not nearly so old as they looked, and proposed to bring some boxes out on the deck and have them jump over them to show their agility, but the proposition was rejected by Samayoa, who had more respect for old age than to suffer that indignity. Their arguments as to their ages were perfectly useless, for their appearance told the story of three-score and ten. Emaciated, bent, wrinkled, black veins standing out like cords, hollow cheeks, toothless mouths and dim eyes were evidences which Ferguson could not destroy. Hobbling along the deck they held on to the ropes and railings to keep from falling. Samayoa refused to take them at any rate and Ferguson got mad. He told him he must take them or none at all. "I had to take the old as well as the young, and if you don't do the same thing I will turn them over to President Barillas, who will take all I can get."

Seeing no way out of it the planter accepted the whole lot, but with very bad grace. A lighter was brought alongside, the natives' clothes were thrown into it, and they were handed down a ladder. An old woman, whose age was doubted, came hobbling with the others, and Samayoa, turning to

Ferguson, said:

"Here is a miserable creature you say is forty years old? I believe she is hamstrung. See how she drags her legs after her. If she don't die in less than a month I will eat my hat"

A sick man made his appearance for the lighter, carried on the back of his son. His spine was injured and his limbs were useless. He had come on board in that condition. Samayoa examined him and said to Ferguson:

"This is the man you said was sick. Why, he is perfectly helpless and I don't want him."

"Well," replied Ferguson, resignedly. "I will not ask you to pay for him, but will make him a present to you."

“But I don’t want him at all; he will only be only in the way and won’t earn his food.”

“Well,” said Ferguson, “you must take him or his relatives won’t go. I had to take him or I would not have got his people aboard.”

“Well if that is the case I suppose I must, but you must tell the interpreter that the rest of the people must do extra work to support him as I will have no one on my plantation who eats and does not work for it.”

The sick man was carried down the ladder and into the lighter and it was towed away to the shore.

### **A Piteous Parting.**

The parting of the people from one another was piteous in the extreme. Men clasped each other around the neck and cried like babies. After the separation the natives stood in groups about the deck discussing the matter, and wondering how they would fare and how far they would go. Ferguson told Samayoa that he had a missionary on board who was to have gone to Honolulu, and tried to persuade Samayoa to take him. Samayoa replied:

“I want no such people on my place, and I find any such man, I will put him in irons or shoot him, be he priest or minister.”

Cars resembling cattle trucks were sent to the wharf to convey these people to their destination. Accompanying them were the white planter and Captain Ferguson, the latter roundly abusing the railroad authorities for not sending a special train for the white men.

“It is a nice thing to expect us to sit in with these filthy people.” He forgot to say how they happened to be so filthy, when there was water aboard ship to clean them.

### **Deceived as to the Work**

The contract signed by the people states specifically that they are employed to work coffee, and this was also told them at the islands. They were very particular about it and had Ferguson told them that they were wanted to work on the sugarcane the probabilities are that very few of them would sign. Those who had worked in Honolulu and Mexico and returned home, told their friends of the hard work on the sugarcane and consequently they dreaded it. When they arrived at the plantation and found that they were to work on sugarcane, they repeated over and over again the story told them by Ferguson that they would work in the coffee fields and no where else, but having no one to take up their cause, they were compelled to submit.

When Ferguson returned from this expedition the vessel sailed on to Camperloo, where Tapoutouca and the Peru people landed, the former under the management of a Honolulu native named Charles for ex-President Barillas [?] and the latter under the management of a man

named Tom for Senor De Hiugh [?]. These gangs had no so many old people among them, yet when an old person came up for inspection, the same objections were raised as with the first gang but with no better results.

### **A Dreadful Journey**

The Miana crowd, by far the youngest and the strongest of the lot, were landed at Ocos, under the direction of Mr. McMurdoch, for Eugene de Sabia. One man in this lot who had his arm broken at the elbow, and which had never been set, was considered unfit for work and was given away as a present. Ocos had no railroad, and to reach the plantation, which is seventy miles from the coast and up a mountain, the journey had to be taken with the aid of mules, and it was three days before the plantation was reached. As a sufficient number of mules could not be obtained, half the number of people were obliged to walk. During the wet season it rained almost incessantly, and as the water came down the mountains it formed rivers in some places so deep that the animals' heads and back only were visible in crossing the streams.

A rough trail, full of holes, was the only road and as the mules stumbled and scrambled along the riders were thrown over the animals' heads and into the mud. Here a mother, holding on to an infant, sometimes two, would pick herself up covered from head to foot with adobe, presenting a piteous appearance, and taking her children to where the water was deep the mud was washed from their ears, noses and mouths and when the mule extricated himself from the mire and was once more on solid ground they would mount again, only to be thrown before they had progressed far. The cavalcade was almost two miles long, headed by Ferguson, De ASabia and the ship's cook, the guide bringing up the rear, while the surgeon, mounted on a horse, was riding from one end to the other in answer to calls for medicines and to attend to cuts and bruises. With a cheering word for each one he tried his best to make them forget their troubles, and to a great extent succeeded. Don Emanuel, the guide, a ferocious-looking fellow with an immense sombrero on his head and his large revolver hanging to his side, kept urging on the stranglers with a cry, "Vamose, vamoose," now and then accompanied with oaths.

It was a hard matter to keep the people together. Some, tired of riding, would exchange with the walkers. When they reached the ground they would place their backs against the trees and rub their limbs vigorously. Others who had no chance to ride were so tired and disheartened that they crawled away under the brush and lay down from sheer exhaustion. The surgeon missed the man with the broken arm and a search was made. He was found lying at full length on the grass about a mile in the rear. He was so fatigued and ill that he could not raise himself, and Don Emanuel rode after the cavalcade to procure a mule.

The man was lifted on its back in a sitting position, but from weakness he fell on his stomach and grabbed the mule's ears to prevent himself tumbling to the ground. The surgeon looked very serious, and after examining him told Ferguson that he was dying and that he must be placed in shelter. The guide led the mule through the brush to a native house, and left him and his wife in the care of the owner.

The news was kept from the rest of the people, and the journey resumed. The third day it ended, and a more discouraged and disconsolate lot of people in a strange land, surrounded by

a strange environment, covered with mud until they resembled terra cotta figures of misery cannot be imagined. During the journey two stops were made each day for meals. Men and women would tumble off their animals in a hurry, stretching their arms and limbs and rushing for the streams of water to wash away the mud from their persons. After meals the order was given to mount, and reluctantly they would climb back upon the mules and take up the weary road again. In old store-house sheds, which are built at intervals of fifteen miles along the mountain roads, the natives passed the night. Large fires were lighted and the fagged out people would throw themselves down beside them and go off into the sleep of exhaustion in a moment.

Too tired to disrobe they would lie with their wet garments teaming from the warmth of the fires.

### **Died on the Way**

Returning after landing the natives on the plantation it was found that the man with the broken arm, who had been left by the way side was dead, and had been buried. His wife, deserted and broken-hearted, sat moodily with her head between her hands, indifferent to everything, and she had to be aroused from her lethargy before she could understand what was being said to her by the interpreter. She was forwarded next day to the plantation.

This man, familiarly called Jumbo on board the ship on account of his immense proportions, had been sick for nearly two weeks prior to his arrival at Ocos. The surgeon was treating him for some internal trouble and he was rapidly recovering. His arm pained him little, as one of the bullets which had broke it had remained in the flesh and it would not heal, but the surgeon before he went ashore said that death would come to him unless there was a change in his condition.

### **“They Cost Money.”**

While at Ocos I had an interview with a Mr. Cuthbert, a wealthy plantation owner, who stood upon the beach, watching the landing of the natives. I asked him what treatment they would receive on the plantation. “I have no doubt but what they will be treated well, for it is to the planter’s interest to do that. They cost money, and he must get all of the work out of them he possible can.”

“Why do you sympathize with them if they are being treated right?”

“Well, when you are as long in this country as I am and know as much of the climate, you would probably do the same. This is a fever country and no one escapes it. A white man can stand it no time, and here you bring people from a healthy country, where sickness is a stranger, and expect them to live. Why, it is the worst fate that could fall on them, and I am willing to gamble that inside of twelve months they will be thinned out 75 percent. The lot that came on the ship Alma two years ago numbered 400 people. They were landed here in just as good health as the people from the Montserrat, and today there are a few less than 180 of them left. Fevers, smallpox, and other epidemics visited us in succession, and they got one after another. If they escaped death by the first they were not so lucky with the other. I employ our

own natives, as I consider it nothing short of a crime to bring those poor people to a place where death is almost sure to visit them. By the time their five years has expired few, if any, will ever see their native land again. Our natives are accustomed to this climate and, as tough as they are, they will not work for more than two weeks at a time without feeling the effects of the fever and they go right to the top of the mountain to recuperate. The sickness retards the progress of the country, as you cannot get people to work.”

**W.H. Bromage** [sic].