The Thralldom of Solitude

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Stories of Men Placed In Isolated Positions. Showing How the Desire for Loneliness Grows Upon Them Until They No longer Care for Human Company and Will Not Travel Even a Few Miles to Get It—These Men of Solitude Amuse Themselves by Music and Writing Poetry—Jamaica Especially Filled With Such Men—An Oxford Graduate Who Became a Castaway on a South Sea Island in Order to Secure Quiet—A New York Banker Whose Only Companions Are His Books—Marriage the Only Possible Cure for a Man in the Thralldom of Solitude—The Story of a Man Who Hesitated Choosing Between Solitude and Marriage, and Lost the Girl.

SINCE "Robinson Crusoe" was written the castaway on a desert island has been a favorite character in fiction. Novelist after novelist has told how the man, on the morning after the wreck, puts up a tall pole on the seashore and ties his shirt to it in order to attract the notice of passing ships. For months or years he lives upon the island, utterly miserable because he is isolated from his kind, and when at last the long-looked-for sail rises above the horizon he goes nearly mad with Joy.

That is the way of the imaginative novelist. The truthful novelist would show a Robinson Crusoe who grew to love his Island solitude, and hated the idea of leaving it and mixing with his fellowmen again.

Everybody who has traveled in out-of-the-way places knows that solitude has a wonderful fascination over almost all men after they have experienced it for some little time and got over its strangeness. There are thousands of men in various parts of the world who live lives as solitary as did Robinson Crusoe, simply because they prefer such existence to the society of their fellows.

A Man Who Fought for Solitude.

The captain of a West Indian banana planter tells a curious story of an adventure which happened to him in the [TEXT OBSCURED] when he was the first mate of British tramp.

On a voyage from Cape Town to Wellington, New Zealand, his vessel passed close to a coral islet. Looking through his telescope, he saw a white man, clothed in rags, standing on the beach. Knowing the place to be a desert island, the captain concluded that the man was a castaway, and sent a boat ashore under command of the first mate to rescue him.

As soon as he saw the boat leave the ship's side the man ran away into the jungle, which covered most of the islet. Thinking he was mad. the boat's crew searched for half an hour until they found him concealed beneath some bushes.

"Come along, my man," said the mate, gently and soothingly. "Why did you run away? We want to take you home."

"I do not wish to go," replied the man, in an educated, refined voice. "I shall not go unless I am carried. I came here ten years ago. because I wished to be alone and quiet. I have everything I wish for, thank you. except solitude at this present moment.

Pardon me if I seem inhospitable, but you will be good enough to take what you want and go away? I may explain that the craving for solitude is almost a monomania with me."

"But why on earth did you run away?" asked the mate, in amazement. "I'm sure we don't want to take you if you don't want to come."

"You are more considerate than most people, then." was the reply. "Several ships have Mopped here during the last ten years, and usually the captains seemed inclined to take me away by force. They thought me mad. which I am not. I only escaped abduction last time by hiding."

"Can we do anything for you? Provisions? Tools? Books?" the mate queried.

The man smiled.

"You are very kind," he said, "but I have all I require I have read all the books I wish to read I have not opened a book since I left Oxford eleven years ago."

"But how do you pass the time?" he was asked.

"In my leisure moments I usually write poetry Tt would be very kind of you to give me some pens. Ink. and paper My last supply. secured from a German warship. which happened to call here, is almost exhausted."

"Writing materials were given him and as they parted the mate asked.

"Can I take any message to your people at home? Things may have happened which would induce you to return."

"You are very sympathetic, but no sudden tragedy in my life has driven me to this place." was the answer. "I am here simply because I prefer it. and I do not contemplate ever wishing to return."

A Man Who Clings to Isolation.

This man is by no means a rare character. On the contrary, most men who live alone are like him. A few weeks ago an American passed by Sombrero island on a voyage from Trinidad to New York. It is a precipitous rock on which the British government maintains a lighthouse, and is the most northerly of the Caribbean Islands.

"What a lonely spot for a lighthouse keeper!" exclaimed the passenger. "Ila must be a miserable man."

"Not at all," said one of the ship's officers. "He enjoys it. He's the only man on the island, and he never cares to leave it. He's been there for years and absolutely refuses to fake a wife or a mate to live with him. Hs is entitled to regular holidays, but he won't take them. The government, fearing that he will go mad. almost begs him to take a change now and then, but he always says he'd rather stay.

"Once he was persuaded to go in Angilla for a month's holiday. Angilla is a tiny island with about two thousand inhabitants, and you would think it the quietest place on earth But in less than a week the lighthouse keeper said there was too much noise and bustle, and went back to Sombrero."

This man passes the time by taming the seabirds that swarm around the lighthouse. He loves them better than his fellow-men.

Jamaica, the Land of Solitude.

In the island of Jamaica there are scores of Englishmen, Americans and Scotsmen living lives almost as solitary as if they were on a desert island. They are the planters or overseers of coffee, fruit and cocoa estates. They live in the "great house" of the plantation, as the negroes call it and their nearest white neighbor lives perhaps twenty or thirty miles away. Moat of them are young, unmarried men, but some are gray-bearded veterans of solitude, who have lived alone all their days, and could not live any other way. Such men as these are to be found in all undeveloped or half-developed countries; but Jamaica is one of their strongholds.

During the five years that he spent on that island, a man now in New York became acquainted with several of these solitaries of "the bush," as the wilder parts of Jamaica are called.

They frequently do not see another white face for weeks, or even months, at a time. There is nothing to prevent them from mixing with their kind, if they chose. In the country districts of Jamaica somebody is always giving a bail or a dinner or a tennis party. All that a man has to do, if he tires of his own company, is to saddle his pony and ride ten or twenty miles to another plantation He warmly welcomed in the hospitable Creole fashion, and given a pleasant evening with music and conversation. But the man of solitude prefers to sit on his own veranda after dinner, smoke his cigar, and try to count the fireflies flitting through the chocolate trees This he does year after year, until he becomes an old man

"I went out to dinner last week old man," said one of these Crusoes of "the bush." "First time for over a year I'd left the plantation. Wish I hadn't Good dinner, charming people Dear old lady, the mother, nice girls, too. Played me Mendelssohn's 'Consolation' and the 'Spring Bong' after dinner I hadn't heard any good music for over live years. But I wished I hadn't gone. Too much racket for me I was glad to get back to this quiet old plantation and be alone again. I'm no good for society I suppose I'm selfish, but I prefer my own company to anybody's."

How They Amuse Themselves.

This man is a type of thousands. Many of them are highly educated men, with cultivated tastes and talents.

An overseer in Jamaica, who never sees another white man if he can possibly avoid doing so, is a gifted musician Every evening, after dinner, he sits down and plays the masterpieces of Beethoven and Palestrina until it is time to go to bed.

Another has published anonymously a profound work on psychology which made a stir in the scientific world, and was wrongfully attributed to several distinguished men if a visitor ran talk intelligently on questions of metaphysics and psychology, this man gives him a hearty welcome to his plantation, if not, he prefers to be left alone.

Some of these men write poetry by the yard and send it to the local newspapers. It la usually rubbish, but occasionally it approaches genius. Here is an example, written by a Jamaican under the pseudonym "Tom Redcam," which gives an idea why some of these hermits shun cities and men:

The night on the town has fallen,
  And the gas lamps, few and far,
Outflame like the picket fires
  On the rim of a lonely war.

The lights of the town. Madonna
  Are the eyes of a soul's despair:
The streets are the thoughts. Madonna,
  That are dreary and dark and bare.

The light that the world affords us.
  Though we win where it burns its beet,
Reveals but the pain and the hurry,
  The stir of a street's unrest.

And we turn from the street's confusion,
  From the toll and the city's pain.
From all that the heart desires.
  And all that the hand can gain

For what if we win it or lose it?—
  The praise that the world bestows,
It fades like a gathered blossom.
  It dies like a withering rose

Ah, the calm of God. Madonna.
  It is far from the streets away.
And, seeking that calm. Madonna.
  The hearts of thy children stray.

A young Englishman, who lived alone on an isolated plantation, got all his pleasure in life out of a gramaphone. He would spend hours every evening alone listening to it. He was never known to spend a night away from his cherished instrument it was all the society he cared for—until he met "the only girl in the world" and married her. She soon civilized him.

Marriage the Only Possible Cure.

When a man falls under the thralldom of solitude, marriage is the only cure; but often he will not marry, simply because he would have to give up his hermit's life.

A young American planter on the sea coast of Jamaica was in that position. He loved a pretty and charming Creola girl, and she cared for him but somehow he would not "make the plunge." He hated the idea of losing her, and yet he hated as much the idea of giving up his solitary life. Month after month he delayed the formal proposal, which, everybody was expecting, until at last the affair had *a* natural result—the girl married another man out of pique. That made the American a confirmed misanthrope, and now he is ranked among the most solitary of all the hermits of Jamaica.

Solitude in a Metropolis.

But it is not necessary to go to the tropics to learn the thralldom of solitude. Many men in the heart of great cities know it is intimately as Alexander Selkirk ever did

One such man is the head of a large banking concern in New York. He lives alone, save for his servants, to whom he only speaks to give commands That is seldom necessary, as they know by long usage exactly what he wants on all occasions. He has no friends, hardly a single acquaintance, never a visitor. Every day he walks in to his office from hit home and walks back—two miles each way At his office he is merely a highly organized machine transacting business in which he takes no personal interest. He never chats with anybody, or lets anybody chat with him

After dinner, his real day begins. He lives in his books all the evening and every evening. Reading is all he cares for. He never gets out anywhere and never has a soul to visit him. His day at the office is nothing but a dream, and bls real life does not begin till he takes up his book.

This man is essentially a hermit from choice He could not be more completely under the thralldom of solitude if he lived on a desert island in the Pacific.

The Ted K Archive

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