

# Cloud Atlas

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*The Pacific Journal of  
Adam Ewing*

*Thursday, 7th November -*

Beyond the Indian hamlet, upon a forlorn strand, I happened on a trail of recent footprints. Through rotting kelp, sea coconuts & bamboo, the tracks led me to their maker, a white man, his trowsers & Pea-jacket rolled up, sporting a kempt beard & an outsized Beaver, shovelling & sifting the cindery sand with a tea-spoon so intently that he noticed me only after I had hailed him from ten yards away. Thus it was, I made the acquaintance of Dr Henry Goose, surgeon to the London nobility. His nationality was no surprise. If there be any eyrie so desolate, or isle so remote that one may there resort unchallenged by an Englishman, 'tis not down on any map I ever saw.

Had the doctor misplaced anything on that dismal shore? Could I render assistance? Dr Goose shook his head, knotted loose his 'kerchief & displayed its contents with clear pride. 'Teeth, sir, are the enamelled grails of the quest in hand. In days gone by this Arcadian strand was a cannibals' banqueting hall, yes, where the strong engorged themselves on the weak. The teeth, they spat out, as you or I would expel cherry stones. But these base molars, sir, shall be transmuted to gold & how? An artisan of Piccadilly who fashions denture-sets for the nobility pays handsomely for human gnashers. Do you know the price a quarter pound will earn, sir?'

I confessed I did not.

'Nor shall I enlighten you, sir, for 'tis a professional secret!' He tapped his nose. 'Mr Ewing, are you acquainted with Marchioness Grace of Mayfair? No? The better for you, for she is a corpse in petticoats. Five years have passed since this harridan besmirched my name, yes, with imputations that resulted in my

being blackballed from Society.' Dr Goose looked out to sea. 'My peregrinations began in that dark hour.'

I expressed sympathy with the doctor's plight.

'I thank you, sir, I thank you, but these ivories,' he shook his kerchief, 'are my angels of redemption. Permit me to elucidate. The Marchioness wears dental-fixtures fashioned by the aforementioned doctor. Next yuletide, just as that scented She-Donkey is addressing her Ambassadors' Ball, I, Henry Goose, yes, I shall arise & declare to one & all that our hostess masticates with cannibals' gnashers! Sir Hubert will challenge me, predictably, "Furnish your evidence," that boor shall roar, "or grant me satisfaction!" I shall declare, "Evidence, Sir Hubert? Why, I gathered your mother's teeth *myself* from the spittoon of the South Pacific! Here, sir, *here* are some of their fellows!" & fling these very teeth into her tortoise-shell soup tureen & that, sir, that will grant me *my* satisfaction! The twittering wits will scald the icy Marchioness in their news-sheets & by next season she shall be fortunate to receive an invitation to a Poor-house Ball!'

In haste, I bade Henry Goose a good day. I fancy he is a Bedlamite.

*Friday, 26th November -*

In the rude shipyard beneath my window, work progresses on the jibboom, under Mr Sykes's directorship. Mr Walker, Ocean Bay's sole taverner, is also its principal timber-merchant & he brags of his years as a master shipbuilder in Liverpool. (I am now versed enough in Antipodese etiquette to let such unlikely truths lie.) Mr Sykes told me an entire week is needed to render *Prophetess* 'Bristol fashion'. Seven days holed up in the *Musket* seems a grim sentence, yet I recall the fangs of the banshee tempest & the mariners lost o'erboard & my present misfortune feels less acute.

I met Dr Goose on the stairs this morning & we took breakfast

together. He has lodged at the *Musket* since middle October after voyaging hither on a Brazilian merchantman, *Namorados*, from Feejee, where he practised his arts in a mission. Now the doctor awaits a long-overdue Australian sealer, the *Nellie*, to convey him to Sydney. From the colony he will seek a position aboard a passenger ship for his native London.

My judgement of Dr Goose was unjust & premature. One must be cynical as Diomedes to prosper in my profession, but cynicism can blind one to subtler virtues. The doctor has his eccentricities & recounts them gladly for a dram of Portuguese *pisco* (never to excess) but I vouchsafe he is the only other gentleman on this latitude east of Sydney & west of Valparaiso. I may even compose for him a letter of introduction for the Partridges in Sydney, for Dr Goose & dear Fred are of the same cloth.

Poor weather precluding my morning outing, we yarned by the peat fire & the hours sped by like minutes. I spoke at length of Tilda & Jackson & also my fears of 'gold-fever' in San Francisco. Our conversation then voyaged from my home-town to my recent notarial duties in New South Wales, thence to Gibbons, Malthus & Godwin via Leeches & Locomotives. Attentive conversation is an emollient I lack sorely aboard *Prophetess* & the doctor is a veritable polymath. Moreover, he possesses a handsome army of scrimshandered chessmen whom we shall keep busy until either the *Prophetess's* departure or the *Nellie's* arrival.

*Saturday, 9th November -*

Sunrise bright as a silver dollar. Our schooner still looks a woeful picture out in the bay. An Indian war-canoe is being careened on the shore. Henry & I struck out for 'Banqueter's Beach' in holy-day mood, blithely saluting the maid who labours for Mr Walker. The sullen miss was hanging laundry on a shrub & ignored us. She has a tinge of black blood & I fancy her mother is not far removed from the jungle breed.

Passing below the Indian hamlet, a 'humming' aroused our curiosity & we resolved to locate its source. The settlement is circumvallated by a stake-fence, so decayed that one may gain ingress at a dozen places. A hairless bitch raised her head, but she was toothless & dying & did not bark. An outer ring of *ponga* huts (fashioned from branches, earthen walls & matted ceilings) grovelled in the lees of 'grandee' dwellings, wooden structures with carved lintel-pieces & rudimentary porches. In the hub of this village, a public flogging was under way. Henry & I were the only two Whites present, but three castes of spectating Indians were demarked. The chieftain occupied his throne, in a feathered cloak, while the tattooed gentry & their womenfolk & children stood in attendance, numbering some thirty in total. The slaves, duskier & sootier than their nut-brown masters & less than half their number, squatted in the mud. Such inbred, bovine torpor! Pockmarked & pustular with *baki-baki*, these wretches watched the punishment, making no response but that bizarre, bee-like 'hum'. Empathy or condemnation, we knew not what the noise signified. The whip-master was a Goliath whose physique would daunt any frontier prize-fighter. Lizards mighty & small were tattooed over every inch of the savage's musculature: – his pelt would fetch a fine price, though I should not be the man assigned to relieve him of it for all the pearls of O-hawaii! The piteous prisoner, hoarfrosted with many harsh years, was bound naked to an A-frame. His body shuddered with each excoriating lash, his back was a vellum of bloody runes but his insensible face bespoke the serenity of a martyr already in the care of the Lord.

I confess, I swooned under each fall of the lash. Then a peculiar thing occurred. The beaten savage raised his slumped head, found *my* eye & shone me a look of uncanny, amicable knowing! As if a theatrical performer saw a long-lost friend in the Royal Box and, undetected by the audience, communicated his recognition. A tattooed 'blackfella' approached us & flicked his nephrite dagger to indicate that we were unwelcome. I enquired after the nature of the prisoner's crime. Henry put his arm around

me. 'Come, Adam, a wise man does not step betwixt the beast & his meat.'

Sunday, 10th November —

Mr Boerhaave sat amidst his cabal of trusted ruffians like Lord Anaconda & his garter-snakes. Their Sabbath 'celebrations' downstairs had begun ere I had risen. I went in search of shaving water & found the tavern swilling with Tars awaiting their turn with those poor Indian girls whom Walker has ensnared in an impromptu *bordello*. (Rafael was not in the debauchers' number.)

I do not break my Sabbath fast in a whorehouse. Henry's sense of repulsion equalled to my own, so we forfeited breakfast (the maid was doubtless being pressed into alternative service) & set out for the chapel to worship with our fasts unbroken.

We had not gone two hundred yards when, to my consternation, I remembered this journal, lying on the table in my room at the *Musket*, visible to any drunken sailor who might break in. Fearful for its safety (& my own, were Mr Boerhaave to get his hands on it), I retraced my steps to conceal it more artfully. Broad smirks greeted my return & I assumed I was 'the devil being spoken of', but I learned the true reason when I opened my door: — to wit, Mr Boerhaave's ursine buttocks astraddle his Blackamoor Goldilocks in *my bed in flagrante delicto!* Did that devil Dutchman apologise? Far from it! He judged *himself* the injured party & roared, 'Get ye hence, Mr Quillcock! or by God's B—d, I shall snap your tricky Yankee nib in two!'

I snatched my diary & clattered downstairs to a *riotocracy* of merriment & ridicule from the white savages there gathered. I remonstrated to Walker that I was paying for a private room & I expected it to remain private even during my absence, but that scoundrel merely offered a one-third discount on 'A quarter-hour's gallop on the comeliest filly in my stable!' Disgusted, I retorted that I was a husband & a father! & that I should rather

die than abase my dignity & decency with any of his poxed whores! Walker swore to 'decorate my eyes' if I called his own dear daughters 'whores' again. One toothless garter-snake jeered that if possessing a wife & a child was a single virtue, 'Why, Mr Ewing, I be ten times more virtuous than you be!' & an unseen hand emptied a tankard of sheog over my person. I withdrew ere the liquid was swapped for a more obdurate missile.

The chapel bell was summoning the godfearing of Ocean Bay & I hurried thitherwards where Henry waited, trying to forget the recent foulnesses witnessed at my lodgings. The chapel creaked like an old tub & its congregation numbered little more than the digits of two hands, but no traveller ever quenched his thirst at a desert oasis more thankfully than Henry & I gave worship this morning. The Lutheran founder has lain at rest in his chapel's cemetery these ten winters past & no ordained successor has yet ventured to claim captaincy of the altar. Its denomination, therefore, is a 'rattle-bag' of Christian creeds. Biblical passages were read by that half of the congregation who know their letters & we joined in a hymn or two nominated by rota. The 'steward' of this demotic flock, one Mr D'Arnoq, stood beneath the modest cruciform & besought Henry & I to participate in likewise manner. Mindful of my own salvation from last week's tempest, I nominated Luke ch. 8, *And they came to him, & awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, & rebuked the wind & the raging of the water: & they ceased, & there was a calm.*

Henry recited Psalm the Eighth, in a voice as sonorous as any schooled dramatist, *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou has put all things under his feet: all sheep & oxen, yea, & the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, & the fish of the sea, & whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*

No organist played a *Magnificat* but the wind in the flue-chimney, no choir sang a *Nunc Dimittis* but the wuthering gulls, yet I fancy the Creator was not displeased. We resembled more



the Early Christians of Rome than any later Church encrusted with arcana & gemstones. Communal prayer followed. Parishioners prayed *ad lib* for the eradication of potato blight, mercy on a dead infant's soul, blessing upon a new fishing boat, &c. Henry gave thanks for the hospitality shown us visitors by the Christians of Chatham Isle. I echoed these sentiments & sent a prayer for Tilda, Jackson & my father-in-law during my extended absence.

After the service, the doctor & I were approached most cordially by an elder 'mainmast' of that chapel, one Mr Evans, who introduced Henry & I to his good wife (both circumvented the handicap of deafness by answering only those questions they *believed* had been asked & accepting only those answers they *believed* had been uttered – a stratagem embraced by many an American advocate) & their twin sons, Keegan & Dyfedd. Mr Evans made it known that every week he had the custom of inviting Mr D'Arnoq, our Preacher, to dine at their nearby home, for the latter dwells in Port Hutt, a promontory some miles distant. Would we, too, join their Sabbath Meal? Having already informed Henry of that Gomorrah back at the *Musket* & hearing cries of 'Mutiny!' from our stomachs, we accepted the Evanses' kindness with gratitude.

Our hosts' farm-stead, seated half a mile from Ocean Bay up a winding, blustery valley, proved to be a frugal building, but proof against those hell-bent storms that break the bones of so many hapless vessels upon nearby reefs. The parlour was inhabited by a monstrous hog's head (afflicted with droop-jaw & lazy-eye), killed by the twins on their sixteenth birthday, & a somnambulant Grand-father clock (at odds with my own pocket-watch by a margin of hours. Indeed, one valued import from New Zealand is the accurate time). An Indian farmhand peered through the window-pane at his master's visitors. No more tatterdemalion a *renegado* I ever beheld, but Mr Evans swore the quadroon, 'Barnabas', was 'the fleetest sheep-dog who ever ran upon two legs'. Keegan & Dyfedd are honest woolly fellows, versed principally in the ways of sheep (the family own

two hundred head), for neither has gone to 'Town' (the islanders thus appellate New Zealand) nor undergone any schooling save Scripture lessons from their father, by dint of which they have learnt to read & write tolerably well.

Mrs Evans said grace & I enjoyed my most pleasant repast (untainted by salt, maggots & oaths) since my farewell dinner with Consul Bax & the Partridges at the Beaumont. Mr D'Arnoq told us tales of ships he has supplied during his ten-year on Chatham Isle, while Henry amused us with stories of patients, both illustrious & humble, he has benefacted in London & Polynesia. For my part I described the many hardships overcome by this American notary in order to locate the Australian beneficiary of a will executed in California. We washed down our mutton-stew & apple-dumpling with small ale brewed by Mr Evans for trading with whalers. Keegan & Dyfedd left to attend to their livestock & Mrs Evans retired to her kitchen duties. Henry asked if missionaries were now active on the Chathams at which Mr Evans & Mr D'Arnoq exchanged looks, & the former informed us, 'Nay, the Maori don't take kindly to us *Pakeha* spoiling their Moriori with too much civilization.'

I questioned if such an ill as 'too *much* civilization' existed or no? Mr D'Arnoq told me, 'If there is no God west of the Horn, why there's none of your constitution's *All men created equal*, neither, Mr Ewing.' The nomenclatures 'Maori' & 'Pakeha' I knew from the *Prophetess's* sojourn at the Bay of Islands, but I begged to know who or what 'Moriori' might signify. My query unlocked a Pandora's Box of history, detailing the decline & fall of the aboriginals of Chatham. We lit our pipes. Mr D'Arnoq's narrative was unbroken three hours later when he had to depart for Port Hutt ere nightfall obscured the dykey way. His spoken history, for my money, holds company with the pen of a Defoe or Melville & I shall record it in these pages, after, Morpheus willing, a sound sleep.