

Pambu

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FROM EDWARD DARLING,
WITH LUV 2 U ALL

When the American novelist Jack London and his wife Charmian arrived in Tahiti in 1907 in their yacht Snark, one of the first people they met was Edward Darling, the Nature Man. The Snark had barely entered the pass into Papeete's lagoon when the Londons saw Darling's "startlingly Biblical figure" standing in a small outrigger canoe which a native was paddling towards them. He was waving a blood-red flag, which, he explained to Jack as his canoe came closer, was a symbol of socialism.

The Nature Man was a magnificent bronzed figure with long brown hair which fell over his shoulders in luxuriant curls and a shaggy, golden beard. When he came over the side of the Snark wearing only a scarlet loin cloth, and bearing gifts of mangoes, pineapples, bananas, limes and oranges, he seemed to Jack like a sun god.

Jack London and the Nature Man were old acquaintances. Jack had first noticed him in Market Street, San Francisco, several years previously. It was a wet and drizzly afternoon, yet he was striding along, with a score of excited urchins at his heels, clad solely in "a pair of abbreviated knee-trousers and an abbreviated shirt, his bare feet going slick-slack through the pavement slush."

Some time later, Jack saw the Nature Man again while staying with friends in the Piedmont hills overlooking San Francisco Bay. They had caught him up a tree which he was apparently using for a bed. Jack accompanied his friends to meet the Nature Man, and found that he was living up a steep hill, in a rickety shack in the midst of a eucalyptus grove.

"He hastened to meet us", Jack wrote, "arriving in the whirl and blur of a handspring. He did not shake hands with us; instead his

The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau was established in 1968 as part of the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. Its purpose is to locate unpublished documents of value concerning the Pacific Islands and to obtain copies of them on microfilm for four world libraries specialising in Pacific research. The four libraries are the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; and the Library of the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

greeting took the form of stunts. He turned more handsprings. He twisted his body sinuously like a snake, until, having sufficiently limbered up, he bent from the hips, and, with legs straight and knees touching, beat a tattoo on the ground with the palms of his hands. He whirligigged and pirouetted, dancing and cavorting round like an inebriated ape. All the sun-warmth of his ardent life beamed in his face. I am so happy, was the song without words he sang..."

Between handsprings and whirligigs, the Nature Man delivered Jack and his friends a message, which, he said, would save the world. It was twofold. First, mankind should strip off its clothing and run wild in the mountains and valleys. Second, it should adopt phonetic spelling...

The Nature Man at that time was in his early thirties, having been born in Kansas in 1871. His father was a doctor who had established a practice at Portland, Oregon, after an early career as a farmer.

It was the cold, wet winters of Oregon that set Ernest Darling on the road to becoming a Nature Man. Being a puny youth, he caught cold after cold, until he was nothing but a cage of bones. While enrolled as a student at San Francisco's Stanford University, he developed tuberculosis.

The medicines of that period could do little for TB, and treatment consisted mainly of keeping the patient well wrapped up and out of the fresh air. Darling was almost at death's door when his father sent him to Arizona in the hope that the warm, dry climate of that state might improve his condition. It did. In time Darling rented a hut on the outskirts of a small town, ate simple foods, and spent all his time in the sun. Noticing that the Red Indians in the area generally went naked to the waist and seemed in perfect health, Darling decided to copy them. Eventually, in the vicinity of his hut, he began to go naked.

In a few weeks, Darling's illness disappeared and he began to feel healthier than at any time in his life. This made him wonder

whether he had not stumbled on a great truth - that all the petting and coddling of consumptives was wrong.

After living for a year on simple foods and without clothes, he was so healthy and happy that he felt he had a message for mankind. So he abandoned his hut and began marching towards California, preaching the gospel of nudity and simple foods to anyone who would listen to him.

On his march, Darling always wore what he thought were sufficient clothes to avoid trouble with the police - knickerbockers, sandals, and a sleeveless singlet made of fishing mesh. However, in those days when women's ankles were still covered and bare male torsos were taboo even on the beach, Darling's scanty garb landed him in trouble repeatedly. Between Arizona and California, he was arrested no less than eleven times. Once or twice he was hauled before the local insanity commission, but more often he was released immediately on condition that he cleared out of town within the hour.

Having found that the United States was rather stony ground for his creed, the Prophet of Nudity stowed away on a ship bound for Hawaii where the tropical climate seemed to offer better prospects. Here he was adjudged an undesirable citizen, and given the choice of a year in prison or deportation. He chose deportation.

It was from Hawaii that Darling reached Tahiti, and it was from the purser of the ship that took him there that he picked up the notions of socialism which he incorporated into his philosophy. In Tahiti, Darling found that the authorities looked on him with a more tolerant eye than he had previously experienced; and he proceeded to seek out a piece of land where he could establish himself as a full-time nature man. Meanwhile, he earned some money as a boxing instructor.

After several weeks, he found a spot that suited him - about 80 acres of guava-covered scrub at a height of about 1,500 ft in the mountains behind Papeete. According to the authorities, it was ownerless.

Darling spent several weeks clearing the scrub for a plantation and building a road to make it accessible. He planted trees and vegetables; but soon found that the area was infested with rats and wild pigs, and that these tore up and ate his plants as soon as they began to sprout. He declared war on these pests, shooting the pigs and trapping the rats, and at one period he caught fifteen hundred rats in a single fortnight.

Gradually, he began to get ahead. He built a hut five yards long by five wide, and before long he had 500 coconut trees, 500

pawpaws, 300 mangoes, and many breadfruit and avocado trees, besides vines, bushes and vegetables. Jack London recorded that Darling "worked out an efficient irrigation scheme, ditching the water from canyon to canyon and paralleling the ditches at different altitudes." "His narrow canyons", London said, "became botanical gardens. The arid shoulders of the hills, where formerly the blazing sun had parched the jungle and beaten it close to earth, blossomed into trees and shrubs and flowers. Not only had the Nature Man become self-supporting, but he was now a prosperous agriculturist with produce to sell to the city-dwellers of Papeete."

Darling then discovered to his dismay that his land did, in fact, have an owner - no less a person than ex-Queen Marau, the divorced wife of Tahiti's last king, Pomare V. All of his work seemed in danger of being lost. In some consternation, he went down to Papeete to confront the ex-queen; but the good lady was remarkably accommodating, and agreed to sell him the land for an almost nominal sum, 200 francs.

The socialist Nature Man thus became one of Tahiti's landed proprietors. But his troubles were not over. Because he used to counsel the Tahitians to discard their Mother Hubbards and other white men's garments, Darling fell foul of the French Protestant missionaries through whose property the road to his plantation ran. The result was that the road he had built with so much labour was barricaded with triple barbed-wire fences, and his easy access to the Papeete market destroyed. From then on, the Nature Man's only means of reaching the town was via a wild pig trail. This was so steep that most people could only negotiate it by crawling on all fours.

But the Nature Man did not care. He had no time for bitterness. "He believes he is in the world for the purpose of being happy, and he has not a moment to waste in any other pursuit", Jack London said.

The English writer George Calderon who visited Darling at his plantation shortly before the Londons, found it was part of the Nature Man's philosophy to "emit wild cries of delight whenever he entered sunshine or water, or reached the top of a hill." If the take-off was suitable, he would also fling a pirouette. It was the Nature Man's practice also to get about "as naked as Isaiah"; and one report has it that he erected a notice on his property saying: "U R free 2 D-nude rite now."

According to Calderon, Darling's hut was open back and front like a fruit-seller's booth, with walls of plaited coconut leaves, and a floor of bare earth. A big bunch of plantains was suspended in the gap of the back wall; a banjo lay across the tie-beams of the roof; while cuttings from American newspapers, "with fantastic portraits of

the Nature Man and articles about him", were on the walls. Beside the newspaper articles was a copy of the Nature Man's "Ten Commandments", which he had had printed as a pamphlet. Two of the Ten Commandments were "Thou shalt not eet meet" and "Vizit troppikle kuntriz." Other commandments counselled nakedness, non-acid foods, socialism, no religion, no drugs, and simplified spelling.

Calderon spent several days with the Nature Man at his plantation. At night, Darling made a bed of sacking on the floor for his visitor, climbed into a hammock himself, and talked and talked until Calderon fell asleep. Among other things, he said: "What we wawnt is faith, brother. If we have faith we can perform miracles. With a little more faith I could float out of this hammock into the air and sail right around this house."

In the morning, the Nature Man bounded out of his hut with "a wild cry of exaltation and threw another pirouette into the air." He and Calderon then worked for an hour or two in the early sunshine clearing the ground for new plantations. A simple breakfast of fruit and coconut milk followed. While the Nature Man "milked the coco-cow" (i.e. extracted the liquid from the coconut) he uttered simple rhyming couplets such as:

If you don't eet meet
You won't get sore feet.

or

The coco-nut cow
Can't pull a plow.

According to Calderon, Darling expected to "create a sort of religious and social revival among the Tahitians." However, most of the natives regarded him as something of a joke; and he himself said that those who joined him on his plantation robbed his hut. On the other hand, other would-be Nature Men were attracted to Tahiti from time to time by the publicity that Darling earned himself abroad. One such was an American called Betts, whose ideal, according to Calderon, was "to live simply and work furiously, when the mood is on him, in order to live at ease at other times." Others of similar ilk were a German called Gus Kromer and a Frenchman, Eugene Dufour. Dufour, in time, became something of a bete noir in Darling's eyes, for he got possession of the Nature Man's land, and eventually sold it, pocketing (if a nudist can do such a thing) the proceeds.

It seems that towards the end of 1912, the Nature Man decided to leave Tahiti and return to the United States. His reason for doing this is not clear, although the Press in San Francisco claimed that it was because he was lonely and wanted a wife to share his existence. At any rate, the newspaper reporters enjoyed themselves hugely at his

expense, and did their best to help him find a Nature Woman. One reporter wrote: "He has no preference in the matter of race or colour. She must be in good health. She must be willing to dispense with raiment except in such places as are burdened with a chief of police of conventional ideas. And she must be willing to subsist on uncooked food. In return for these sacrifices she gets Darling..."

Meanwhile, Darling had left his property in the hands of Dufour, and had had the title to it transferred to him on the understanding that the land would be used to found a colony of nudist Frenchmen. The idea of the nudist colony was apparently a pet scheme of Dufour's, but the scheme ran into difficulties (probably not difficult to imagine) and eventually it came to nothing. Meanwhile, Dufour let Darling's plantation go to ruin, and consistently neglected to answer the plaintive letters that Darling wrote him from California. Indeed, with one exception, Darling's Tahiti friends all proved to be remarkably poor correspondents. The one exception was Alexandre Drollet, the Government interpreter, who not only replied to Darling's letters and cards to him - whether they were in phonetic English, more or less plain English, or Esperanto - but he had the foresight to preserve them all for posterity. The Darling correspondence is now in the Papeete Museum. It was recently discovered there with whoops of delight by the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau and copied on microfilm for the Bureau's member libraries.

The earliest item is a postcard posted in Berkeley, California, on June 5, 1913. The writer's name and address are printed on it as follows:

From E.W. Darling (Unkoot fd.)
2117 Ashby Street (Nature-Man)
Berkeley, Calif.

The postcard itself reads:

"My dear Drollets: After my picnic trip on Tahiti I landed in dear old Cal. & seemed indeed to b welcomed by even the happy robins. Took my blankets up to foothills first nite & slept under eucalyptus. My short pants and sleeves pass police OK. Few wil beleev that I gave my place to Dufour. Vizited Jack [London], such a happy time. I rode up mts. with him."

The Nature Man's next epistle was dated August 9, 1913:

"Dear A. & family: Glad 2 get ur postal yestrday. Hurra for the athletix! I go swiming in the Bay. This A.M. I planted 22 blak berry plants for my friends here.

I am going to plant 15 or 20 walnuts. The 94 avoca treez I brot from Tahiti r growing...

I have a fine variety of food - dried olives, nuts, blakberries, peeches, &c. Hope to go 2 Germany in a yr or so. Urz iz the only line I hav had from Tahiti. I wunder why no body else has anserd my letters & kards but U. Rote long lettr 2 Tane for all the feloz. No. ans.

Luv 2 all
Natura"

Other items among the Drollet correspondence show that, in addition to tree-planting, Darling did some lecturing in California, and also took up the study of Esperanto. A card advertising one of his lectures in Patterson's Hall, 5432 East 14th Street, Melrose, Oakland, says that, for an admission fee of 10 cents, the Nature Man would briefly describe the climate, natives and home-getting possibilities in Tahiti, that he would devote part of his lecture to answering questions from the audience, that he would be dressed in native costume, and would "show how rich milk is made from the coconut."

A letter from Darling to Drollet of early 1914 shows that Darling was beginning to regret having transferred his Tahiti property to Dufour. "What hope is there to recover my plase at rezonable price?" he asked. And he went on: "Does he [Dufour] seem to think he should keep the plase now that there's no hope of getting the Paris colonists to join him? That was the only reason I gave him the plase - to make a gd home for French Naturists. He promist so earnestly he would kary on my work. I don't want to offend Dufour if he has good rezon to hold on, but I dout if he wil ever do what he promist as it was too much for one of his habits. He ment wel. But town life was too much. He liked town. Koodn't liv up on mts alone. Wel now I think he ought to turn the plase back to me at cost..."

The voyage that Darling hoped to make to Europe (presumably so that he could further spread the gospel of nudity and simple foodism) never eventuated because of the outbreak of World War I. The war itself was anathema to him, and brought out his belief in the simple life and simplified spelling more strongly than ever. "If peep l livd nearer 2 Natur, I'm sure they wood be more likely 2 setl their disputes az nabers shood - by arbitrashun", he wrote to Alexandre Drollet in March, 1916. He went on: "How I'd like 2 see U all. I daily think ov Tahiti... Luvly Tahiti smiles always in her robes of summr. My hart turns oft 2 the happy days & deer frendz in Tah., which I may never see agen, but ernestly hope 2 see."

Darling never did see Tahiti again. But he did get back to the South Seas. On June 21, 1918, he wrote to Drollet from Suva, Fiji:

"Helo my dear Alexandr and all that's left ov the family: I've had quite a trip round the Pacific, visiting Japan, China, Philippines, Java 4 mos., Singapore, India, Aust., NZ & Fiji, & never saw a better place than dear old Tahiti. O that I had kept that plase in my name. Please find out all you can about it & what it looks like. I might come to see it again after I visit Samoa & Tonga. What do you think.

"How r the social & politikl kondishunz. Likely 2 b eni chanjez?

"Climate here is lovely. Rather much rain, but fruit & nuts are hard to get, variety limited, quality inferior 2 that of dear old Tahiti. Peopl heer liv mostly on breed, meet, fish, taro, kandy & kow's milk. Bah! Maa Tahiti mea maitai ai, roa!

"I bot a gd set tools here, planted kokanuts, bans, utas, pines, &c., all over our lot. Meni nice peopl here, English, Fijian & Indian. Am with Indian lawyer, Dr. Manilal, fine man.

"Am trying to persuade the people 2 liv more on nature fdz, stop sending 1,000,000 fr. a year out of this produktiv country for foodstuffs. Konserv that money. Bild swimming pools, jimnaziums, publik skoolz for all the brown peepls, teeching hortikulchure, hijiene, sanitashun, ekonomix, demokrazy, vejetarianizm, thus bringing permanent, substanshal, universaly satisfactory world peace."

As part of his campaign for living reform, Darling had a set of postcards printed at the Fiji Times office, which he distributed to anyone interested at threepence per pair. On one side of each card was a picture of himself with a very woolly beard, and the caption: "Nature Man - Ernest Darling, student Stanford University, California. 7 yrz on hiz plantashun on Tahiti, Society Iles, working mostly nude and mostly on unkookt fd (froots & nts, best quality), now touring Pacific, riting a bk; teeching a gradual return to nature for helth, hapiness & true prosperity (2 krds 3d)." On the other side was a similar message in Fijian.

Darling was still dreaming of returning to Tahiti when he wrote his last letter to Drollet from Fiji at the end of August, 1918. "Am anxious 2 no if I mite do as wel by returning 2 Tahiti as I did before", he said. "Iz the plase all run down or iz there enuf left for me 2 start in agen if I were wiling 2 buy it bak?" He went on:

"I may not return, but should like 2 no kondishunz. Many fine lokashunz here & fine nativz, gd government ofiserz, &c... I was thinking of taking an island here (leasing a small one), but first wish to look around. Next Friday hope to visit Samoa for four weeks, then Tonga...Feel fine and happy..."

Darling was 47 years old at that time, but he was still so fit that he could turn hand-spring somersaults with the agility of a youth. However, his robust good health was no proof against the virulent influenza epidemic that was then sweeping the world.

Towards the end of 1918, he was stricken by it. A doctor who attended him, prescribed drugs. But the Nature Man was true to his faith to the last and, refusing to take them, died on December 9, 1918.

He was buried in Suva Cemetery. Friends erected a tombstone over his grave bearing the inscription:

Beloved Natura
Sleepeth Here
Ernest W. Darling
Born Aug. 5, 1871
Died Dec. 9, 1918
American

MANY VALUABLE MANUSCRIPTS IN PAPEETE MUSEUM

The correspondence of Edward Darling, described above, may not be every researcher's idea of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. But it is certainly a representative sample of the wide variety of valuable manuscripts housed in the museum of the Société des Etudes Océaniques in Papeete.

The executive officer of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau was recently able to obtain microfilm copies of all of the Société's holdings, thanks to the generous co-operation of the Société's president, Mr. Henri Jacquier, and its secretary, Miss Aurora Natua.

The documents microfilmed are as follows:

- . Genealogy of Ma'i by Rene Calinaud, Magistrate, Papeete, July 23, 1966.
- . Orders of the day of the Commanding Officer, Iles Sous le Vent, Society Islands, January-February, 1897.
- . Miscellaneous documents of Huahine and Raiatea, 1879-1891.

- . Notes on the ethnology of the Marquesas Islands by C. Noury, capitaine de fregate, commandant of the Nukuhiva station, November 2, 1849.
- . Documents on the ethnology of the Society Islands gathered by C.F. Lavaud, capitaine de vaisseau, Commissaire de la Republique, Society Islands. The documents are dated July 16, 1849, and September 20, 1849.
- . Report on a mission to the Gambier Islands by Cdt. de la Motte Rouge, February, 1871.
- . Letters on the smallpox epidemic at Nukuhiva and Uapou, Marquesas Islands, 1863. (The originals are in the Bishop Museum, Honolulu).
- . The Old Orsmond Manuscript. (A transcript of a document with this title, dated 1849, is stated to be in the archives of the London Missionary Society - see p. xv of The History of the Tahitian Mission, by John Davies, Cambridge, 1961).
- . Legend of the Lizard Mo'orea by the Chief of Mai'ao.
- . Letter of Commandant Maxime Destremau, December 2, 1914. (Destremau was the commander of the French warship Zelee when the German raiders Scharnhorst and Gneisenau bombarded Papeete on September 22, 1914).
- . An official document thanking the men who rescued the victims of the German raider Seeadler from Mopelia Atoll in 1917.
- . Notes on the inland route from Papenoo to Mataiea, Tahiti, by M. Jay.
- . Report on lands owned by the Pomare Family, compiled by a secretary of Queen Pomare IV (in Tahitian).
- . Legends of the Society Islands.
- . Useful Plants of Tahiti, by Edouard Butteaud.
- . Newspaper clippings concerning an old cannon found in the pass of Papeete in 1963.
- . A document concerning the establishment of the French protectorate over Rurutu, Rimatara and dependencies, March 27, 1889.
- . Miscellaneous manuscripts of Xavier Caillet (1822-1901).
- . Miscellaneous documents relating to the reign of Queen Pomare IV.
- . Autobiography (in Tahitian) of Teriieroo a Teriierooiterai (1875-1952), a notable Tahitian chief and orator.

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