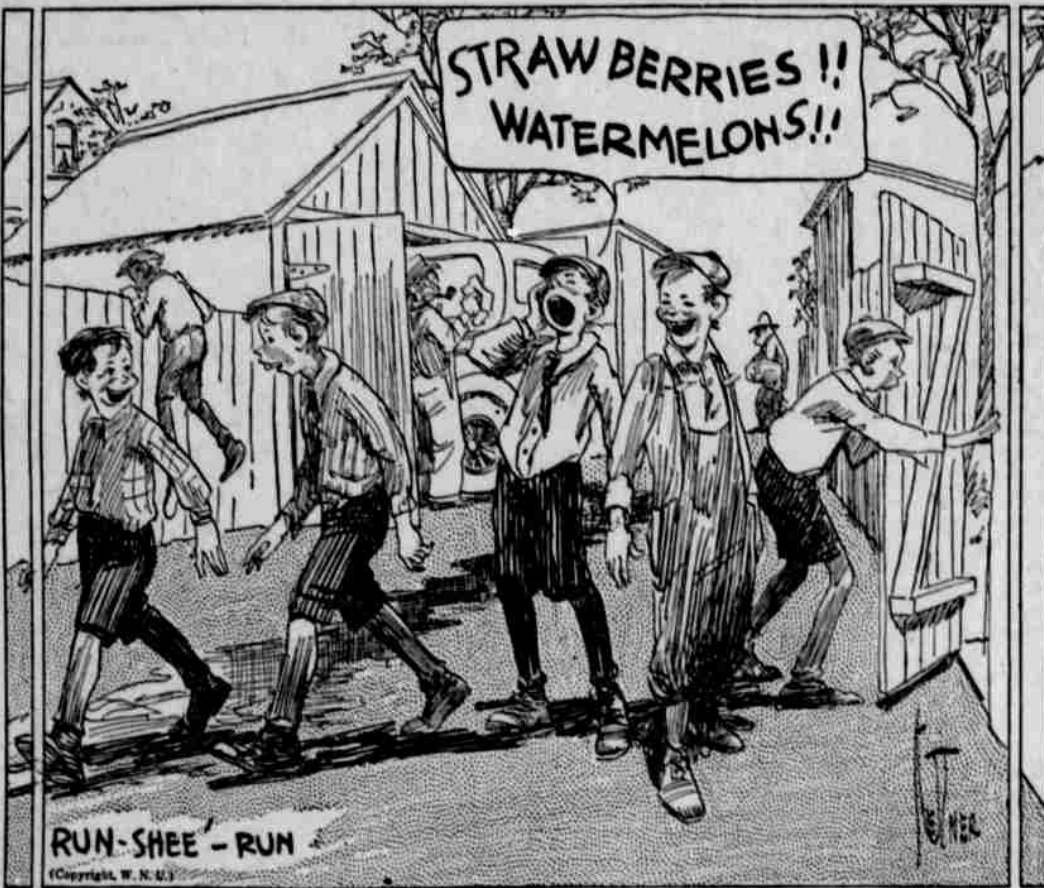


# OUR COMIC SECTION

## Events in the Lives of Little Men



# Heart of Polynesia



Native Tahitian Girl.

Prepared by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.

**T**AHITI lies far from the feverish activities of modern industrial life. It is more than 1,000 miles below the equator, in longitude about 150 degrees west; 3,000 miles from Australia, 3,000 miles from San Francisco, 4,500 miles from the Panama canal, 6,000 miles from Asia. By old trade routes—via the Suez canal and Australia—it is nearly as far from New York as all these distances combined, but the Panama canal reduces this to 6,500 nautical miles, thus effecting a saving of 10,000 miles.

Ever since its discovery by Wallis in 1767, the Otahette of early exploration days—or King George the Third's Island, as this navigator called it—has been famed as an isolated jewel remarkable in contour, rich in verdure, blessed with a pleasant, healthful climate, and inhabited by friendly people of handsome physique.

Tahiti is an extraordinary work of creation—a jagged, fertile cinder from volcanic pits, perhaps, or a verdant fragment of a sunken continent. It is indeed a steeped gem of wondrous green within a teeming coral ring.

This captivating heart of Polynesia presents abundant evidence that in its adornment nature was in a liberal mood. Here the eye is delighted by leafy luxuriance stretching from palm-fringed beach to loftiest mountain crest; by the brilliant colors of land and sea; by the high physical standards of the natives, both men and women.

Here the ear is soothed by the wash of an inner sea; by the flow of gentle streams or of boisterous mountain torrents. Here the tired or distressed mind is composed and renewed by lasting quietude, and by the knowledge that madly competitive centers are far away.

Overshadowing all are the mountains. In every colossal pile there is distinctiveness. Here a mighty slab rises high above a valley; there a peak with a triangle summit shoots thousands of feet upward; beyond, lofty columns hundreds of feet in thickness stand in solitary grandeur; another turn and a shaft cuts the sky with an edge like an enormous knife—an edge to which tree, shrub, fern and vine cling tenaciously.

**An Amiable Country.**

As its indulgent climate might well suggest, Tahiti is an amiable country. Along all its shores one sees smiling, care-free faces, bright, liquid eyes expressing contentment and inviting confidence, and generous hands outstretched in welcome. Everywhere one hears musical voices carrying notes of kindness and sympathy; daily the visitor is gladdened by the gracious "Haere mai!" or the social "Iorana!"

Tahiti is not an abode of savages. It still has primitive life, but of barbarism it has none. There life and property are safe; compulsory education quickens the mind of the youthful; and the church, the vernacular religious press, and contact with the Caucasian broaden, in a limited way, the intellect of the adult.

It is most impressive to gain one's first view of Tahiti at dawn. To the right and left strangely shaped mountains cleave the sky, and in their dense wooded depths flit fantastic outlines of crag, peak, and precipice. On a coral-strewn shore tall palms flap a lazy welcome. In the distance rise the green spires of La Diademe. Between them and the jutting reef, Papeete, drowsy capital and metropolis of Tahiti and its far-flung dependencies, gently rises and falls in a mirroring sea.

As the ship anchors inside the reef, the sun is ready to surmount its lofty obstruction. Shafts of gold shoot over the island. Suddenly sunbeams bathe the mountain summit and valley floor. The great Ra of the Polynesian is now well advanced on his daily march across the sky. In the solitudes of the interior, dark with luxuriant foliage, vapor shadows fantastically flit about. In the burst of light one sees more clearly the strange features of rocky height, the palm-sheltered shores, and the secluded town beneath leafy sunshades.

Straight ahead is the long, high ridge of Aoral, culminating 7,000 feet above the tides. Standing at the head of the historic Fautaua valley, it overlooks La Diademe and lesser heights and guards a difficult entrance to the innermost recesses of the island.

**The Great Mountain Crown.**

To its right rises a great crown of nature's fashioning—La Diademe of the French, the Malau of the Tahitians. The loftiest of its jutting spurs, which fancy has sculptured into king-like insignia, towers 4,000 feet above the sea and seems to be covered to its tip with vegetation. Between Aoral and the lengthy ridges to the right is a mighty gap. Through this the Fautaua river cuts its way, spilling itself, six miles from the sea, in a cascade more than 600 feet high.

In the foreground, mirrored in a deep and clear harbor that swarms with marine life of great variety and diversified color, runs a fringe of algaroba trees. Back of them are sequestered avenues of "damboyant," tamarind, mango, and breadfruit. From these rise an occasional red tile roof, church spire, white flag-staffs, and tall coconut palms.

Sloping gradually from the town, evergreen hills, scarred here and there by barren red and gray clay, extend miles inland, where they overlook the Fautaua and Punarua valleys. They are broken into almost innumerable canyons and gullies all over their surface.

As the steamer draws near the shore many small craft—the picturesque outrigger canoe, the broad beamed fruit boat, and the noisy gasoline schooner—lie at anchor or move about the lake-like harbor.

At the copra-scented dock hundreds of Tahitians and scattered pairs and groups of Americans and Europeans are on hand to meet the boats from Africa. It is a variegated throng. There are as many colors and shades of complexion as there are of dress, and some of the feminine possessors are beautifully proportioned and move with queenly grace. Their dark hair, crowned in some cases with a wreath of the tiare, the flower of love and friendship, hangs low on their backs. Their brilliant dark eyes sparkle with good will and merry resolution.

Everyone in Papeete rises early except the tourist. The capital believes in making the most of the cool hours of the dawn. The market opens at 5:30, the shops remove their shutters 30 minutes later, and the laborer begins work at the same hour.

**Only the Carts Move Rapidly.**

All this activity, however, is quiet bustle. The only noise is the rattle of lantern-lighted carts driven furiously by native Jehus. These men of the whip love speed, and they insist on getting it, even though the horse they drive looks like a cadaver.

At 11 o'clock, and in some cases an hour sooner, Papeete pauses to take a siesta of an hour or two. During this period all places of business are closed, barring Chinese shops, which keep open uninterruptedly until bed-time.

The most animated moment of the town's daily life begins shortly after its 5,000 inhabitants awaken. The site of this activity is the market square. Sunday is the chief market day of the week. At that time neatly dressed men and women from many parts of Tahiti assemble at the market half an hour before the opening bell clangs its signal.

On the previous day and night, boat-loads of feia (plantains) and oranges are laid outside the market building in preparation for the morning rush, and in the Sabbath dawn strings of fish and wagons filled with soil products are hurried to the victualers' stands.

The scene is enlivening; the crowd is friendly and gay. There meet comrades and relatives who have long been separated; there white and brown elbow each other in neighborly fashion.

Within 30 minutes after the first customer is served the fish benches are stripped, and the butchers, bakers and vegetable men, have parted with more than half their stock. In an hour the market is almost deserted.

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