

ward, and reports his observations at the pilot-house. Now the boat is slowed to cross some shallow, or to pass a "tow" without washing their decks. Again the speed is increased. Now a sharp turn is made, and then there is a run through a long stretch of straight water. So all the night through, pilot and wheelmen are carefully watching the course and skilfully guiding the vessel, as the powerful engine drives her on her way.

When we awake in the morning the

floating town is nearly at the city. A little later seven or eight hundred people have landed, and are dispersed through the great metropolis; but one would never know, unless he paused to think, that literally a whole villageful had passed over the gangway of the great steamer into the city's streets. What a triumph of man's ingenuity it is when such great companies are daily carried to and fro, not only in safety, but in absolute luxury, and at such small cost.



THE BALOLO FESTIVAL.

IN her book "At Home in Fiji," Miss Gordon Cumming tells the following extraordinary fact in natural history, which is peculiar to these islands:—

"It is called 'The Balolo Festival'—in other words, 'The Feast of Worms,' and occurred yesterday. The balolo is a small sea-worm, long and thin as ordinary vermicelli. Some are fully a yard long; others about an inch. It has a jointed body and many legs, and lives in the deep sea.

Only on two days in the whole year do these creatures come to the surface of the water. The first day is in October, which is hence called 'Little Balolo,' when only a few appear. The natives know exactly when they are due, and are all on the lookout for them. They make their calculations by the position of certain stars. After this no more are seen till the high tide of the full moon, which occurs between the twentieth and twenty-fifth of November, which hence takes the name of 'Great Balolo,' when they rise to the surface in countless myriads, always before daybreak. In the Samoan Isles the days occur about a fortnight earlier.

At certain well-known points near the reefs the whole sea, to the depth of several inches, is simply alive with these red, green, and brown creatures, which form one writhing mass, and are pursued by shoals of fish of all sizes, which come to share the feast with the human beings. The latter are in a state of the wildest excitement, for it is the merriest day of the year, and is looked forward to from one November to the next by all the young folk. About midnight they go out in their canoes, and anxiously await the appearance of the first few worms; and great is the struggle to secure these, which herald the approach of untold myriads. For several hours there is the merriest sport and laughter, every one bailing up the worms and trying who can most quickly fill his canoe, either by fair sport or by stealing from his neighbour. All is noise, scrambling, and excitement, the lads and lasses each carrying wicker baskets, with which they capture the worms without carrying too much salt water on board.

As the day dawns, these mysterious creatures with one accord sink once more to their native depths, and by the moment of sunrise not one remains on the surface; nor will another be seen for a twelvemonth, when, true to its festival, the balolo will certainly return.

Never has it been known to fail, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, white or brown. Nor is there any record of anyone having seen one rise to the surface on any save the two appointed days, which are known as the 'Little Balolo' and 'Great Balolo.' Well do the natives know how heedless it would be to look for one after sunrise, so all the canoes then return to land, wrap their balolo in bread-fruit leaves, cook them in ovens dug on the beach, and have a great feast—a regular whitebait dinner, in fact. So now you know the true meaning of the 'diet of worms.'

So great is the quantity taken that the supply generally lasts for several days, being warmed up when required; and basketfuls are sent to friends at a distance, just as we in Scotland send a box of grouse. Such is our prejudice against all manner of worms that few Europeans appreciate this dainty, which nevertheless is really not nasty, especially when eaten like potted meat, with bread and butter. It is rather like spinach, with a flavour of the sea—perhaps I should compare it with the laver of the Scilly Isles. Captain Olive brought us some to taste, which had been given him by some of the soldiers."

In the islands of the South Pacific (says the Rev. Wyatt Gill) fresh-water eels (*murænæ*) are regarded as incarnations of deity. Until Christianity came it was unlawful for women to taste eels, on the alleged ground that in the olden time a divinity assumed the form of a great eel in order to approach an unsuspecting woman while bathing. To this day nothing can exceed the disgust most of the native women feel at eels, which they refuse even to touch. A woman once secretly ate the sea-eel. On discovering the sacrilege, the husband fled from her in horror, and never lived with her again, regarding her as possessed of an evil

spirit, which would be sure to kill and devour him on some future occasion.

One variety, the *pui*, is entirely white, and attains the length of six feet. A much fiercer fish is the *vaaroa*, "long-mouthed," which is often eight feet in length, and of the thickness of a man's leg. The mouth of the *vaaroa* is very formidable; its appetite voracious. Its brown body is ornamented with black spots. It inhabits the outer edge of the reef where the surf forever beats, and occasionally such great rents in the middle of the reef as will admit its huge body. One recently caught was supposed to be very old, as seaweed was actually growing on the forehead of the living fish. It is accustomed to draw half its length out of its hole in order to attack anything that may come within reach, whether fish or man. Impelled by hunger, it sometimes leaves its natural home in the coral, to roam about in quest of victims.

In the Paumotu Islands, I have been assured, it is customary for the natives when walking over the coral at low tide to carry with them a large knife to defend themselves from the attacks of this savage species of *murænæ*.

A year or two since a poor white man, sauntering without shoes over the reef at Palmerston's Island, was suddenly laid hold of by the heel by one of these *murænæ*. Well knowing its habits, he did not at first attempt to extricate himself, or he would have been maimed for life, but allowed himself to be dragged backwards. As soon as the eel got to its hole and began to descend, not suspecting that its victim would attempt to escape, it relaxed its hold for a second, so as to enter the more easily. That second enabled the man to escape by running away at full speed. A neighbour of mine lost two fingers by an unlucky bite from one of these fierce denizens of our coral reef.