

We make friends in the Tuamotus and Marquesas

THE further we go through the Pacific Islands the better times we seem to have. This is no doubt partly due to our increasing skill in extracting enjoyment from our ports of call.

But here in the Marquesas, and in the Tuamotus, 600 miles to the southwest, the natives have been almost overwhelming in their friendliness and hospitality. This is the region of Paul Gauguin and of Hermann Melville's Typee.

Leda has been the scene of revelry by night. Singing and dancing and guitars, and hula-hulas on the galley floor. Parties ashore with the whole village participating.

I never would have believed that I could actually enjoy myself performing a solo hula in front of an audience almost hysterical with laughter, or that I would ever dance with a girl clad only in a skirt and think nothing of it.

My brother Dooley's clarinet has proved a vast success with these natural musicians. Our repertoire of Tahitian songs has rapidly increased and the very fact that we learn them further increases the friendliness of the islanders, accustomed to the aloofness and insistence on their own language of the French in these parts.

The islands of the Tuamotus, where Kon Tiki ended her voyage and more recently the former Auckland ketch New Golden Hind was burnt, are only coral atolls and very poor in vegetation. They could give us little but coconuts (a dinghy-full), chickens and fish. But they gave unstintingly.

At the island of Fakarava, which consists of a fringe of coral enclosing a lagoon 60 miles long and 20 miles wide, we took the chief and his retinue on two all-day fishing trips.

The first time we went diving with spears and the second time used throwing spears in the shallow water over the coral along the wreck-strewn coast.

Sharks!

"SHARKS?" they said in answer to our query. "Oh, yes, plenty." They took us along the beach half an hour after we had first dropped anchor at the village and showed us a seven-footer, still kicking, hauled up on the sands.



Marquesas Islanders aboard the Leda at Tahuata.

There was little pearl fishing these days, they said, because of the shark risk and the scarcity

from W. A. Wilson

Aboard the yacht Leda
Marquesas Islands

of shell. Yet when we went diving accompanied by four natives they didn't turn a hair when the sharks and barracoutta came nosing round.

Occasionally when they became too inquisitive one of the natives would shoot them away with a playful spear-thrust, but no time was wasted from the serious business of catching fish.

They were only small sharks (no barracoutta is small enough for my liking) but none the less an unpleasant sight, standing off 30 feet away, motionless with mouth hanging slightly open and staring with a fishy eye.

Dave Woolf found himself out in deep water once keeping company with quite a fair-sized fellow. He screamed at it repeatedly under water, but it only moved in closer to enjoy

the sport. Dave took off for shallow water, his faith in sharks considerably shaken.

It is in the deep water near the lagoon entrances that the real shark danger lies. Diving for pearl shell the Tuamotans really do descend to depths of 100 to 120 feet, using goggles only.

They use a stone, hooked by a cord through one of their toes, to carry them down, each man having his own special stone which will carry him down at the maximum speed he is able to stand. To ease the frightful pressure on the ear drums they hold their noses and blow, violently.

We got 32 fish in about three hours' spear fishing and they were the best size and the tamest we had seen in all the islands.

According to Dave the fishing was better there than in New Zealand. This was also the first time we had swum close to turtles. We saw three, but they were too fast for us to catch them.

It was dark before we got back to the anchorage, but Francois and Tomoana piloted us unerringly among the coral patches. Our confidence in them was slightly shaken when Charlie the Chief later admitted that this was the first time his boys had ever been entrusted with a visiting yacht either by day or night.

But they were fine, virile, trustworthy fellows, among the very best we have struck. Perhaps it is because they live a more spartan life, lacking the natural blessings of so many of the other islands.

A three or four-pronged spear is used for the shore fishing. The

boys were amazingly accurate up to 20 yards or more and they raced bare-footed up and down the coral faster than we could go wearing boots, shoes or sandals.

They caught 54 fish and our share lasted over a week, but they were mostly parrot fish and not such good eating as the deep-water types.

We found many new varieties of shells at Fakarava, including pearl shell. The season had finished for the Tuamotans but they kept finding them for us.

"Ici, nacre," one of them would shout, and Dave or Dooley or I would swim across and dive for it. We collected about 20 but found no pearls.

Erica doctored several of the small children with the result that whenever we strolled along the island road little girls would come shyly out with handfuls of cowrie shells and necklaces, "Pour Madame."

But here in Tahuata they are not interested in such ornaments. Blessed with so many natural advantages lacking in the Tuamotus the men seem much less virile.

They do not swim for fish or collect shells and have repeatedly warned us of sharks, although we have swum miles up and down the coast and only sighted three.

No chickens

AT four o'clock this morning they took us scrambling over the mountains for chickens but the exhibition was a fiasco. The man with the little native .22 became separated from the ammunition and we ended by fruitlessly hurling rocks at the nesting coveys.



Erica Wilson with some of the spear-fishing catch (and some of the fishermen) at Fakarava.

However their generosity with fruit, feasting and dancing have more than compensated for their other shortcomings. There has been a dance for us every night, with the girls queuing up to ask us to dance, and even Dave, who has never before taken the floor, has been prancing round like a veteran.

A French metallurgist, who has spent the last 12 months in the Marquesas, arrived in time for last night's performance. He was staggered.

"All this time I have spent in these islands," he said, "and none of the natives has ever done anything like this for me."



On the lagoon at Fakarava, in the Tuamotus. From left: Victor, Francois, Tomoana. Sitting on the tiller, a young petrel, "Le Capitaine," presented to Leda as a mascot.

Flying Cardinal Transatlantic

NEW YORK

FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN flew the first leg of his journey from New York to Rome in a helicopter.

It was only from Manhattan, to the International Airport on Long Island, but the cardinal did it to keep a date with 50,000 members of the Holy Name Society, rallying at the baseball stadium of the New York Giants.

He had less than an hour to catch the Rome airliner, and could not have made it by car.

PROFESSIONAL men are low down on America's income totem pole.

Figures just published by the Federal Reserve Board show their weekly earnings are up by 33 per cent since 1946, but that clerks, salesmen, and semi-skilled workers are up by 48 per cent, unskilled workers by 54 per cent, and farmers by 69 per cent.

A BURGLAR looking for jewels and cash has raided homes in Denver, Colorado, three times in a fortnight. He pockets the cash, but hides the jewels somewhere in the house—presumably to make the affair better fun for the householders.