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A Pattern Of Islands



Synopsis

An account of Sir Arthur's life as Administrator in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in the Pacific. A record of years spent amongst fishermen, sorcerers and midwives. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I would give it five stars if the authors original drawings were in this edition. The writing is excellent. The self-deprecating stories of his own folly and ignorance of local customs are hilarious. Other experiences related to local people's and customs are poignant, respectful and illuminating. It is a shame that so much has been lost by the ignorant interferences of the "enlightened" modern world. These people suffered huge losses during the war in the pacific. This book is set in the decade or so prior to the onset of WWII.

This book was recommended to me by a friend. I immediately searched for the book and several of the results were on . The copy of the book I picked arrived in very good condition and well ahead of advised delivery to the ACT in Australia. I was happy to be able to find such a good copy of the book as it was first published in 1952, with a tenth impression in 1956 and a cheap edition also in 1956. I was also very interested that the book I received had a name on the front page with a date of 'June 2nd. 1956' - before I was born. All in all I am very pleased with my search on , purchase and delivery of the book in a very short timeframe.

Arthur Grimble's account of his years as a District Officer in the Gilbert and Ellis Islands (now Tuvalu) in the 1920s is absolutely fascinating. He describes the islands and their inhabitants in a

way that makes you long to see them. It is not a romantacised account, the inconveniences and hardships of island life are not glossed over, but Arthur Grimble clearly loved the islands and their people. He had some astonishing experiences which are described in vivid detail, like witnessing the magical summoning of the porpoises, and his hair-raising encounter with sharks. His surprising account of delivering a baby is quite remarkable. And the description of how he had his arms tattooed in the traditional island manner is not for the squeamish. When he returns to England and tries to describe to the people at the Colonial Office some of the difficulties to be encountered in the islands, the young man in the personnel office exclaims: "But - my dear fellow! I mean to say, good heavens! If we told our applicants even a quarter of these facts in advance, we'd never get a bally recruit!" Perhaps not, but reading this book you get the impression that Arthur Grimble wouldn't have missed his years there for the world. An unforgettable book.

I have read the entire book once, and parts of it many times for story telling purposes amongst friends. Grimble has a humorous and astute perceptive eye, and cleverly and lucidly pinpoints ways of ancient islanders that are beyond the understanding of the normal English bureaucrat sent abroad to run the empire in the days of old. He plays brilliantly on the absurdity of a city gent turned pacific island administrator, as he himself is confronted with the most remarkable cultural roots of an ancient people. He sets the scene impeccably, and then drops the reader into uncanny circumstances that are often hilarious. He perceptively unravels the innermost superstitions of an island people far from the courts of the western world. He understands that he is supposedly a big colonial fish in a little pacific pond, but for this particular British gentleman, he is well aware that in reality he is a big fish stranded on the bank far from the water. He sits on this bank and observes deeply with tremendous insight, the ways and waves that are deeply ingrained in an ancient culture. He leaves you with a lasting impression that one way and another will haunt you for long into your future.

Arthur Grimble is well-connected with the old establishment of the British civil service. Sadly, he is ill-suited to the ways of administrative achievement in London. It is gently but firmly suggested that he 'develop his career' as the colonial representative in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati and Tuvalu). He sets sail at a time when the Sun still hasn't set on the Empire and the Titanic is still to be built. He is determined not to 'funk' any issues in his new life, but London has not prepared him for octopus hunting, shark baiting or the simple and easy directness of the island people. The 'Man of Matang' writes of his episodes with a simple and self-effacing ease learnt from the dwellers

of what still is one of the least visited places on earth. Often humorous, at times dramatic, this memorable book is a time capsule from two worlds, from one that has gone and from one that is about to. (Shades of Gerard Durrell ... with more grit.)

A lovely book. I always thought of British colonial rule as unremittingly evil until I read this book. Arthur Grimble's touching and humorous account of his term in the Gilbert and Ellis Islands at the beginning of the century reflects his own deep appreciation of the simplicity and beauty of the people of these islands.

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