

# Grand Bahama in 1917

Chapter 2 - The Sponge Fishers  
In a Forgotten Colony by Amelia Defries

A big schooner from the sponging fields loomed in front of us and, casting anchor, furled her sails; the concerted chanting of the ship's crew wafted across to us and when the last hymn had been sung we heard them playing the concertina and beating out a rhythm on the back of some tin box or bath tub!

Life on a desert island has its variety!

And if it has its discomforts and dangers it certainly has many advantages which millionaires in their yachts and Society women in their hotels do not ever experience.

On Eight Mile Rock, with its monthly mail, one hardly realizes it is not a three days' journey to New York—by yacht!

But the ends of the earth are always quite near, and savages are not only on remote islands. If manners maketh the man, one would judge these people as far more civilized than many in the big cities.

The urchin who came to call Aunt Celia to the birth of his mother's tenth child raised his ragged cap to me with the courtesy and gentleness of a prince, and the Royal Physician himself could not have given me a finer bow than the wise woman gave as she rose from the ground and went away to her "case," promising me she'd come again to-morrow - "If God gives life."

Every appointment is made with this prefix: "If God gives life."

Last summer a mild sort of typhoid was brought into this distant island by some "stranger" and many children died of it—simply, Aunt Celia said, because their parents were lazy and careless.

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She herself had two, out of her eight, delirious and "talking in unknown tongues," but she saved them "by hard work." She "packed" them with pepper grass and she "filled" them with oil and other purges; she made them sweat and removed their clothing each time: she covered them continually in dry, clean rags and threw away the damp ones; she bathed them unceasingly in hot water and rubbed them with hot lard. She put plasters of red pepper and earth at the napes of their necks and on their temples; she covered her finger in a piece of flannel and wiped out their throats and she fetched certain cool branches from the bush and made them fresh beds which "drew away the heat;" she fed them only on "biled" milk and when at last the fever broke and they slept, she cleaned out the rooms and washed the floors, and, for the first time in many days, she took off her own clothes and rested. Afterwards, she gave them conch, stewed, with a few eggs and a medicine with rusty irons in it; and they were speedily cured, but remained deaf, so she melted candle and lard and beeswax, and poured it into their ears, which she afterward syringed with soap suds.

And so saved them.

"Nobody never die wid my treatment, please Gawd,": she repeats periodically; and really one grows to have a great deal of faith in her—and she is not nearly so rough as one would think.

When you have a headache and she begins with her fingers (you have suggested that she first cut her nails) upon your scalp, the quality of her touch is quite remarkable. She soon soothes you and "draws all the blood together"—then immerses the/ legs up to the knees in a hot bath and puts a towel rung in boiling water across the abdomen, and lo! your headache is gone and your nerves are steady!

She makes gargles for sore throats and syringes the nose with soothing lotions—and whatever is wrong she invariably "cleans you all down throughout."

If she were cleaned up herself and set up in Bond Street or Fifth Avenue as "the New Herbalist," she would reap a fortune; but fifty cents will pay for any treatment and, as she is now, she will thank God for it.

*Defries, Amelia Dorothy. In A Forgotten Colony. Nassau: The Guardian Office, 1917. (sections from three chapters)*