



By CHARLES FRANCIS

THERE WAS shouting, then silence, and through the quiet came a swishing then a heavy thud as the tree crashed through the undergrowth to the ground. And from that tree a canoe was hewn by native axe in deft black hands.

Over the shallow water it swiftly skimmed, past the mangroves and out to where the sea was faintly blue, and peering over the side I saw a strange world beneath me. A watery world where grew gently wavering weeds from pink and blue and snow-white coral, and darting in among the weeds were small red fish. Bright royal-blue fish majestically emerged from a dark chink in the coral wall and hovered over the wavering weeds as though lulled by the motion of the water and the distant music of the waves. Wriggling through the amber-coloured foliage were tiny yellow and black striped fish shaped like the wing of a butterfly, and over the coral crawled weird-looking shell-fish.

I was thinking how beautiful their sky would appear, the quickly changing patterns of light and shadow and the beads of sunlight on bubbles of foam like stars twinkling in the daylight. I wondered whether the murmuring of the current in the weeds would sound as a wind in the trees, and whether a silver forest of queer-shaped coral and eerie woods crystallized from the deep shadows when the moon rose at night.

Vainly I yearned their serene being. All was a galaxy of colour and coolness and peacefulness, and there on the surface I was hot in the sun.

Then like a giant arrow from a quiver a dark shadow shot into their midst, and like lightning the small fish scattered—those that were not caught in the ravenous jaws of the big fish.

Quietly I paddled back through the mangroves to the shallow water, unaware of the heat and unperturbed by the shouting of the sergeant from the shore. "Yes," I was thinking "there's big fish and little fish."

