

Jack, Ralph and Peterkin, three young friends, have become shipwreck on a desert Coral Island.

This was now the first time that I had looked well about me since landing, as the spot where I had been laid was covered with thick bushes which almost hid the country from our view. As we now emerged from among these and walked down the sandy beach together, I cast my eyes about¹, and, truly, my heart glowed within me and my spirits rose at the beautiful prospect² which I beheld on every side. The gale³ had suddenly died away, just as if it had blown furiously till it dashed our ship upon the rocks, and had nothing more to do after accomplishing that.

The island on which we stood was hilly, and covered almost everywhere with the most beautiful and richly coloured trees, bushes, and shrubs, none of which I knew the names of at that time, except, indeed, the cocoa-nut palms, which I recognised at once from the many pictures that I had seen of them before I left home.

A sandy beach of dazzling whiteness lined this bright green shore, and upon it there fell a gentle ripple of the sea. This last astonished me much, for I recollected that at home the sea used to fall in huge billows⁴ on the shore long after a storm had subsided. But on casting my glance⁵ out to sea the cause became apparent. About a mile distant from the shore I saw the great billows of the ocean rolling like a green wall, and falling with a long, loud roar, upon a low coral reef, where they were dashed into white foam and flung up in clouds of spray. This spray sometimes flew exceedingly high, and, every here and there, a beautiful rainbow was formed for a moment among the falling drops. We afterwards found that this coral reef extended quite round the island, and formed a natural breakwater to it. Beyond this the sea rose and tossed violently from the effects of the storm; but between the reef and the shore it was as calm and as smooth as a pond.

While Peterkin enjoyed himself in the shallow water and in running along the beach, Jack and I swam out into the deep water, and occasionally dived for stones. I shall never forget my surprise and delight on first beholding⁶ the bottom of the sea. As I have before stated, the water within the reef was as calm as a pond; and, as there was no wind, it was quite clear, from the surface to the bottom, so that we could see down easily even at a depth of twenty or thirty yards. When Jack and I dived in shallower water, we expected to have found sand and stones, instead of which we found ourselves in what appeared really to be an enchanted garden. The whole of the bottom of the lagoon, as we called the calm water within the reef, was covered with coral of every shape, size, and hue⁷. Some portions were formed like large mushrooms; others appeared like the brain of a man, having stalks or necks attached to them; but the most common kind was a species of branching coral, and some portions were of a lovely pale pink colour, others pure white. Among this there grew large quantities of sea-weed of the richest hues imaginable, and of the most graceful forms; while innumerable fishes—blue, red, yellow, green, and striped—sported in and out amongst the flower-beds of this submarine garden, and did not appear to be at all afraid of our approaching them.

On darting to the surface for breath, after our first dive, Jack and I rose close to each other.

“Did you ever in your life, Ralph, see anything so lovely?” said Jack, as he flung the spray from his hair.

“Never,” I replied. “It appears to me like fairy realms. I can scarcely believe that we are not dreaming.”

Extract from The Coral Island by R.M. Ballantyne
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/646/646-h/646-h.htm>

¹ I looked around

² View

³ Wind

⁴ Waves

⁵ Looking

⁶ Seeing

⁷ Colour

Reading Guide

- ☞ What image of the island is given by the narrator? (focus on the mainly on the adjectives and metaphors)
- ☞ What feelings are experienced by the characters?
- ☞ What kind of readership is targeted by this book in your opinion? Why?