




NAXOS
AudioBooks

JUNIOR
CLASSICS



R.M. Ballantyne

THE CORAL ISLAND

Read by **Wayne Forester**

NA394012D

1	Roving has always been, and still is, my ruling passion...	4:25
2	It was a bright, beautiful, warm day...	5:39
3	As I slowly recovered...	4:50
4	We now seated ourselves upon a rock...	6:00
5	Now, as we hastened along the white beach...	4:57
6	What a joyful thing it is to awaken...	7:04
7	Thus we advanced to the foot of the hill...	7:14
8	For several days after this excursion...	6:20
9	Our encounter with the shark...	7:58
10	Scarcely had the sun shot its first ray...	5:40
11	While we were examining a small tree...	5:02
12	The following morning...	4:43
13	No human footprints were to be seen...	4:32
14	'Come, Jack,' cried Peterkin...	6:29
15	We gained the interior of the submarine...	4:52
16	For many days after this...	5:18
17	The mast and sail answered excellently...	5:39
18	To our surprise, we found...	6:20

19	For many months after...	6:34
20	At this moment the chief advanced...	6:49
21	We could by no means shake off...	6:09
22	On awaking, we saw by the faint light...	6:49
23	Here, instead of being rudely handled...	4:24
24	Three weeks after...	7:47
25	One day we were becalmed...	8:14
26	For some time the swimmers continued...	8:04
27	In the course of the evening...	8:53
28	I then left him...	8:09
29	I will not tax the reader's patience...	8:36
30	When all was ready...	6:54
31	We had ascertained from the teacher...	7:03
32	Jack's face looked ghastly pale and haggard...	7:11
33	As the time for our meditated flight drew near...	5:54
34	For a long, long month...	5:12
35	The scene that met our eyes...	6:55

Total time: 3:43:03

R.M. Ballantyne
(1825–1894)

THE CORAL ISLAND

There is the dream of escape to an uninhabited island, of warm blue seas and white sand, of tranquility. And there is the dream of adventure, of storms survived, of shipwreck and self-sufficiency. Combine with the romantic peril of pirates and you have the perfect mix to fire the imagination of any young mind – and inspire any young boy (at least in the mid-19th century) to search the distant seas.

That certainly was the intention and hope of Robert Michael Ballantyne when he wrote his classic adventure story, *The Coral Island*, in 1857. He was aiming it at the young boys of the Victorian era: he wanted to tell a yarn that they would love reading, and he wanted them to gain, as he said, ‘valuable information, much pleasure, great profit, and unbounded amusement’ from its pages.

He knew that the balmy Pacific Islands held a special appeal for damp, industrialised Europeans; and he also knew how those two dreams – of escape and adventure – had

been part of the fabric of story-telling for centuries. At the same time there was an increasing appetite in Britain for stories of discovery, as the British Empire expanded and trade was established in ever-more distant parts of the globe. New countries, cities and potential markets were being discovered by the traders, and the people back home wanted to know about them. They also wanted to escape the cold, dark, wet and rapidly urbanised world they were living in – even if only in their imaginations.

There was, too, a desire for moral certainty, and Ballantyne’s stories served as comforters. They needed to show that the Western way of doing things (church, marriage, work for its own sake, self-reliance, social structures in general) was the right one. In all regards, Ballantyne fitted the bill. And when it came to adventure, he was a natural.

In fact, he was so much a natural that his first employers called him a ‘useless apprentice’ clerk and claimed he was no

more likely to be an accountant than to become Archbishop of Canterbury. This was a little unfair – whatever else he did in his life, Ballantyne was always diligent. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 and a decline in the family fortunes led to him being apprenticed to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1841. He spent six years in Canada and, when not disappointing his superiors with his office work, spent time exploring its vast wildernesses as a trader. His time there sowed the seeds of his authorial life, as he used to spend his spare time writing long letters home to his mother. There were only two deliveries of mail a year in some of the places where he was posted, so his letters were very long indeed! But apart from the pleasure they gave his mother, they also served to hone his direct, precise, unadorned style. One winter he was in a particularly isolated location, with little in the way of amusement except for a pen, ink and an inch-thick book of blank paper. He started to write a narrative that would eventually become his first book, *Hudson's Bay, or Life in the Wilds of North America*.

When he returned to Edinburgh he was employed by a variety of companies while his first books – all largely autobiographical

adventure stories of life in the wild – were published, and in 1855 he became a full-time writer. He married in 1866 and had six children. He wrote more than 90 stories in all, including collections of nursery works, which he published under the pseudonym Comus. *The Coral Island* was an early but significant departure for him, since it was about an area of which he had little personal knowledge. He armed himself with plenty of reference works, however, and created what was to become his most enduringly popular story. It did teach him a lesson, though. There is a small mistake in *The Coral Island*, about the skin of coconuts. It was not pointed out to Ballantyne until much later after publication, but from then on he made tremendous efforts to ensure his stories were accurate, spending weeks on a lighthouse, living with tin-miners, and even working with the fire brigade. Through this diligence he earned, and repaid, the trust of his readers – which is another reason his audience loved him so much.

The success of *The Coral Island* is in part because of the public's ceaseless appetite for stories of shipwrecks and pirates, but also because it brilliantly exploits a particular brand of plucky resilience that delights

in making the very best of a disastrous situation. While contemporary stories of shipwreck (such as the TV series *Lost* or any number of space-based variants) tend to use the situation for profound introspection or social commentary, any Victorians who found themselves on a deserted Island would be expected at the very least to construct a weather-proof shelter, hunt, fish and cook, make notes on the flora and fauna, create their own clothes, tools and weapons, convert the natives to Christianity, and probably establish a Civil Service.

In short, they would be expected to be actively *doing*, exploring and collecting, taking the British way of life wherever they happened to find themselves, while maintaining decorum and a thoroughly civilised attitude. This is what the readers of those days believed their country should be doing and it was what Ballantyne believed young men should be aspiring to. His heroes are made in this mould and their attitudes reflect those of the secure, expansionist, mercantile, evangelistic middle-class.

Much of this is uncomfortable for modern readers; but what Ballantyne magnificently succeeds in creating is an absolutely believable, accurately described

world in which busy intelligence, courage, skill and curiosity are rewarded. The characters' resourcefulness is treated equally with delight and admiration, and the pleasure induced in reading about their adventures is infectious. While Ballantyne's book owes something to *Robinson Crusoe*, of course, it is perhaps best judged by what it led to. Robert Louis Stevenson was inspired by it to travel to the South Seas. It influenced J. M. Barrie, and William Golding used Ballantyne's tale as a template for his own reworking of the mythic idea. In other words, without *The Coral Island* there might have been no *Treasure Island*, no *Peter Pan*, no *Lord of the Flies* (indeed, some scenes of Stevenson's classic could have been lifted straight from the pages of Ballantyne's book).

When he died, in Rome in 1894, it was not just the literary world that mourned him. He was buried in Rome's English cemetery, but back in Britain a subscription was established to establish a memorial for him. Much of the money raised (£600 or so) came in shillings and pennies from the boys he had entertained so richly for some 50 years.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Wayne Forester is a highly sought after voice artist with many character voices to his name. His work includes *Zebedee* in the *New Magic Roundabout* and *Dad* in *Horrid Henry*. He is also the voice of *Rockit the Frog*, and *Roly Mo*, the cuddly storytelling *Mole* in *The Fimbles*, and *The Roly Mo Show*. Wayne has also recorded numerous radio plays for BBC Radio including *Dirk Gentley's Holistic Detective Agency* and *Under Milk Wood*, performing with a digitally re-mastered Richard Burton!

The music on this recording was taken from the NAXOS catalogue

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Music programming by Caroline Waight

Credits

Abridged by Caroline Waight
Produced by Roy McMillan
Recorded at Motivation Sound Studios, London
Edited by JD Evans

Cover picture: *Coral Island* by Watt, John Millar (1895-1975); courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library

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R.M. Ballantyne
THE CORAL ISLAND

Read by **Wayne Forester**

Shipwreck! Storms! Pirates! And... surfing? All the ingredients of the 'boy's own' tale (and a few more) are brought together in this classic story. Ralph has always longed for adventure and he finds it when he, along with the older and wiser Jack and the irrepressible Peterkin, are shipwrecked on a Pacific island. But their exploits don't stop there. Apart from being battered by storms, they are attacked by sharks, kidnapped by pirates, and have to save a beautiful native girl from an unhappy marriage. They even get a chance to see some surfers in action! The inspiration for *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan*, R.M. Ballantyne's story still fires the imagination – listen to it and you too might find yourself longing for the life of the adventurer and the 'beautiful, bright, green, coral islands'.



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Produced by
Roy McMillan

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Total time
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