

## CHAPTER XIV

SOUTH SEA CRUISES—THE CENTRAL PACIFIC,  
JUNE, 1889—APRIL, 1891

“I will never leave the sea, I think; it is only there that a Briton lives: my poor grandfather, it is from him that I inherit the taste, I fancy, and he was round many islands in his day; but I, please God, shall beat him at that before the recall is sounded. . . . Life is far better fun than people dream who fall asleep among the chimney-stacks and telegraph wires.”—*Letters*, ii. 162.

THE object of the new cruise for Stevenson was to visit a native race of a different character from those he had already seen, living as far as was still possible under purely natural conditions. The Gilberts are a group of some sixteen low islands of no great size, densely populated, situated close to the Equator. At this time they were independent, nearly every island being governed by its own king or council of elders. Scenery in all of them is reduced to the simplest elements, a strand with cocoanut-palms and pandanus, and the sea—one island differing from another only in having or not having an accessible lagoon in its centre; in none of them is the highest point of land as much as twenty feet above sea-level. This very flatness and absence of striking features render the islands a more perfect theatre for effects of light and cloud, while the splendours of the sea are further enhanced by the contrast of the rollers breaking on the reef and the still lagoon sleeping within the barrier, of the dark depths of ocean outside and the brilliant shoal-water varying

infinitely in hue with the inequalities of the shallows within.

Stevenson's former experience lay, his future was almost entirely to lie, among the Polynesians—the tall, fine, copper-coloured race, speaking closely allied dialects of the same language, and including among their family the Hawaiians, Marquesans, Tahitians, Samoans, and the Maoris of New Zealand. The Gilbert and Marshall natives, on the other hand, are Micronesians—darker, shorter, and to my taste less comely folk—speaking languages widely removed from the Polynesian—people with a dash of black blood, stricter in morals and more ferocious, with an energy and backbone which the others but rarely possess. It is noteworthy that Polynesians never commit suicide; on the Line it is not uncommon; and the frequent causes are unrequited love, or grief for the dead.

When this visit should be finished, the travellers were not finally committed to any plan, but their latest intention was to proceed to the Marshalls and thence to the Carolines, and so “return to the light of day by way of Manila and the China ports.”

Scarcely, however, were they at sea before these schemes were modified. One moonlight night, in the neighbourhood of Johnstone Island, the talk fell upon the strange history of the loss of the brigantine *Wandering Minstrel*, and from this germ was quickly developed the plot of *The Wrecker*. The life of cruising was for the time all that Stevenson could desire: after the depression of Honolulu he had entirely recovered his health and spirits on the open sea, and the only difficulty in continuing his cure was its great expense.

Surely if he possessed a schooner of his own, he might make his home on board and pay the current charges, at all events in part, by trading. So *The Wrecker* was to be written and sent to a publisher from Samoa, and there with the proceeds they were to buy a schooner, stock the trade-room, and start upon their wanderings under the guidance of Denis Reid, who threw himself heart and soul into the spirit of the new venture.

It was a wild scheme. Versatile as Stevenson was, it is impossible even to think of him as a "South Sea merchant," haggling with natives over the price of copra<sup>1</sup> and retailing European goods to them at a necessarily exorbitant rate. But the project, though never realised, did finally determine the course of his life, for instead of taking him to Ponape, Guam, and the Philippines, it sent him south to Samoa, there to take up his abode and live and die.

In the meanwhile the first part of the voyage was safely performed, and the schooner arrived at the town of Butaritari in the island of Great Makin. Under ordinary conditions a white man, if he conducted himself reasonably, might wander through all the group in perfect safety, but the arrival of the *Equator* fell at an unpropitious moment. For the first and probably the only time in his wanderings, Stevenson was in real danger of violence from natives.

The two principal firms trading in Butaritari belonged to San Francisco; the missionaries in the group were sent there by the Boston Society, and the influence of American ideas was considerable. Nine days before

<sup>1</sup> The dried kernel of the cocoanut, largely used in making soap, candles, oil-cake, etc.

Stevenson's arrival was the Fourth of July; the king of Butaritari had observed the festival with enthusiasm, but not wisely, nor in accordance with missionary views, for he had removed the taboo upon spirits which ordinarily was imposed for all his subjects.

Neither sovereign nor courtiers had been sober since, and though, with a lofty Sabbatarianism, the king declined to be photographed upon a Sunday, it was not to be supposed that he could be refused more drink if he offered to purchase it at the usual price. There was this further difficulty in the way of restoring sobriety to his dominions, that even if one firm declined to supply him, there was the rival house, which, having as yet sold less of its liquor, might be less anxious for the special open season to come to an end. So the carnival continued for ten days more, and all the white men could do was to get out their pistols and show in public such skill as they possessed in shooting at a mark.

Twice a large stone was hurled at Stevenson as he sat in his verandah at dusk, just as the lamp was brought out and placed beside him. He now entered into negotiations with the German manager of the other firm, whom he found to take a far more serious view of the situation than any of them, and whom he induced by diplomacy to discontinue to supply the natives. The crisis was now reached: would the populace, irritated by refusal, carry either of the bars with a rush?

Fortunately all passed off smoothly. The king came to his senses, and the taboo was re-imposed. Quiet was restored, and only just in time, for a day or two

later a large body of rather turbulent natives arrived from the next island for a dance competition, quite ready to profit by any political trouble.

The danger having been averted, the party lived at peace in the house of Maka, the Hawaiian missionary, one of the most lovable of men. They saw the dances, they gave exhibitions of their magic lantern, and as all pictures were supposed to be photographs, and photographs could only be taken from actual scenes, their slides of Bible history brought about a distinct religious reaction among the people. They made friends with various natives, but the end of their stay was by comparison tame and dull, and after about a month the *Equator* returned and carried them away.

The terms of the elaborate charter party were entirely disregarded. The captain from the beginning acted as though the vessel were Stevenson's yacht, and went or stayed according to the wishes of his passenger. Stevenson, on his part, took a keen interest in the ship's fortunes, and was as eager to secure copra as any one on board. The captain acted as showman of the group. "I remember once," says Mr. Osbourne, "that he banged the deck with a marlinspike and called below to Louis: 'Come on deck, quick, Kaupoi; here 's the murderer and the poisoner I told you of, coming off in a boat.'" It was Stevenson's fate in the Pacific, at the times when he was most anxious about his finances, to be regarded by the natives as the wealthiest of men, and addressed accordingly. Thus "Kaupoi" in the Gilberts and "Ona" in Samoa are equivalent to "Dives," or "Richie," as Stevenson himself used to render it. "Ona," by the way, is not a genuine

Samoan word, but "owner," the wealthy and powerful person whom even ship-captains obey.

They visited the island of Nonuti, and were then continuing on a southward course, when the wind veered and they made for Apemama, a large island ruled by the despot Tembinok', who allowed no white man in his kingdom. As an exceptional favour, however, granted only after a long inspection of the party and two days devoted to consideration, Stevenson and his family were admitted as the special guests of the king. He cleared a site for them, pitched four houses upon it for their accommodation, and tabooed with a death penalty their well and their enclosure against all his subjects. The settlement was begun to the discharge of a rifle; the cook who was lent to the Stevensons, and was guilty of gross misbehaviour, received six shots from the king's Winchester over his head, at his feet, and on either side of him; and though no one was actually killed while the white men were on the island, yet the power of life and death in the king's hands was plainly shown to be no obsolete prerogative.

In Apemama the party spent a couple of months in daily intercourse with this very remarkable personage, with whom they entered into close relations of friendship. Of all the chiefs Stevenson knew in the Pacific, Ori, the Tahitian, was probably the one for whom he had most affection; Mataafa, in Samoa, probably he most respected; but Tembinok' was unquestionably the strongest character, and the man who interested him the most. Who that has read the South Sea chapters has forgotten his appearance?

"A beaked profile like Dante's in the mask, a mane

of long black hair, the eye brilliant, imperious, and inquiring; for certain parts in the theatre, and to one who could have used it, the face was a fortune. His voice matched it well, being shrill, powerful, and uncanny, with a note like a sea-bird's. Where there are no fashions, none to set them, few to follow them if they were set, and none to criticise, he dresses—as Sir Charles Grandison lived—‘to his own heart.’ Now he wears a woman's frock, now a naval uniform, now (and more usually) figures in a masquerade costume of his own design—trousers and a singular jacket with shirt-tails, the cut and fit wonderful for island workmanship, the material always handsome, sometimes green velvet, sometimes cardinal-red silk. This masquerade becomes him admirably. I see him now come pacing towards me in the cruel sun, solitary, a figure out of Hoffmann.”<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this grotesque disguise, there was nothing ridiculous about the man. He had been a fighter and a conqueror, “the Napoleon” of his group; he was, besides, a poet, a collector, the sole trader and man of business, and a shrewd judge of mankind. Having admitted the missionaries to his island, he had learned to read and write; having found the missionaries interfering, as he thought, with his trade and his government, without hesitation he had banished them from his domains.

For the account of this unique society, this masterful sway, I must refer the reader to the seventy pages of Stevenson's own description, which were the part of his diary least disappointing to himself. It could hardly

<sup>1</sup> *In the South Seas*, p. 310.

be told in fewer words, and extracts can do it no justice. It is the more valuable in that it represents a state of things which is gone for ever. Only four years later, when I visited the island, all was changed. Tembinok' was dead, the Gilbert Islands had been annexed by Great Britain, and a boy was king under the direction of a British Resident. How severe the old discipline had been was proclaimed by a large "speak-house" at Tuagana, some two hours' sail down the coast, where all round the interior of the house, at the end of the roof-beams, there had been a set of eight-and-forty human skulls, of which nearly twenty were still remaining. The house had been built by Tembinok's father, and the heads were those of malefactors, both white and native, or, at all events, of people who had caused displeasure to the king. The Stevensons had never heard of the existence of this place from Tembinok', though his father's grave was here, and here also were lying the two finest sea-going canoes in all the island.

But for the history of Tembinok', and for Stevenson's experience—how he was mesmerised for a cold by a native wizard, and how, with many searchings of conscience, he bought for Mr. Andrew Lang the devil-box of Apemama, the reader must go—and will thank me for sending him—to Stevenson's own pages. I will quote here only the king's leave-taking of his guest, and the impression which Stevenson had produced upon this wild, stern, and original nature:—

"As the time approached for our departure Tembinok' became greatly changed; a softer, more melancholy, and, in particular, a more confidential man appeared in his stead. To my wife he contrived laboriously to ex-



plain that though he knew he must lose his father in the course of nature, he had not minded nor realised it till the moment came; and that now he was to lose us, he repeated the experience. We showed fireworks one evening on the terrace. It was a heavy business; the sense of separation was in all our minds, and the talk languished. The king was specially affected, sat disconsolate on his mat, and often sighed. Of a sudden one of the wives stepped forth from a cluster, came and kissed him in silence, and silently went again. It was just such a caress as we might give to a disconsolate child, and the king received it with a child's simplicity. Presently after we said good-night and withdrew; but Tembinok' detained Mr. Osbourne, patting the mat by his side and saying: 'Sit down. I feel bad, I like talk.' 'You like some beer?' said he; and one of the wives produced a bottle. The king did not partake, but sat sighing and smoking a meer-schaum pipe. 'I very sorry you go,' he said at last. 'Miss Stlevens he good man, woman he good man, boy he good man; all good man. Woman he smart all the same man. My woman,' glancing towards his wives, 'he good woman, no very smart. I think Miss Stlevens he big chiep all the same cap'n man-o'-wa'. I think Miss Stlevens he rich man all the same me. All go schoona. I very sorry. My patha he go, my uncle he go, my cutcheons he go, Miss Stlevens he go: all go. You no see king cry before. King all the same man: feel bad, he cry. I very sorry.'

"In the morning it was the common topic in the village that the king had wept. To me he said: 'Last night I no can 'peak: too much here,' laying his hand upon his bosom. 'Now you go away all the same my

pamily. My brothers, my uncle go away. All the same.' This was said with a dejection almost passionate. . . . The same day he sent me a present of two corselets, made in the island fashion of plaited fibre, heavy and strong. One had been worn by his grandfather, one by his father, and, the gift being gratefully received, he sent me, on the return of his messengers, a third—that of his uncle. . . .

“The king took us on board in his own gig, dressed for the occasion in the naval uniform. He had little to say, he refused refreshments, shook us briefly by the hand, and went ashore again. That night the palm-tops of Apemama had dipped behind the sea, and the schooner sailed solitary under the stars.”<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of Stevenson's notes on the Gilberts relate chiefly to the white, or, at any rate, the alien population of the group, which at that date was naturally a sort of No Man's Land—one of the last refuges for the scoundrels of the Pacific. Not that all the traders by any means were black sheep; some of them and some of the captains and mates working in those waters were decent fellows enough, but among them were thieves, murderers, and worse, patriots who showed an uncommon alacrity in changing their nationality when any man-of-war of their own government happened to come their way. When the Gilberts were finally annexed in 1892, a labour vessel took a shipload of these gentry on board, bound for a South American republic, which, fortunately for that State, they never reached—the vessel being lost at sea with all hands.

<sup>1</sup> *In the South Seas*, p. 378.

Of the stories that were then current Stevenson collected a number, and had he been a realist, his readers might have been depressed through many volumes by the gloom and squalor of these tragedies; as it was, he utilised only a little of what he had actually seen as material for the darker shadows in the romantic and spirited *Beach of Falesá*.

After returning to Butaritari, the *Equator*, with Stevenson and his party on board, left for Samoa. The trip was tedious but for the excitement of running by night between the three different positions assigned by the charts to a reef which possibly had no real existence. There were the usual squalls, in one of which, during the night, the safety of the ship depended entirely on the cutting of a rope. The foretopmast snapped across and the foresail downhaul fouled in the wreckage, but Ah Fu climbed to the top of the galley with his knife, and the position was saved. Next morning, however, the signal halyard had disappeared, nor was its loss accounted for until several weeks afterwards, when the Chinaman presented his mistress with a neat coil of the best quality of rope. He had once heard her admiring it, and took occasion of the squall and extremity of danger to procure it for her as a present.

The schooner arrived about the 7th of December at Apia, the capital and port of Upolu, the chief of the group known collectively as Samoa<sup>1</sup> or the Navigator

<sup>1</sup> The first two syllables are long: Sā-mōa; similarly Vāi-līma; but Fālě-sā. The first A in Ā-pīa is shorter, but the vowel-sounds throughout are as in Italian. The consonants are as in English, but g = ng. Thus Pagopago is pronounced Pangopango.

Islands, which Stevenson now saw for the first time, and which he had every intention of leaving finally within two months of his arrival.

The *Equator's* charter now came to an end. Hiring a cottage in the hamlet a mile above the town, Stevenson began to collect the material necessary for those chapters which should be allotted to Samoa in his book upon the South Seas. This obtained, he proposed to start at once for Sydney, and thence proceed to England.

The Samoan record, as he anticipated from the outset, would deal chiefly with the history of the recent war, and for this he engaged in a most painstaking and—so far as I can judge—most successful judicial investigation into the actual facts and the course of events within the last few years. It is difficult for any one who has not lived hard by a South Sea "Beach" to realise how contradictory and how elusive are its rumours, and how widely removed from anything of the nature of "evidence." But into this confused mass Stevenson plunged, making inquiries of every one to whose statements he could attach any importance, American or English or German (my order is alphabetical), and invoking the aid of interpreters for native sources of information. He weighed and sifted his information with the greatest care, and I have never heard any of the main results contested which were embodied in *A Foot-note to History*.

For the sake of this work he lived chiefly in Apia,<sup>1</sup> at the house of an American trader, Mr. H. J. Moors. He

<sup>1</sup> For convenience I have spoken throughout of the whole town as Apia, though the name is in strict usage limited to one of its four districts.

made the acquaintance of Colonel de Coëtlogon, the English consul, with whom he maintained the most friendly terms, who had been with Gordon in Khartoum; of Dr. Stuebel, the German Consul-General, perhaps the ablest and most enlightened, and certainly not the least honourable diplomatist that the Great Powers ever sent to the South Seas; of the Rev. W. E. Clarke and other members of the London Mission, his warm friends then and in later days; and especially of the high chief Mataafa, who impressed him at once as the finest of the Samoans.

It was the only time Stevenson ever lived in Apia or its immediate suburbs, and a few words in passing should be devoted to the Beach with which now, more than at any time, he was brought into contact. This term, common to other South Sea islands, comprises, as I understand, every white resident in a place who has not some position that can be definitely described: in the last instance it denotes the mere beach-combers, loafers or mean whites, although most people would include in it all persons of markedly less consideration than themselves. There was much kindness and generosity even among the lowest, and not more want of energy or of scruple than might have been expected. There was also a genial readiness to believe rumours, balanced by a willingness to think no worse of the persons against whom they were told. It might have been described as a society for investigation but not for promulgation of the truth. The number of white or half-caste residents in Apia was supposed to be about three hundred, of whom about two-thirds were British subjects, the bulk of the remainder being Germans.

At first Stevenson was not greatly struck either by

the place or by the natives; the island was "far less beautiful than the Marquesas or Tahiti; a more gentle scene, gentler acclivities, a tamer face of nature; and this much aided, for the wanderer, by the great German plantations, with their countless regular avenues of palms." Nor was he "specially attracted by the people; but they are courteous; the women very attractive, and dress lovely; the men purposedlike, well set up, tall, lean, and dignified."

In the end of December he made a boat expedition with Mr. Clarke some dozen miles to the east, partly on mission business, and partly on his own account to visit Tamasese, the chief whom the Germans had formerly set up as king; not long afterwards he made a similar journey to the west to Malua, where the London Mission have long had a training college for native students. It was on this latter occasion that he was first introduced to the natives by the Rev. J. E. Newell as "*Tusitala*," "*The Writer of Tales*," the name by which he was afterwards most usually known in Samoa. Here he gave an address which was translated for their benefit;<sup>1</sup> and a few days later he delivered a lecture in Apia upon his travels, on behalf of a native church, Dr. Stuebel taking the chair.

From his notes made on the first expedition I draw one or two passages, descriptive of Samoan customs and of Samoan scenery, which is nowhere more beautiful than in the inlet he then visited.

"Dec. 31, '89.

"At the mission station, the most enchanting scene: troops of children and young girls in that enchanting

<sup>1</sup> Appendix A.

diversity of bright attire which makes a joy to the eye of any Samoan festival; some in *tapa*<sup>1</sup> crinolined out, some in gaudy tabards, some in the sleeveless bodice of black velvet; one little girlie in a *titi* of russet leaves, herself crowned with the red flower of royalty, for all the world like a pantomime fairy, only her lendings were not of tinsel, but still glittered with the raindrops of the morning. They came in a certain order, one standing by to let another pass, these singing as they came, those as they waited. The strains were almost as pleasant to the ear as the colours and the bright young faces to the eye; the words were now conventional and applicable to any *malaga*, now composed or prepared against the present occasion. Each little gaudy band of choristers approached the open apse of the mission-house, where we sat installed, walking in loose array, their gifts of *taro*, or sugar-cane, shouldered gallantly like muskets, one girl in special finery leading with a chicken in her arms, and every foot in time; they paused some paces off, ending their compliment with more boisterous enunciation, rose to a last high note, and suddenly with a medley of shrill shouts hurled all their offerings one upon another in front of us, broke up their ranks with laughter, and dispersed. One of our boat's crew gathered up the offerings, and a high voice like a herald's proclaimed the name of the village and the number and nature of the gifts. And before he had well spoken a fresh troop was drawing near, with a new song. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Tapa*, native cloth made of mulberry bark; *titi*, something between a girdle and a skirt; *malaga*, excursion, visiting party; *taro*, the edible root of the *Arum esculentum*.

*“Fagaloa, Dec. 31st.*

“Past Falefā, where the reef ends and the coaster enters on the open sea, all prettinesses, as if they were things of shelter, end. The hills are higher and more imminent, and here and there display naked crags. The surf beats on bluff rocks, still overhung with forest; the boat, still navigated foolishly near the broken water, is twisted to and fro with a drunken motion, in the backwash and broken water of the surf; and though to-day it is exceptionally smooth, another boat that crosses us appears only at intervals and for a moment on the blue crest of the swells. At last, rounding a long spit of rocks on which the sea runs wildly high, the bay, gulf, or rather (as the one true descriptive word) the loch of Fagaloa opens. The oarsmen rest awhile upon their oars. ‘Thank you for your rowing,’ says Mr. Clarke—the conventional allocution: the conventional answer comes, ‘Thank you for your prayers’; and then, with a new song struck up, which sings the praise and narrates with some detail the career of Mr. Clarke himself, we begin to enter the enchanted bay; high clouds hover upon the hill-tops; thin cataracts whiten lower down along the front of the hills; all the rest is precipitous forest, dark with the intensity of green, save where the palms shine silver in the thicket; it is indeed a place to enter with a song upon our lips.

“. . . Fagaloa is the original spot where every prospect pleases. It was beautiful to see a vast black rain-squall engulf the bottom of the bay, pass over with glittering skirts, climb the opposite hill, and cling there and dwindle into rags of snowy cloud; beautiful too



was a scene where a little burn ran into the sea between groups of cocos and below a rustic bridge of palm-stems; something indescribably Japanese in the scene suggested the idea of setting on the bridge three gorgeously habited young girls, and these relieved in their bright raiment against the blue of the sky and the low sea-line completed the suggestion; it was a crape picture in the fact. We went on further to the end of the bay, where the village sits almost sprayed upon by waterfalls among its palm-grove, and round under the rocky promontory, by a broken path of rock among the bowers of foliage; a troop of little lads accompanied our progress, and two of them possessed themselves of my hands and trotted alongside of me with endless, incomprehensible conversation; both tried continually to pull the rings off my fingers; one carried my shoes and stockings, and proudly reminded me of the fact at every stoppage. They were unpleasant, cheeky, ugly urchins; and the shoe-bearer, when we turned the corner and sat down in the shade and the sea-breeze on black ledges of volcanic rock, splashed by the sea, nestled up to my side, and sat pawing me like an old acquaintance. . . .

*“Jan. 1st, 1890.—*On our way back along the most precipitous and seemingly desert portion of the coast, we were startled by a sudden noise rising above the continuous sound of the breaching surf which hangs along the shore incessant and invariable in pitch. At first we supposed it to be the sound of some greater wave exploding through a blow-hole of the rocks; but presently the sound was repeated, our eye was caught by a growing column of blue smoke arising in the

shore-side forest, and we were aware that in that bay, where not a roof appeared to break the continuous foliage, a not inconsiderable village must sit secret, whose inhabitants were now saluting the New Year with a field-piece, some relic of the war."

But Stevenson was now to take a step that proved more decisive than for the moment he imagined. The winter home he had once projected at Madeira was to be transferred to Samoa; he purchased some four hundred acres in the bush, two miles behind and six hundred feet above the level of the town of Apia. The ground was covered, not exactly with virgin forest, for it had formerly been occupied (according to tradition) by a Samoan bush town, but with vegetation so dense that on her first visit his wife had been quite unable to penetrate to the spot where the house afterwards stood. The land, however, was to be cleared, and a cottage erected, which would at any rate shelter the family during such intervals between their cruises as it should suit them to spend in Samoa. But the real reason for the selection of this island for a settlement lay principally in the facilities of communication. An author, and especially a writer of novels, can dispense with many of the blessings of civilisation; the one thing absolutely indispensable is a regular and trustworthy mode of communicating with his printer and his publisher. Now in the matter of mails Samoa was exceptionally fortunate. The monthly steamers between Sydney and San Francisco received and deposited their mail-bags in passing, and very soon after began to call at the port of Apia. A German steamer, the *Lübeck*, ran regularly between Apia and Sydney, and the New

Zealand boat, the *Richmond*, called on her circular trip from Auckland to Tahiti. Of all the other islands which Stevenson had visited, Tahiti itself was the only possible rival, but its mail service was much less frequent and less trustworthy; and, moreover, Stevenson was not anxious to place himself under the control of a French colonial government.

So the ground was bought, the money paid, and orders were left to begin the necessary operations. Early in February the party sailed for Sydney, where Mrs. Strong was now waiting to see them on their way home to England for the summer.

Soon after reaching Australia, Stevenson found in a religious paper a letter from Dr. Hyde, a Presbyterian minister in Honolulu, depreciating the labours of Father Damien at Molokai, and reviving against his memory some highly unchristian and unworthy slanders. The letter was written in a spirit peculiarly calculated to rouse Stevenson's indignation, and when he heard at the same time a report, which may or may not have been true, but which he, at any rate, fully believed, to the effect that a proposed memorial to Damien in London had been abandoned on account of this or some similar statement, his anger knew no bounds. He sat down and wrote the celebrated letter to Dr. Hyde, which was forthwith published in pamphlet form in Sydney, and subsequently in Edinburgh in the *Scots Observer*. He had the courage of his opinions, and realised the risks he was taking: "I knew I was writing a libel: I thought he would bring an action; I made sure I should be ruined; I asked leave of my gallant family, and the sense that I was signing away all I

possessed kept me up to high-water mark, and made me feel every insult heroic."

But in place of the news for which his friends were waiting, that he had started upon his homeward voyage, there came a telegram to Mr. Baxter on the 10th April: "Return Islands four months. Home September."

He had taken cold in Sydney, and after the lapse of eighteen months having again started a hemorrhage, was very ill and pining for the sea. Mrs. Stevenson heard of a trading steamer about to start for "the Islands," applied for three passages and was refused, went to the owners and was again refused, but stating inflexibly that it was a matter of life or death to her husband, she carried her point and extorted their unwilling consent.

This vessel was the steamship *Janet Nicoll*, an iron screw-steamer of about six hundred tons, chartered by Messrs. Henderson & Macfarlane, a well-known South Sea firm. There was a dock strike in Sydney at the time, but with a "black-boy" crew on board, the *Janet* got away, carrying a full complement of officers and engineers, and the trio to whom *Island Nights' Entertainments* was afterwards dedicated—Mr. Henderson, one of the partners; Ben Hird,<sup>1</sup> the supercargo; and "Jack" Buckland, the living original of Tommy Haddon in *The Wrecker*.

Unwelcome guests though they had been, no sooner had they started than they met with the greatest kind-

<sup>1</sup> In a brief sketch in *Macmillan's Magazine* for November, 1896, I endeavoured to do justice to the memory of some of Hird's many admirable qualities.

ness and cordiality from every one on board, and when they reached Auckland the invalid was himself again. They left that port under sealed orders, but were not yet clear of the lighthouse before some fireworks, left in Buckland's berth, set his cabin on fire. The saloon was filled with dense smoke and a rosy glow "Let no man say I am unscientific," wrote Stevenson. "When I ran, on the alert, out of my stateroom, and found the main cabin incarnadined with the glow of the last scene of a pantomime, I stopped dead. 'What is this?' said I. 'This ship is on fire, I see that; but why a pantomime?' And I stood and reasoned the point, until my head was so muddled with the fumes that I could not find the companion. By singular good fortune, we got the hose down in time and saved the ship, but Lloyd lost most of his clothes, and a great part of our photographs was destroyed. Fanny saw the native sailors tossing overboard a blazing trunk; she stopped them in time, and behold, it contained my manuscripts." <sup>1</sup>

After this episode all went well; the course of the steamer may be traced on the accompanying map. She put in to Apia, and stayed there long enough to enable the party to visit their new property and see what progress had been made. After that she went to the east and to the north, calling at three-and-thirty low islands; their stay in almost every case was limited to a few hours, and, as Stevenson wrote on this cruise, "hackney cabs have more variety than atolls." They saw their friend King Tembinok' again, and received a welcome from him almost too pathetic to be hearty.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, ii. 185.

He had been ill, and the whole island had been attacked by measles, a disaster which was apparently attributed by the victims to the sale of their "devil-box." In the centre of the big house was a circular piece of "devil-work" in the midst of a ring of white shells, and the worship of "Chench," the local deity, had obviously received an impetus from recent events.

The circumstances of this expedition were, of course, very different from their former leisurely and more local voyages in schooners. Stevenson greatly enjoyed the company on board, for two at least of his fellow-voyagers were probably unrivalled by any white man in their experience of these regions, and were possessed besides of remarkable ability and character.

The altered conditions of navigation were a great interest to him, and he was never weary of admiring the captain's skill in handling the steamer, one specimen of which he has recorded in the account of his first visit to a pearl-shell island, such as, to his great disappointment, he had failed to visit from Fakarava.

"Nearly two years had passed before I found myself in the trading steamer *Janet Nicoll*, heading for the entrance of Penrhyn or Tongarewa. In front, the line of the atoll showed like a narrow sea-wall of bare coral, where the surges broke; on either hand the tree-tops of an islet showed some way off: on one, the site of the chief village; the other, then empty, but now inhabited, and known by the ill-omened name of Molokai. We steamed through the pass and were instantly involved amidst a multiplicity of coral lumps, or horses' heads, as they are called by sailors. Through these our way meandered; we would have a horse's head athwart the

bows, one astern, one upon either board; and the tortuous fairway was at times not more than twice the vessel's beam. The *Janet* was, besides, an iron ship; half the width of the Pacific severed us from the next yard of reparation; one rough contact, and our voyage might be ended, and ourselves consigned to half a year of Penrhyn. On the topgallant fore-castle stood a native pilot, used to conning smaller ships, and unprepared for the resources of a steamer; his cries rang now with agony, now with wrath. The best man was at the bridge wheel; and Captain Henry, with one hand on the engine signal, one trembling towards the steersman, juggled his long ship among these dangers, with the patient art of one fitting up a watch, with the swift decision of a general in the field. I stood by, thrilling at once with the excitement of a personal adventure and the admiration due to perfect skill.

“We were presently at anchor in a singular berth, boxed all about; our late entrance, our future exit not to be discovered; in front the lagoon, where I counted the next day upwards of thirty horses' heads in easy view; behind, the groves of the isle and the crowded houses of the village. Many boats lay there at moorings: in the verandah, folk were congregated gazing at the ship; children were swimming from the shore to board us; and from the lagoon, before a gallant breeze, other boats came skimming homeward. The boats were gay with white sails and bright paint; the men were clad in red and blue, they were garlanded with green leaves or gay with kerchiefs; and the busy, many-coloured scene was framed in the verdure of the palms and the opal of the shallow sea.

“It was a pretty picture, and its prettiest element, the coming of the children. Every here and there we saw a covey of black heads upon the water. . . . Soon they trooped up the side-ladder, a healthy, comely company of kilted children; and had soon taken post upon the after-hatch, where they sat in a double row, singing with solemn energy.”

But on the whole Stevenson did not benefit greatly by the voyage. He now turned to the “letters” upon his experiences for the American syndicate; from the first they failed to satisfy him, although he regarded them, even in their final form, as only the rough material for the book. The heat of the steamer, driven before the wind, was often intolerable; he had another hemorrhage, and remained languid and unfit for work. On the return journey the *Janet* turned off to New Caledonia, and thence went direct to Sydney. Stevenson, however, landed at Noumea, where he spent a few days by himself, observing the French convict settlement, and learning something of the methods of dealing with natives. It was the only time he was ever among Melanesian tribes, although occasionally he met with isolated individuals, especially in Samoa, where they are frequently imported as labourers for the German firm.

He followed his wife and stepson to Sydney, whence Mr. Osbourne left for England, finally to arrange their affairs, and bring out the furniture from Skerryvore for the “yet unbuilt house on the mountain.”

All idea of this journey had been given up by Stevenson himself in the course of the past voyage, and indeed, having reached Sydney, he was confined to his



room in the Union Club, and left it only to return to Samoa. From this time forth, although he formed various projects, never realised, of seeing his friends, and especially Mr. Colvin, in Egypt, Honolulu, or Ceylon, he never, so far as I know, again looked forward to setting foot upon his native shores.

With his wife he left for Apia, and on their arrival they camped in gipsy fashion in the four-roomed wooden house which was all, except a trellised arbour, that had yet been erected on the property. Here for the next six months they lived alone with one servant, until the ground was further cleared and the permanent house built.

Into the details of Stevenson's life at this time there is no need to go; it was a period of transition, and it is sufficiently described in the *Vailima Letters*. Most of his material difficulties were crowded into it; but even from them he derived a great deal of enjoyment. There were daily working on the land a number of labourers, partly Samoans, partly natives of other groups, superintended for most of the time by a Samoan who figures largely in the first part of the letters to Mr. Colvin. After a while, as soon as the lie of the ground could be more clearly seen, the site of the new house was selected on a plateau a couple of hundred yards higher up the hill, and the building itself was begun by white carpenters.

This was the only time their food-supply ever ran at all short; but after their experiences in schooners and on low islands, they found little to complain of, as they felt that if it ever came to the worst, two miles off there was always an open restaurant. Their one ser-

vant was a German ex-steward, a feckless, kindly creature, who seemed born with two left hands, but was always ready to do his best. But the less competent the servant, the more numerous and miscellaneous were the odd jobs which devolved upon his master and mistress.

Thus in the meantime Stevenson's own work went on under great disadvantages. Much of his effort was expended upon the South Sea Letters; but this was the time when he saw most of the virgin forest, and his solitary expeditions and the hours spent in weeding at the edge of the "bush" were, as we shall see, not without effect upon his writing.

In January, 1891, he left his wife in sole charge and went to Sydney to meet his mother, who was to arrive there from Scotland on her way to Samoa. The shaft of the *Lübeck* broke when she was near Fiji, at the worst of seasons and in the most dangerous of waters; but it was patched up with great skill, and, under sail and to the astonishment of the whole port, she arrived at her destination only four days late. Stevenson as usual "fell sharply sick in Sydney," but was able to go on board the *Lübeck* again and convoy his mother to her new home. The house, after all, was not ready to receive her, and, having taken her first brief glimpse of Samoa, she returned to the Colonies for another couple of months.

Stevenson then accompanied Mr. Harold Sewall, the American Consul-General, upon a visit to Tutuila, the easternmost island of the group, now added to the territory of the United States.

Here they spent three weeks, partly by the shores of

the great harbour of Pagopago, partly on an attempt to reach the islands of Manu'a in a small schooner, and partly in circumnavigating Tutuila by easy stages in a whale-boat. The expedition was rather at the mercy of its interpreter; but the island was new to them, and they all greatly enjoyed their experiences. It was the best view Stevenson ever had of the more remote Samoans in their own homes, and the scenery and the life attracted him more than ever. Fortunately he kept a diary, from which I have taken a few characteristic passages:—

#### “PAGOPAGO

“The island at its highest point is nearly severed in two by the long-elbowed harbour, about half a mile in width, cased everywhere in abrupt mountain-sides. The tongue of water sleeps in perfect quiet, and laps around its continent with the flapping wavelets of a lake. The wind passes overhead; day and night overhead the scroll of trade-wind clouds is unrolled across the sky, now in vast sculptured masses, now in a thin drift of débris, singular shapes of things, protracted and deformed beasts and trees and heads and torsos of old marbles, changing, fainting, and vanishing even as they flee. Below, meanwhile, the harbour lies unshaken and laps idly on its margin; its colour is green like a forest pool, bright in the shallows, dark in the midst with the reflected sides of woody mountains. At times a flicker of silver breaks the uniformity, miniature whitecaps flashing and disappearing on the sombre ground; to see it, you might think the wind was treading on and toeing the flat water, but not so

—the harbour lies unshaken, and the flickering is that of fishes.

“Right in the wind’s eye, and right athwart the dawn, a conspicuous mountain stands, designed like an old fort or castle, with naked cliffy sides and a green head. In the peep of the day the mass is outlined dimly; as the east fires, the sharpness of the silhouette grows definite, and through all the chinks of the high wood the red looks through, like coals through a grate. From the other end of the harbour, and at the extreme of the bay, when the sun is down and night beginning, and colours and shapes at the sea-level are already confounded in the greyness of the dusk, the same peak retains for some time a tinge of phantom rose.

“Last night I was awakened before midnight by the ship-rats which infest the shores and invade the houses, incredible for numbers and boldness. I went to the water’s edge; the moon was at the zenith; vast fleecy clouds were travelling overhead, their borders frayed and extended as usual in fantastic arms and promontories. The level of their flight is not really high, it only seems so; the trade-wind, although so strong in current, is but a shallow stream, and it is common to see, beyond and above its carry, other clouds faring on other and higher winds. As I looked, the skirt of a cloud touched upon the summit of Pioa, and seemed to hang and gather there, and darken as it hung. I knew the climate, fled to shelter, and was scarce laid down again upon the mat before the squall burst. In its decline, I heard the sound of a great bell rung at a distance; I did not think there had been a bell upon the island. I thought the hour a strange one for the ring-

ing, but I had no doubt it was being rung on the other side at the Catholic Mission, and lay there listening and thinking, and trying to remember which of the bells of Edinburgh sounded the same note. It stopped almost with the squall. Half an hour afterwards, another shower struck upon the house and spurted awhile from the gutters of the corrugated roof; and again with its decline the bell began to sound, and from the same distance. Then I laughed at myself, and this bell resolved into an eavesdrop falling on a tin close by my head. All night long the flaws continued at brief intervals. Morning came, and showed mists on all the mountaintops, a grey and yellow dawn, a fresh accumulation of rain imminent on the summit of Pioa, and the whole harbour scene stripped of its tropic colouring and wearing the appearance of a Scottish loch.

“And not long after, as I was writing on this page, sure enough, from the far shore a bell began indeed to ring. It has but just ceased, boats have been passing the harbour in the showers, the congregation is within now, and the mass begun. How very different stories are told by that drum of tempered iron! To the natives a new, strange, outlandish thing: to us of Europe, redolent of home; in the ear of the priests, calling up memories of French and Flemish cities, and perhaps some carved cathedral and the pomp of celebrations; in mine, talking of the grey metropolis of the north, of a village on a stream, of vanished faces and silent tongues.

#### “THE BAY OF OA

“We sailed a little before high-water, and came skirting for some while along a coast of classical landscapes,

cliffy promontories, long sandy coves divided by semi-independent islets, and the far-withdrawing sides of the mountain, rich with every shape and shade of verdure. Nothing lacked but temples and galleys; and our own long whale-boat sped (to the sound of song) by eight nude oarsmen figured a piece of antiquity better than perhaps we thought. No road leads along this coast; we scarce saw a house; these delectable islets lay quite desert, inviting seizure, and there was none like Keats's *Endymion*<sup>1</sup> to hear our snowlight cadences. On a sudden we began to open the bay of Oa. At the first sight my mind was made up—the bay of Oa was the place for me. We could not enter it, we were assured; and being entered we could not land; both statements plainly fictive; both easily resolved into the fact that there was no guest-house, and no girls to make the kava for our boatmen and admire their singing. A little gentle insistence produced a smiling acquiescence, and the eight oars began to urge us slowly into a bay of the *Æneid*. Right overhead a conical hill arises; its top is all sheer cliff of a rosy yellow, stained with orange and purple, bristled and ivied with individual climbing trees; lower down the woods are massed; lower again the rock crops out in a steep but-tress, which divides the arc of beach. The boat was eased in, we landed and turned this way and that like fools in a perplexity of pleasures; now some way into the wood toward the spire, but the woods had soon strangled the path—in the Samoan phrase, the way was dead—and we began to flounder in impenetrable bush, still far from the foot of the ascent, although already

<sup>1</sup> Book II. 1. 80.

the greater trees began to throw out arms dripping with lianas, and to accept us in the margin of their shadows. Now along the beach; it was grown upon with crooked, thick-leaved trees down to the water's edge. Immediately behind there had once been a clearing; it was all choked with the mummy-apple, which in this country springs up at once at the heels of the axeman, and among this were intermingled the coco-palm and the banana. Our landing and the bay itself had nearly turned my head. 'Here are the works of all the poets *passim*,' I said, and just then my companion stopped. 'Behold an omen,' said he, and pointed. It was a sight I had heard of before in the islands, but not seen: a little tree such as grows sometimes on infinitesimal islets on the reef, almost stripped of its leaves, and covered instead with feasting butterflies. These, as we drew near, arose and hovered in a cloud of lilac and silver-grey<sup>1</sup>. . . .

"All night the crickets sang with a clear trill of silver; all night the sea filled the hollow of the bay with varying utterance; now sounding continuous like a mill-weir, now (perhaps from further off) with swells and silences. I went wandering on the beach, when the tide was low. I went round the tree before our boys had stirred. It was the first clear grey of the morning; and I could see them lie, each in his place, enmeshed from head to foot in his unfolded kilt. The Highlander with his belted plaid, the Samoan with his lavalava, each sleep in their one vesture unfolded. One

<sup>1</sup> "Later on I found the scene repeated in another place; but here the butterflies were of a different species, glossy brown and black, with arabesques of white."

boy who slept in the open under the trees had made his pillow of a smouldering brand, doubtless for the convenience of a midnight cigarette; all night the flame had crept nearer, and as he lay there, wrapped like an oriental woman, and still plunged in sleep, the redness was within two handbreadths of his frizzled hair.

“I had scarce bathed, had scarce begun to enjoy the fineness and the precious colours of the morning, the golden glow along the edge of the high eastern woods, the clear light on the sugar-loaf of Maugalai, the woven blue and emerald of the cone, the chuckle of morning bird-song that filled the valley of the woods, when upon a sudden a draught of wind came from the leeward and the highlands of the isle, rain rattled on the tossing woods; the pride of the morning had come early, and from an unlooked-for side. I fled for refuge in the shed; but such of our boys as were awake stirred not in the least; they sat where they were, perched among the scattered boxes of our camp, and puffed at their stubborn cigarettes, and crouched a little in the slanting shower. So good a thing it is to wear few clothes. I, who was largely unclad—a pair of serge trousers, a singlet, woollen socks, and canvas shoes; think of it—envied them in their light array.

“*Thursday*.—The others withdrew to the next village. Meanwhile I had Virgil’s bay all morning to myself, and feasted on solitude, and overhanging woods, and the retiring sea. The quiet was only broken by the hoarse cooing of wild pigeons up the valley, and certain inroads of capricious winds that found a way hence and thence down the hillside and set the palms clattering; my enjoyment only disturbed by clouds of



dull, voracious, spotted, and not particularly envenomed mosquitoes. When I was still, I kept Buhac powder burning by me on a stone under the shed, and read Livy, and confused to-day and two thousand years ago, and wondered in which of these epochs I was flourishing at that moment; and then I would stroll out, and see the rocks and the woods, and the arcs of beaches, curved like a whorl in a fair woman's ear, and huge ancient trees, jutting high overhead out of the hanging forest, and feel the place at least belonged to the age of fable, and awaited Æneas and his battered fleets.

“Showers fell often in the night; some sounding from far off like a cataract, some striking the house, but not a drop came in. . . . At night a cry of a wild cat-like creature in the bush. Far up on the hill one golden tree; they say it is a wild cocoanut: I know it is not, they must know so too; and this leaves me free to think it sprang from the gold bough of Proserpine.

“The morning was all in blue; the sea blue, blue inshore upon the shallows, only the blue was nameless; the horizon clouds a blue like a fine pale porcelain, the sky behind them a pale lemon faintly warmed with orange. Much that one sees in the tropics is in water-colours, but this was in water-colours by a young lady.”

The mention of Livy recalls a curious circumstance, and raises besides the question of Stevenson's classical studies.

A year or two later he told me that he had read several books of Livy at this time, but found the style influencing him to such an extent that he resolved to read no more, just as in earlier days he had been driven

to abandon Carlyle. Mr. Gosse has recorded that Walter Pater in turn refused to read Stevenson lest the individuality of his own style might be affected, but it is more curious to find Stevenson himself at so late a stage fearing the influence of a Latin author.

As to his classics, he was ignorant of Greek, and preferred the baldest of Bohn's translations to more literary versions that might come between him and the originals. His whole relation to Latin, however, was very curious and interesting. He had never mastered the grammar of the language, and to the end made the most elementary mistakes. Nevertheless, he had a keen appreciation of the best authors, and, indeed, I am not sure that Virgil was not more to him than any other poet, ancient or modern. From all the qualities of the pedant he was, of course, entirely free. Just as he wrote Scots as well as he was able, "not caring if it hailed from Lauderdale or Angus, from the Mearns or Galloway," but if he had ever heard a good word, he "used it without shame," so it was with his Latin. Technicalities of law and the vocabulary of Ducange were admitted to equal rights with authors of the Golden Age.

Latin no doubt told for much in the dignity and compression of his style, and in itself it was to him—as we see in his diary—always a living language. But as an influence, Rome counted to him as something very much more than a literature—a whole system of law and empire.

From this expedition he returned to Apia in an open boat, a twenty-eight hours' voyage of sixty-five miles,

on which schooners have before now been lost. But for the journey and the exposure Stevenson was none the worse. "It is like a fairy-story that I should have recovered liberty and strength, and should go round again among my fellow-men, boating, riding, bathing, toiling hard with a wood-knife in the forest."

Before the end of the month the family were installed in the new house, and in May they were reinforced not only by the elder Mrs. Stevenson, but also by Mrs. Strong and her boy from Sydney, who thenceforward remained under Stevenson's protecting care.

His wanderings were now at an end, and he was to enter upon a period of settled residence. Stevenson has been generally regarded as a tourist and an outside observer in Samoa, especially by those who least know the Pacific themselves. There is, it must be granted, only one way to gain a lifelong experience of any country, but to have lived nowhere else leads neither to breadth of view nor to wisdom. It must always be borne in mind that before Stevenson settled down for the last three and a half years of his life in his own house of Vailima, he had spent an almost equal length of time in visiting other islands in the Pacific. In fact, had he been deliberately preparing himself for the life he was to lead, he could hardly have pursued a wiser course, or undergone a more thorough training. On his travels he enjoyed exceptional opportunities of gathering information, and in general knowledge of the South Seas, and of Samoa in particular, he was probably at the time of his death rivalled by no more than two or three persons of anything like his education or intelligence.