

St. Ives,

Being The Adventures of
a French Prisoner in
England

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ST. IVES

BEING

THE ADVENTURES OF A FRENCH PRISONER
IN ENGLAND

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



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PREFACE

BY MRS. R. L. STEVENSON

THE house at Vailima has been contradictorily described as a palace where the master sat enthroned amid hordes of obsequious vassals, and as a sordid, poor place in the jungle, where food was scant, and poverty sat at the elbow of the jaded novelist spurring him on to continual, feverish exertions. Neither was true. The house at Vailima was a plain, large wooden building, with wide verandahs and many doors and windows. Our house-workers, who did not consider themselves servants, but members of the family, were efficient, as a rule, especially Talolo, the cook. We had our own furniture, linen, plate, and china brought from home, and lived very much as we would in England, with a few American innovations. To a man just off a cruise among the islands, no doubt an evening spent at the house in Vailima, with its waxed floors and antique rugs, its rooms blazing with lamps, the glitter of glass and silver, and the flower-bedecked, noiseless house-boys, would seem like a glimpse into paradise. On the other hand, a tourist fresh from the colonies or San Francisco would accept all this as a matter of course, but would note with disapproval the bare feet of our butler, and be much annoyed when the shoes, put out over night to be blacked, showed by their sodden condition in the morning that they had been washed, inside as well as out, under the garden hose.

We had a few good horses imported from New Zealand, many ordinary island ponies, enough cows to keep up a constant supply of milk and butter, and an abundance of tropical fruits and vegetables. A fortnightly

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service of steamships brought us ice, fresh oysters, and other supplies from the colonies or San Francisco. There was a good baker and butcher in Apia, and fish to be bought on the beach. Eels and fresh-water prawns abounded in our streams, wild pigeons could be shot from our back door, and the chickens and eggs of our own raising were excellent. Without any extraordinary expenditure we were able to live very comfortably.

Socially, Samoa was certainly not dull. Diplomats and officials, many of them accompanied by their families, rented houses in the vicinity of Apia and entertained as they would at home. I have known Apia to be convulsed by a question of precedence between two officials from the same country, who each claimed the place of honour at public functions; burning despatches on the subject were written, and their respective governments appealed to. Well has Apia been called "the kindergarten of diplomacy."

Besides native feasts, we had afternoon teas, evening receptions, dinner parties, private and public balls, paper-chases on horseback, polo, tennis parties, and picnics. My husband joined in all these festivities, once coming in second in a paper-chase over very rough country. Being an invalid child, he had never been taught to dance. To hold aloof from the balls in Apia that were attended by almost the entire white population, was like an assumption of superiority; to go and sit out the evening was tedious. So, at the age of forty, he learned to dance, though I do not think he ever attempted more in public than a plain quadrille.

These social diversions did not interfere very materially with my husband's literary work. It was his usual habit to begin in the fresh, cool hours of the early morning, when the house was quiet. One of the native boys was always on the alert for the study bell, and at the first tinkle would hasten to prepare Tusitala's breakfast, which was served to him in his bed. After that it would be at least two full hours before the household was astir. The notes for *Hermiston* were

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thus jotted down on scraps of paper, to be elaborated later in the day in dictation to my daughter. These notes were very slight, but from them my husband dictated as rapidly as though he were reading from the finished work.

The study was a small room off the library, in reality an enclosed bit of the upper verandah. Two windows opened seaward at the front, and one at the end gave a view of Mount Vaea where my husband now lies. Shelves laden with books ran round the room on all sides. The only furniture was a large deal table, a couple of chairs, a locked stand of six Colt's repeating rifles, a narrow bed, where my husband might recline at his work, and a patent table that could be swung over the bed and raised or lowered at will.

Work, however, was not the invariable custom. Sometimes my husband—a very indifferent performer—played on his flageolet, or tried to make little compositions in music. His knowledge of music was not very profound, but it amused and interested him to attempt such exercises as the fragment I give below, which is meant to indicate the sounds made by the birds at night.

NIGHTS OF VAILIMA

R. L. S.



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While my husband preferred to do preparatory work in the morning, dictating in the afternoon, there were no absolutely fixed hours set apart for the purpose. The mornings, as I have said, might instead be devoted to the flageolet, to musical composition, or to the making of verses, which the author never took very seriously. And sometimes a party of flower-wreathed natives might come dancing over the lawn in front of the study windows, or a band of sailors from a man-of-

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war would be seen gathered in an embarrassed knot at the front gate. Either circumstance brought Tusitala to the lower verandah to welcome his guests. The conversation of sailors was of unfailing interest to him, and with the Samoans he always strictly followed their forms of etiquette, though there were times when the latter became a little irksome. The sailors might be received and entertained by other members of the family until such time as my husband chose to come downstairs. But a Samoan *melanga* (visiting party) expected the chief of Vailima to be instantly visible, with his talking man at his elbow to make his oration, and his maids in readiness with the 'ava bowl for the refreshment of the guests. Often, on such occasions, a sentence was left broken in the middle and its thread lost. And yet my husband's intercourse with the natives was of a kind that particularly pleased him. They knew nothing of the books he had written; he was no literary celebrity with them. They came to him, as to an elder brother, to ask advice on all subjects from the desirability of a marriage to their conduct in war. The house at Vailima was known throughout Samoa as "the house of wisdom." After my husband's death, an old chief came to me. "I wish," he said, "to make a memorial of my love for Tusitala. He once spoke to me of the need of a comfortable place on the high ground for the sick, who want a change of air; wherefore I have opened a road through the forest to the summit of a hill, where I have built a large house for the accommodation of any who wish to use it. This I have done to mark my love for Tusitala."

St. Ives was written entirely to dictation; not continuously, but at intervals, in conjunction with *Hermiston*. My husband would work on one book until he was tired or his mood changed, when he would take up the other. He told me, shortly before his death, that he meant to rest from both very soon, and begin something entirely different. The new book was to be called *Sophia Scarlet*, with all the principal characters women.

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The most important male character, an invalid with whom Sophia Scarlet fell in love, would die in an early chapter. "There was a time," he said, "when I didn't dare to really draw a woman; but I have no fear now. I shall show a little of what I can do in the two Kirstys; but in *Sophia Scarlet* the main interest shall be centred in the women." He did not tell me the plan of the story any further than that it was to be laid in Tahiti, Sophia Scarlet owning a large plantation, which she managed herself.

While my husband was thus working alternately on *St. Ives* and *Hermiston*, a passing ship brought contagious influenza to Apia. It spread rapidly over the island, scarcely one native person escaping the infection. To pass through a Samoan village during this epidemic was a most depressing experience. The sides of the houses, usually raised to the eaves, were drawn down and closely fastened. A deadly silence prevailed, broken only by an occasional cough or groan from behind the cocoanut leaf walls. Every Samoan in Vailima fell a victim to this "foreign sickness." The hall was turned into a hospital with rows of beds down the centre. My husband did not escape, and for a time was very seriously ill. But not even influenza and a consequent hemorrhage could hold him back from *St. Ives*. His amanuensis taught him the deaf and dumb alphabet by which he slowly and laboriously dictated fifteen pages.

A visit to Sydney a little later was a real interruption to *St. Ives*. My husband made a holiday of his trip, doing no work at all while he was in the colonies. He had entirely recovered from the influenza and was in high spirits, enjoying everything that came in his way even to the making of speeches and the answering of toasts. We gave parties in our rooms at the hotel, went to other people's parties, took long drives, and walked about through the Domain. Strangers meeting my husband in Sydney could hardly realise that he had ever been an invalid. It fell to a London "lady jour-

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nalist " to undo all he had gained in the way of health and strength on this excursion. On our return voyage to the islands she waylaid him for an interview in a draughty part of the ship, holding him with a monologue until he caught a heavy cold that kept him confined to his cabin until we reached the tropics.

Now followed the most harassing period of my husband's life. A war, as usual fomented for their own purposes by the whites, was raging in Samoa when we arrived. I will not touch on its political aspect; my husband's sympathies were made plain in the articles he wrote at the time. All that has happened since justifies the wisdom of the course he advocated.

He had, some time before, persuaded several of the high chiefs to grow cacao, giving them the seed for their plantations. To Mataafa he proposed the erection of a mill, with the object of manufacturing fibre. He intended himself to furnish the money to buy the machinery and necessary materials, and was already in communication with English firms in connection with this matter when the war broke out. As this undertaking would require a large expenditure, he tried to push on the two novels, expecting to make from them a sum sufficient for his purpose. After the deportation of Mataafa he still hoped the remaining chiefs might be brought to understand the necessity, under the new conditions, of cultivating their lands, instead of wasting their energies in useless warfare. In his speech to the chiefs who built for him "The Road of the Loving Heart," he said: "Who is the true champion of Samoa? . . . It is the man who makes roads, who plants fruit-trees, who gathers harvests, and is a profitable servant before the Lord, using and improving that great talent that has been given him in trust, . . . because all things in a country hang together like the links of the anchor cable, one by another; but the anchor itself is industry." Further on, speaking of Mataafa, he said: "He knew what I am telling you; no man better. He saw the day was come when Samoa had to walk in a new path,

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and be defended, not only with guns and blackened faces, and the noise of men shouting, but by digging and planting, reaping and sowing. When he was still here amongst us, he busied himself planting cacao; he was anxious and eager about agriculture and commerce. I wish every chief in these islands would turn to and work, and build roads, and sow fields, and plant food-trees, and educate his children, and improve his talents—not for the love of Tusitala, but for the love of his brothers, and his children, and the whole body of generations yet unborn.”

That Tusitala had an intention of helping Mataafa in some way not made public was soon noised abroad. The only explanation the white foreigners, with a few exceptions, could find was that arms and ammunition were being bought and smuggled into the country for the use of Mataafa's army. The amount believed to be so spent grew to immense proportions. A verandah lantern, a present from my mother-in-law, was supposed to be used for signalling a mysterious vessel that had been seen hovering near the coast. Some of the tales were incredibly foolish—such as the existence of a concealed road that had been opened over the hills beyond our house to join Mataafa's village, Malie; or the rumour that three thousand Mataafa warriors were encamped in our woods. I remember our amusement when a high white official, taking tea on our verandah, nearly swooned from fright when he heard the *pu* (a war conch we used for calling our workmen together), believing that he was to be treacherously attacked. The king, Laupepa, under similar circumstances, showed a more manly spirit. He simply looked at my husband with an inquiring smile.

Both publicly and privately my husband was doing all in his power to effect a reconciliation between Mataafa, whom he held in the highest esteem, and the amiable, broken Laupepa, who had become a mere puppet in the hands of a few white men. Such a reconciliation, desired by both principals, would have

brought peace to the country. But this course would have caused financial loss to several persons whose interest lay in the sale of certain commodities, to say nothing of a band of ambitious officials who were quick to seize on any opportunity to keep themselves before the eyes of the public. Both cliques believed my husband's presence in the island to be a menace to their projects. They now started a regular system of persecution against him. Several new labourers at Vailima confessed to being spies set to watch Tusitala's movements. Open threats of deportation were made. Long after, the captain of a passenger ship told me he had been approached on the possibility of luring my husband on board the ship and deporting him. "I didn't dare," said the captain, "even if I had wished to do it. How could I explain such an action at my port in the English colonies? Why, they would have torn me to pieces when they found it out." Futile attempts were made to induce the Laupepa warriors to attack Vailima. Were a party of Mataafans defeated, my husband would be taunted with the failure of his plans. Innuendoes and covert slanders pointing to Tusitala appeared in our only newspaper. Once an edict was actually issued by Sir John Thurston, the British High Commissioner in Fiji, patently directed against my husband. This, however, was withdrawn by cable as soon as it reached Downing Street.

One side of my husband's character was almost unknown; the profession of letters was a second choice, his ill health, beginning in his childhood, making what he preferred, the career of a soldier, impossible. His library had many books on military tactics, fortifications, etc., on any one of which he could have passed a thorough examination. It may be imagined how galling it was to sit writing books on his verandah, conscious the while of the foolish manœuvres of the opposing parties, and knowing how easy it would be to turn the scale. There were occasions when he was almost tempted to throw in his lot with Mataafa, as

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he was accused of doing. But his better judgment prevailed and sent him back to his pen and ink-bottle. One of the petty persecutions he was subjected to was an order restraining him from the purchase of firearms. The only reason for his desire to have a few rifles at his command was that we were living some three and a half miles in the bush, on an historic battlefield just at the border between the opposing forces. At any moment a collision might take place at our very doors. We had no reason to fear either side, except in one case; in Samoa no prisoners were taken. Even a wounded prisoner would be instantly decapitated, the head to be carried to the victor's chief as an evidence of prowess. Tusitala knew that wounded men from either side would look to him for protection. Empty-handed, without weapons, such protection would be impossible. He therefore asked permission to import half a dozen rifles. This request was insolently refused. Not long after my son saw his opportunity and forced the hands of the authorities then in power, who themselves unwillingly imported the six rifles that we afterwards kept in the study.

The changes in the government were most bewildering. Sometimes one man was at the head, sometimes another. I remember when two consuls took the lead, turn and turn about. But through all this distracting period one figure compelled our admiration—that of the American Chief Justice, Henry C. Ide. Besides Judge Ide, there were a few others among the officials who never wavered in their loyal friendship for my husband. There was Basett Haggard, the British Land Commissioner, brother to the novelist; and the American Consul General, James H. Mulligan, whose personal charm and witty, sympathetic conversation brightened many an otherwise dull hour in Vailima.

There were now continual interruptions to my husband's work. As he walked up and down on the verandah in front of his study, dictating either *St. Ives* or *Hermiston* to my daughter, a haggard chief might

come to ask the truth of this or that *tala* (gossiping tale) concerning the war, and to beg for "words of wisdom"; or an insulting message, filled with threats, would arrive from one of the white officials. A boy from the Mission might appear with news of the wounded in the hospital, or a party of warriors with embarrassing presents—one was a large white bull—would stop for 'ava and a chat, firing a parting salute that endangered not only our live stock, but ourselves as well. Part of *St. Ives* was written to the booming of cannon. We could see the smoke, and hear the sound of the guns rolling over the hills, as the men-of-war attacked Luatuanu'u. At each report a wail arose from our native people, most of whom had friends or relatives at the front.

This was very trying for the amanuensis, but she kept bravely at her work, making only an involuntary pause at the detonation of a big gun. We had an unusual number of terrific thunderstorms at this season, perhaps precipitated by the bombardment. They would gather suddenly, and break with an appalling uproar. I think my daughter feared a thunderstorm more than anything else in the world—yet the dictation continued undisturbed. My husband meant to express his admiration for her courage in a dedication to *St. Ives*. I remember his saying to her, "It shall be the best thing in the book, my dear."

After the defeat and deportation of Mataafa, whose cause he now took up with the home government, my husband partially withdrew from participation in the politics of Samoa. Assisted by Mr. H. J. Moors of Apia, he did all in his power to ameliorate the wretched condition of the political prisoners confined in Mulinu'u, sending them food and medicine, and indirectly bringing about their final release. The many fatigues of mind and body he had undergone seemed to have no adverse effect on his health, which steadily improved. It was no unusual thing for him to spend an entire day in the saddle, often drenched to the skin by tropic squalls,

with nothing more than a ship's biscuit in his pocket. Colds and hemorrhages became things of the past. No one who has not lain in a sick-bed, year after year, can understand what this meant to him. It was like being born again, with a new life opening out before him. The weary years of invalidism that he had borne with such brave patience became hideous to look back upon. In May, 1892, he wrote to his friend, Mr. Sidney Colvin: "I have endured some two and forty years without public shame, and had a good time as I did it. If only I could secure a violent death, what a fine success! I wish to die in my boots; no more land of counterpane for me. To be drowned, to be shot, to be thrown from a horse,—ay, to be hanged, sooner than to pass again through that slow dissolution."

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