

MR. R. L. STEVENSON AS A SAMOAN CHIEF.*

BY W. H. TRIGGS.



NATIVE HUT, SAMOA.

(From a photograph supplied by Mr. Stevenson.)



SAMOAN GIRL.

(From a photograph supplied by Mr. Stevenson.)

IN the first instance, Mr. R. L. Stevenson chose Apia, Samoa, as his place of residence because it suited his health, which has always been very delicate. He clings to it as a home because it is unconventional and free, and accords with his love for the untamed and romantic. If you question him on the subject, he will tell you that, as re-

gards health, Honolulu suited him equally well; the Alps probably better. The very reason that would make most literary men avoid Samoa caused the author of "Treasure Island" to select it.

"I chose Samoa instead of Honolulu, for instance," he informed the present writer, "for the simple and eminently satisfactory reason that it is less civilised. Can you not conceive that it is awful fun?"

To the nineteenth-century Philistine fresh from the luxury and excitement of a bustling civilisation, this is at first a hard saying.

When we have seen Mr. Stevenson at

home, however, entering into the simple joys and sorrows of the interesting natives among whom he has cast his lot, living for the world's benefit, and yet himself keeping apart from its feverish allurements, we begin to understand the secret of his content.

Mr. Stevenson's house is removed even from such semblance of nineteenth-century civilisation as is to be found in Apia, the little capital of Samoa. It lies about three or four miles from the beach of Apia up towards the hills. The first part of the road is civilised macadam. You turn up past the Tivoli Hotel, through plantations of cocoanut trees, interspersed with bananas, candlenut trees, bread-fruit trees, and other tropical productions.

You pass a few houses on the way, but not many—the suburban residences, no doubt, of traders and officials living in Apia.

From the gardens come brilliant flashes of colour from tropical flowers, all the more striking as they gleam upon you suddenly from the sombre depths of the plantation. Presently you come to a road that is not a road at all, and to bush that is only now being cleared in patches. English readers will best understand the position when I state that all the wood to build Mr. Stevenson's house was carried about a third of the way on men's shoulders, and that all the stores and parcels

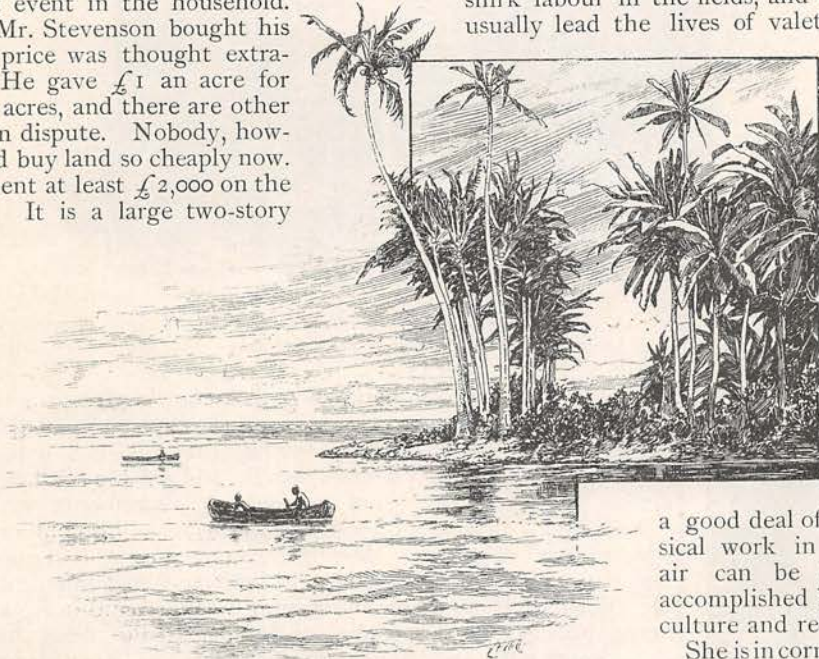
* This paper was written shortly before Mr. Stevenson's death.—ED.

are brought by pack-saddle. This important work is admirably performed by Donald and Edie, two old Auckland tramcar horses, a most excellent selection, the biggest and handsomest horses in the island. The Sydney Civil Service Co-operative Society—the popular writer's universal provider—have accurately gauged the tonnage of these faithful animals, and pack accordingly. They make their way through the forest, with its tall trees, lianas, wild pineapples, etc., wearing quite an air of importance, and, needless to say, their arrival is always an important event in the household.

When Mr. Stevenson bought his land, the price was thought extravagant. He gave £1 an acre for about 300 acres, and there are other 73 acres in dispute. Nobody, however, could buy land so cheaply now. He has spent at least £2,000 on the residence. It is a large two-story

skill. There is also a staff of native servants, of whom more anon. Each member of this little hierarchy has a share in its government. Mr. Osbourne is the bookkeeper, general business manager, and looks after the overseer and his gang of outside "boys." Mrs. Stevenson is an enthusiastic agriculturist, and really performs wonders in that capacity.

I see that according to the last census there were no fewer than 5,000 women gardeners in England. There were also a large number of women farmers. Mrs. Stevenson has shown that even in the tropics, where white men shirk labour in the fields, and their wives usually lead the lives of valetudinarians,



MATAUTU POINT, APIA, SAMOA.

(From a photograph supplied by Mr. R. L. Stevenson.)

house, with a verandah and balcony running round; and taking it altogether, it is by far the largest and finest house I saw in and around Apia.

The owner is also gradually improving the estate by felling trees, opening up views, and cultivating the land. It is known as Vai Lima, which means "Five Waters" in Samoan, and indicates the number of streams which flow by the spot.

The household consists of Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson and a grown-up son and daughter of Mrs. Stevenson by a former husband. The son, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, who is about twenty-five years of age, is already known to the public as a collaborator in some of Mr. Stevenson's works. The daughter, Mrs. Strong, is an artist of considerable taste and

a good deal of hard physical work in the open air can be successfully accomplished by a lady of culture and refinement.

She is in correspondence with Kew Gardens, Honolulu, Brisbane, Florida, etc., and is general referee on all matters of science.

In addition to special charge of her own two experimental gardens, she has general supervision of all the additions and improvements. For example, she has just engineered a court of cement between the house and kitchen, working with her hands when her tongue failed her. Finally, this talented and energetic lady acts as doctor to the establishment should any of its members fall ill.

Mrs. Strong, besides acting as Mr. Stevenson's amanuensis, has charge of the household and house and kitchen "boys." Thanks to her training, whereas they began with an Australian table-maid, German cook, etc., they are now equally well served—and, indeed, better—by a set of Samoan "boys."

Mr. Stevenson, of course, is mainly engaged with his literary work. As regards

the household, he may be described as playing the part of veiled prophet in general. He rarely appears upon the scene unless some of the "boys" have misbehaved. The reader must not imagine that these are frequent occasions, or that the misdemeanours are serious. "The boys," as Mr. Stevenson told me, "are awfully good, on the whole. They are more like a set of well-behaved young ladies. They are a perfectly honest people; nothing of value has ever been taken from our house, where doors and windows are always wide open; and upon one occasion, when white ants attacked the silver chest, the whole of my family plate lay spread upon the floor of the hall for two days unguarded." The hall, it may be added, is on the ground floor, while the family all sleep upstairs.

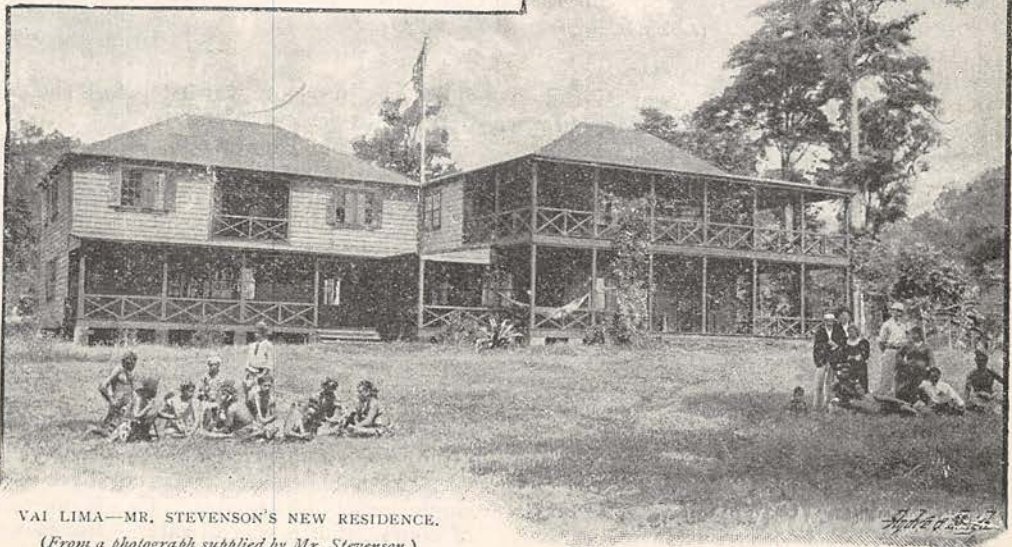
This brings me to the question of Mr. Stevenson's patriarchal relations with his native servants.

The Samoans, it is notorious, have a deep-seated and almost insuperable objection to work in the ordinary way. People in Apia always tell you that Samoans will not work, or, if they do, never stay with you beyond a few months. Such, undoubtedly, is the general experience; it is not Mr. Stevenson's. He himself says he pays lower wages than other Europeans, but he certainly gets better served, and visitors frequently remark that Vai Lima is the only place where you can see Samoans run.

What is the secret of this mysterious success? Mr. Stevenson was good enough to tell me. He said: "The reason of this is neither high wages nor indulgent treatment. Samoans rather enjoy discipline; they like,

however, to be used as gentlefolk. They like to be used with scrupulous justice; they like a service of which they can be proud. This we endeavour to give them by 'trying' all cases of misdemeanour in the most serious manner with interpreters, forms of oath, etc., and by giving them a particular dress on great occasions. If, when you were in Apia, you saw a few handsome, smart fellows in a striped jacket and a Royal Stuart tartan, they were Vai Lima boys. We have a tree at Christmas for all hands, a great native feast upon my birthday, and try in other ways to make them feel themselves of the family. Of course, no Samoan works except for his family. The chief is the master; to serve another clan may be possible for a short time, and to get money for a specific purpose. Accordingly, to ensure permanent service in Samoa I have tried to play the native chief with necessary European variations. Just now it looks as if I was succeeding.

"Our last triumph," the popular author continued, "was at the annual missionary feast. Up to now our boys had always gone home and marched into the show with their own individual villages. This time, of their own accord, they marched in a body by themselves into the meeting, clad in the Vai Lima uniform, and on their entrance were saluted as '*Tama Ona*,' which may be literally translated into Scotch, 'Mac Richies' (children of the rich man).



VAI LIMA—MR. STEVENSON'S NEW RESIDENCE.
(From a photograph supplied by Mr. Stevenson)

"We have a child on the place, a small fellow of eight or thereabouts. My daughter had amused herself in dressing him out in fine *lava-lava*, white linen coat, and straw hat. In this guise he was strutting about in front of the Tivoli Hotel, when the proprietor noticed him. 'Hi, youngster!' he asked in Samoan, 'who may you be?' Feloa'i replied with pride, 'I am one of the Vai Lima men!'

"Of course, this almost involves discharging nobody. They must learn to count upon this house as a permanent refuge, and I am rather hopeful that I may be able to carry it out upon these lines.

"Cases of misconduct must be met with some sort of punishment. At first I always discharged; now that we are beginning to take so much the character of a clan, and that by the previous process of discharges, as by survival of the fittest, we have so good a class together, I am trying to substitute fines upon a large scale. The other day I cut down the wages of one defaulter one-half; this was cheerfully accepted, and the man is still with us. As to the disposal of the fines: if the boy is Catholic, the amount is taken by the culprit to the Catholic Mission; if Protestant, to the Protestant Mission."

If the visitor arrives at Vai Lima at about five o'clock he will very likely find Mr. Osbourne and Mrs. Strong playing lawn tennis with some of the boys who take it *à tour de rôle*, and sometimes go on with the game by themselves after the "bosses" go in to dinner. Not always "bosses" with regard to the game, be it understood, for some of the Samoans are capital players. At night you hear the Samoans singing in their houses, shouting with laughter, and speechifying.

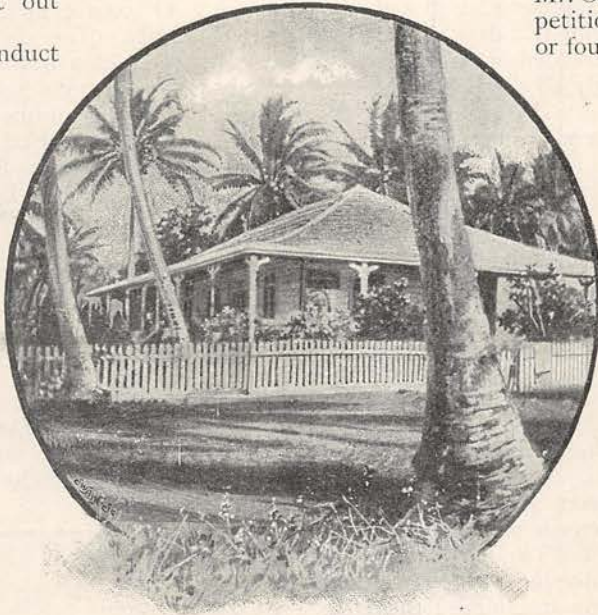
At Mr. Stevenson's last birthday feast there were great doings, one or two of which, as related by the author, illustrate the feeling of "the boys."

"You must know," he said, "that every chief who respects himself in Samoa must have an officer called a *Tulafale*—usually Englished 'speaking man.' It is a part, and perhaps the most momentous, of this officer's attributions to cry out the names at the *ava* drinking. This is done in a peculiar howl or song very difficult to acquire, and, I may say, to understand. He must also be fairly well versed in the true science of Samoan names, as no chief above a certain rank is ever 'called' under his own name. He has another, an *ava* name for the purpose. Well,

I had no *Tulafale*, and Mr. Osbourne held a competition, in which three or four of our boys howled against each other. The judgment of Apollo fell upon one boy, who was instantly a foot taller.

"I am sorry to make such confession of my disrespectability, but I must continue. I had not only no *Tulafale*—I had no *ava* name. I was called plain, bald 'Tusitala,' or 'Ona,' which is only a sobriquet at the best. On this coming to the knowledge of a high chief who was present, he paid me the graceful attention of giving me one of his own,

and I was hurriedly warned before the event that I must look out and recognise the new name, Au-Mai-Taaua-Ma-Le-Manuvao. The feast was laid on the floor of the hall—fifty feet by about eight of solid provisions. Fifteen pigs cooked whole, underground; two hundred pounds of beef, ditto of pork, two hundred pineapples, over four hundred head of taro, together with fish, chickens, Samoan prepared dishes, shrimps, oranges, sugarcane, bananas, biscuit and tinned salmon in proportion. The biscuit and tinned salmon, though not exactly to *our* taste, are a favourite luxury of the Samoans. By night—and we sat down at four p.m.—there was nothing left beyond a few oranges and a single bunch of bananas. This is not to say, of course, that it was all eaten—the Samoans



THE BRITISH CONSULATE.

(From a photograph supplied by Mr. R. L. Stevenson.)

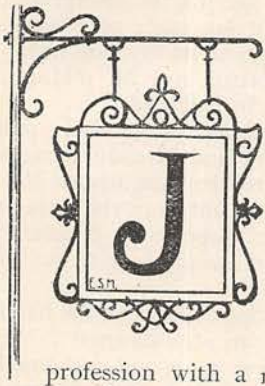
are comparatively dainty at a feast ; but so soon as we rose the arduous and difficult task of dividing what remained between the different guests was at once entered into, and the retainers of our guests, white and Samoan, departed, laden, to the sea. The wretched giver of a feast thus wakens on the morrow with a clean house. But it is not all loss. All gifts or favours in Samoa are to be repaid in kind and in a proportion, and to my feast nobody had come empty-handed. It was rather strange to look out next morning and see my courtyard alive with cocks, hens, and chickens."

After these details the reader will understand, I fancy, not only why Mr. Stevenson is held in such affectionate respect by his

native "boys"—who, I need hardly say, are all men—and receives from them such willing service, but also why it is that he himself enjoys life amid the unconventionalities of his island home. He has not isolated himself as a species of nineteenth-century hermit. On the contrary, while he manages to get keen intellectual enjoyment from his literary work and his reading, he has found new pleasures in entering into the simple joys and sports and troubles of a native race fresher from the mould of Nature than we are, possessing many interesting traits of character, taking more cheerful views of life than we do, and actuated in all things by a high-bred sense of courtesy which one cannot but admire.



BOSS 'TEC AT OLDBY.



JOHN BRIDGER was baffled, and being baffled, was out of humour with the world in general and with the village of Oldby in particular.

He had gone up the ladder of his profession with a run—with so quick a run that among pressmen he was known as Boss 'Tec.

The crime he was investigating was too ordinary to allow of one of those miraculous flashes of insight for which he was so famous ; in fact, had he not been longing for country air after his close application to the noted Vangirard-Vannes case, he would have turned the Oldby murder over to a *confrère*. This murder had no lurid background, no picturesque touches, and yet it baffled him.

The bald outline given to him was this :—

A man—A Frenchman, Alphonse d'Himbu by name—had come to Oldby, on a visit to Dr. Settle. These two had met at Vichy the previous year, and had chummed over billiards and cigars. No great friendship had ripened, and yet when little M. d'Himbu had written from London to say "It would give me great pleasure to see you before I return to Paris," Charles Settle had cordially replied : "Come down for a day or two, and see something of rural England, and give me my revenge for that last lost game."

The stranger arrived on Wednesday by the

12.15 from Liverpool Street ; at six that same evening Dr. Settle received an urgent summons to Lea Farm, about two miles away. M. d'Himbu, left alone, had sauntered forth into the garden, and from thence into the lane that skirts the doctor's garden and the rectory grounds—the Back Lane it is locally called.

A British earthwork, picturesquely crowned by elm and wild cherry-trees, must have attracted M. d'Himbu, for he had evidently climbed the stile half-way down the lane, and crossed the "British Field" to the knoll. There he was found twenty minutes later by Arthur Whitcroft, a lad of seventeen, or thereabouts, stabbed to the heart.

An inquest had, of course, been held, when the inevitable tramp theory was mooted. A beetle-browed fellow *had* been seen loafing about that day. But the coroner had dismissed this theory at once.

"A tramp," he remarked parenthetically, "may mutter imprecations when sent away empty-handed, but he does not run amuck like a Malay fanatic."

The station-master was called.

"Had the 6.20 train set down any passengers?"

"Yes ; one."

"Who?"

"The rector."

There was a slight sensation here, for if the rector had taken his usual short cut across the British Field he must have reached the knoll at 6.25—the very time of the murder.