

CHAPTER VIII--AFFAIRS OF LAULII AND FANGALII

November-December 1888

For Becker I have not been able to conceal my distaste, for he seems to me both false and foolish. But of his successor, the unfortunately famous Dr. Knappe, we may think as of a good enough fellow driven distraught. Fond of Samoa and the Samoans, he thought to bring peace and enjoy popularity among the islanders; of a genial, amiable, and sanguine temper, he made no doubt but he could repair the breach with the English consul. Hope told a flattering tale. He awoke to find himself exchanging defiances with de Coetlogon, beaten in the field by Mataafa, surrounded on the spot by general exasperation, and disowned from home by his own government. The history of his administration leaves on the mind of the student a sentiment of pity scarcely mingled.

On Blacklock he did not call, and, in view of Leary's attitude, may be excused. But the English consul was in a different category. England, weary of the name of Samoa, and desirous only to see peace established, was prepared to wink hard during the process and to welcome the result of any German settlement. It was an unpardonable fault in Becker to have kicked and buffeted his ready-made allies into a state of jealousy, anger, and suspicion. Knappe set himself at once to efface these

impressions, and the English officials rejoiced for the moment in the change. Between Knappe and de Coetlogon there seems to have been mutual sympathy; and, in considering the steps by which they were led at last into an attitude of mutual defiance, it must be remembered that both the men were sick,--Knappe from time to time prostrated with that formidable complaint, New Guinea fever, and de Coetlogon throughout his whole stay in the islands continually ailing.

Tamasese was still to be recognised, and, if possible, supported: such was the German policy. Two days after his arrival, accordingly, Knappe addressed to Mataafa a threatening despatch. The German plantation was suffering from the proximity of his "war-party." He must withdraw from Laulii at once, and, whithersoever he went, he must approach no German property nor so much as any village where there was a German trader. By five o'clock on the morrow, if he were not gone, Knappe would turn upon him "the attention of the man-of-war" and inflict a fine. The same evening, November 14th, Knappe went on board the Adler, which began to get up steam.

Three months before, such direct intervention on the part of Germany would have passed almost without protest; but the hour was now gone by. Becker's conduct, equally timid and rash, equally inconclusive and offensive, had forced the other nations into a strong feeling of common interest with Mataafa. Even had the German demands been moderate, de Coetlogon could not have forgotten the night of the taumualua, nor how Mataafa had relinquished, at his request, the attack upon the German

quarter. Blacklock, with his driver of a captain at his elbow, was not likely to lag behind. And Mataafa having communicated Knappe's letter, the example of the Germans was on all hands exactly followed; the consuls hastened on board their respective war-ships, and these began to get up steam. About midnight, in a pouring rain, Pelly communicated to Fritze his intention to follow him and protect British interests; and Knappe replied that he would come on board the Lizard and see de Coetlogon personally. It was deep in the small hours, and de Coetlogon had been long asleep, when he was wakened to receive his colleague; but he started up with an old soldier's readiness. The conference was long. De Coetlogon protested, as he did afterwards in writing, against Knappe's claim: the Samoans were in a state of war; they had territorial rights; it was monstrous to prevent them from entering one of their own villages because a German trader kept the store; and in case property suffered, a claim for compensation was the proper remedy. Knappe argued that this was a question between Germans and Samoans, in which de Coetlogon had nothing to see; and that he must protect German property according to his instructions. To which de Coetlogon replied that he was himself in the same attitude to the property of the British; that he understood Knappe to be intending hostilities against Lauili; that Lauili was mortgaged to the MacArthurs; that its crops were accordingly British property; and that, while he was ever willing to recognise the territorial rights of the Samoans, he must prevent that property from being molested "by any other nation." "But if a German man-of-war does it?" asked Knappe.--"We shall prevent it to the best of our ability," replied the colonel. It is to the credit of both men that this trying interview should have been conducted and concluded without heat; but Knappe must have returned to

the Adler with darker anticipations.

At sunrise on the morning of the 15th, the three ships, each loaded with its consul, put to sea. It is hard to exaggerate the peril of the forenoon that followed, as they lay off Laulii. Nobody desired a collision, save perhaps the reckless Leary; but peace and war trembled in the balance; and when the Adler, at one period, lowered her gun ports, war appeared to preponderate. It proved, however, to be a last--and therefore surely an unwise--extremity. Knappe contented himself with visiting the rival kings, and the three ships returned to Apia before noon. Beyond a doubt, coming after Knappe's decisive letter of the day before, this impotent conclusion shook the credit of Germany among the natives of both sides; the Tamaseses fearing they were deserted, the Mataafas (with secret delight) hoping they were feared. And it gave an impetus to that ridiculous business which might have earned for the whole episode the name of the war of flags. British and American flags had been planted the night before, and were seen that morning flying over what they claimed about Laulii. British and American passengers, on the way up and down, pointed out from the decks of the war-ships, with generous vagueness, the boundaries of problematical estates. Ten days later, the beach of Saluafata bay fluttered (as I have told in the last chapter) with the flag of Germany. The Americans riposted with a claim to Tamasese's camp, some small part of which (says Knappe) did really belong to "an American nigger." The disease spread, the flags were multiplied, the operations of war became an egg-dance among miniature neutral territories; and though all men took a hand in these proceedings, all men in turn were struck with their absurdity. Mullan, Leary's

successor, warned Knappe, in an emphatic despatch, not to squander and discredit the solemnity of that emblem which was all he had to be a defence to his own consulate. And Knappe himself, in his despatch of March 21st, 1889, castigates the practice with much sense. But this was after the tragicomic culmination had been reached, and the burnt rags of one of these too-frequently mendacious signals gone on a progress to Washington, like Caesar's body, arousing indignation where it came. To such results are nations conducted by the patent artifices of a Becker.

The discussion of the morning, the silent menace and defiance of the voyage to Lauili, might have set the best-natured by the ears. But Knappe and de Coetlogon took their difference in excellent part. On the morrow, November 16th, they sat down together with Blacklock in conference. The English consul introduced his colleagues, who shook hands. If Knappe were dead-weighted with the inheritance of Becker, Blacklock was handicapped by reminiscences of Leary; it is the more to the credit of this inexperienced man that he should have maintained in the future so excellent an attitude of firmness and moderation, and that when the crash came, Knappe and de Coetlogon, not Knappe and Blacklock, were found to be the protagonists of the drama. The conference was futile. The English and American consuls admitted but one cure of the evils of the time: that the farce of the Tamasese monarchy should cease. It was one which the German refused to consider. And the agents separated without reaching any result, save that diplomatic relations had been restored between the States and Germany, and that all three were convinced of their fundamental differences.

Knappe and de Coetlogon were still friends; they had disputed and differed and come within a finger's breadth of war, and they were still friends. But an event was at hand which was to separate them for ever. On December 4th came the Royalist, Captain Hand, to relieve the Lizard. Pelly of course had to take his canvas from the consulate hospital; but he had in charge certain awnings belonging to the Royalist, and with these they made shift to cover the wounded, at that time (after the fight at Laulii) more than usually numerous. A lieutenant came to the consulate, and delivered (as I have received it) the following message: "Captain Hand's compliments, and he says you must get rid of these niggers at once, and he will help you to do it." Doubtless the reply was no more civil than the message. The promised "help," at least, followed promptly. A boat's crew landed and the awnings were stripped from the wounded, Hand himself standing on the colonel's verandah to direct operations. It were fruitless to discuss this passage from the humanitarian point of view, or from that of formal courtesy. The mind of the new captain was plainly not directed to these objects. But it is understood that he considered the existence of a hospital a source of irritation to Germans and a fault in policy. His own rude act proved in the result far more impolitic. The hospital had now been open some two months, and de Coetlogon was still on friendly terms with Knappe, and he and his wife were engaged to dine with him that day. By the morrow that was practically ended. For the rape of the awnings had two results: one, which was the fault of de Coetlogon, not at all of Hand, who could not have foreseen it; the other which it was his duty to have seen and prevented. The first was this: the de Coetlogons found themselves left with their wounded exposed to the inclemencies of

the season; they must all be transported into the house and verandah; in the distress and pressure of this task, the dinner engagement was too long forgotten; and a note of excuse did not reach the German consulate before the table was set, and Knappe dressed to receive his visitors. The second consequence was inevitable. Captain Hand was scarce landed ere it became public (was "sofort bekannt," writes Knappe) that he and the consul were in opposition. All that had been gained by the demonstration at Laulii was thus immediately cast away; de Coetlogon's prestige was lessened; and it must be said plainly that Hand did less than nothing to restore it. Twice indeed he interfered, both times with success; and once, when his own person had been endangered, with vehemence; but during

all the strange doings I have to narrate, he remained in close intimacy with the German consulate, and on one occasion may be said to have acted as its marshal. After the worst is over, after Bismarck has told Knappe that "the protests of his English colleague were grounded," that his own conduct "has not been good," and that in any dispute which may arise he "will find himself in the wrong," Knappe can still plead in his defence that Captain Hand "has always maintained friendly intercourse with the German authorities." Singular epitaph for an English sailor. In this complicity on the part of Hand we may find the reason--and I had almost said, the excuse--of much that was excessive in the bearing of the unfortunate Knappe.

On the 11th December, Mataafa received twenty-eight thousand cartridges, brought into the country in salt-beef kegs by the British ship Richmond. This not only sharpened the animosity between whites;

following so closely on the German fizzle at Lauili, it raised a convulsion in the camp of Tamasese. On the 13th Brandeis addressed to Knappe his famous and fatal letter. I may not describe it as a letter of burning words, but it is plainly dictated by a burning heart. Tamasese and his chiefs, he announces, are now sick of the business, and ready to make peace with Mataafa. They began the war relying upon German help; they now see and say that "e faaalo Siamani i Peritania ma America, that Germany is subservient to England and the States." It is grimly given to be understood that the despatch is an ultimatum, and a last chance is being offered for the recreant ally to fulfil her pledge. To make it more plain, the document goes on with a kind of bilious irony: "The two German war-ships now in Samoa are here for the protection of German property alone; and when the Olga shall have arrived" [she arrived on the morrow] "the German war-ships will continue to do against the insurgents precisely as little as they have done heretofore." Plant flags, in fact.

Here was Knappe's opportunity, could he have stooped to seize it. I find it difficult to blame him that he could not. Far from being so inglorious as the treachery once contemplated by Becker, the acceptance of this ultimatum would have been still in the nature of a disgrace. Brandeis's letter, written by a German, was hard to swallow. It would have been hard to accept that solution which Knappe had so recently and so peremptorily refused to his brother consuls. And he was tempted, on the other hand, by recent changes. There was no Pelly to support de Coetlogon, who might now be disregarded. Mullan, Leary's successor, even if he were not precisely a Hand, was at least no Leary; and even if

Mullan should show fight, Knappe had now three ships and could defy or sink him without danger. Many small circumstances moved him in the same direction. The looting of German plantations continued; the whole force of Mataafa was to a large extent subsisted from the crops of Vailele; and armed men were to be seen openly plundering bananas, breadfruit, and cocoa-nuts under the walls of the plantation building. On the night of the 13th the consulate stable had been broken into and a horse removed. On the 16th there was a riot in Apia between half-castes and sailors from the new ship Olga, each side claiming that the other was the worse of drink, both (for a wager) justly. The multiplication of flags and little neutral territories had, besides, begun to irritate the Samoans. The protests of German settlers had been received uncivilly. On the 16th the Mataafas had again sought to land in Saluafata bay, with the manifest intention to attack the Tamaseses, or (in other words) "to trespass on German lands, covered, as your Excellency knows, with flags." I quote from his requisition to Fritze, December 17th. Upon all these considerations, he goes on, it is necessary to bring the fighting to an end. Both parties are to be disarmed and returned to their villages--Mataafa first. And in case of any attempt upon Apia, the roads thither are to be held by a strong landing-party. Mataafa was to be disarmed first, perhaps rightly enough in his character of the last insurgent. Then was to have come the turn of Tamasese; but it does not appear the disarming would have had the same import or have been gone about in the same way. Germany was bound to Tamasese. No honest man would dream of blaming Knappe because he sought to redeem his country's word. The path he chose was doubtless that of honour, so far as honour

was still left. But it proved to be the road to ruin.

Fritze, ranking German officer, is understood to have opposed the measure. His attitude earned him at the time unpopularity among his country-people on the spot, and should now redound to his credit. It is to be hoped he extended his opposition to some of the details. If it were possible to disarm Mataafa at all, it must be done rather by prestige than force. A party of blue-jackets landed in Samoan bush, and expected to hold against Samoans a multiplicity of forest paths, had their work cut out for them. And it was plain they should be landed in the light of day, with a discouraging openness, and even with parade. To sneak ashore by night was to increase the danger of resistance and to minimise the authority of the attack. The thing was a bluff, and it is impossible to bluff with stealth. Yet this was what was tried. A landing-party was to leave the Olga in Apia bay at two in the morning; the landing was to be at four on two parts of the foreshore of Vaialele. At eight they were to be joined by a second landing-party from the Eber. By nine the Olgas were to be on the crest of Letongo Mountain, and the Ebers to be moving round the promontory by the seaward paths, "with measures of precaution," disarming all whom they encountered. There was to be no firing unless fired upon. At the appointed hour (or perhaps later) on the morning of the 19th, this unpromising business was put in hand, and there moved off from the Olga two boats with some fifty blue-jackets between them, and a praam or punt containing ninety,--the boats and the whole expedition under the command of Captain-Lieutenant Jaeckel, the praam under Lieutenant Spengler. The men had each forty rounds, one

day's provisions, and their flasks filled.

In the meanwhile, Mataafa sympathisers about Apia were on the alert. Knappe had informed the consuls that the ships were to put to sea next day for the protection of German property; but the Tamaseses had been less discreet. "To-morrow at the hour of seven," they had cried to their adversaries, "you will know of a difficulty, and our guns shall be made good in broken bones." An accident had pointed expectation towards Apia. The wife of Le Mamea washed for the German ships--a perquisite, I suppose, for her husband's unwilling fidelity. She sent a man with linen on board the Adler, where he was surprised to see Le Mamea in person, and to be himself ordered instantly on shore. The news spread. If Mamea were brought down from Lotoanuu, others might have come at the same time.

Tamasese himself and half his army might perhaps lie concealed on board the German ships. And a watch was accordingly set and warriors collected along the line of the shore. One detachment lay in some rifle-pits by the mouth of the Fuisa. They were commanded by Seumanu; and with his party, probably as the most contiguous to Apia, was the war-correspondent, John Klein. Of English birth, but naturalised American, this gentleman had been for some time representing the New York World in a very effective manner, always in the front, living in the field with the Samoans, and in all vicissitudes of weather, toiling to and fro with his despatches. His wisdom was perhaps not equal to his energy. He made himself conspicuous, going about armed to the teeth in a boat under the stars and stripes; and on one occasion, when he supposed himself fired upon by the Tamaseses, had the petulance to empty his

revolver in the direction of their camp. By the light of the moon, which was then nearly down, this party observed the Olga's two boats and the praam, which they described as "almost sinking with men," the boats keeping well out towards the reef, the praam at the moment apparently heading for the shore. An extreme agitation seems to have reigned in the rifle-pits. What were the newcomers? What was their errand? Were they Germans or Tamaseses? Had they a mind to attack? The praam was hailed in Samoan and did not answer. It was proposed to fire upon her ere she drew near. And at last, whether on his own suggestion or that of Seumanu, Klein hailed her in English, and in terms of unnecessary melodrama. "Do not try to land here," he cried. "If you do, your blood will be upon your head." Spengler, who had never the least intention to touch at the Fuisa, put up the head of the praam to her true course and continued to move up the lagoon with an offing of some seventy or eighty yards. Along all the irregularities and obstructions of the beach, across the mouth of the Vaivasa, and through the startled village of Matafangatele, Seumanu, Klein, and seven or eight others raced to keep up, spreading the alarm and rousing reinforcements as they went. Presently a man on horse-back made his appearance on the opposite beach of Fangalii. Klein and the natives distinctly saw him signal with a lantern; which is the more strange, as the horseman (Captain Hufnagel, plantation manager of Vailele) had never a lantern to signal with. The praam kept in. Many men in white were seen to stand up, step overboard, and wade to shore. At the same time the eye of panic descried a breastwork of "foreign stone" (brick) upon the beach. Samoans are prepared to-day to swear to its existence, I believe conscientiously, although no such thing was ever made or ever intended in that place. The

hour is doubtful. "It was the hour when the streak of dawn is seen, the hour known in the warfare of heathen times as the hour of the night attack," says the Mataafa official account. A native whom I met on the field declared it was at cock-crow. Captain Hufnagel, on the other hand, is sure it was long before the day. It was dark at least, and the moon down. Darkness made the Samoans bold; uncertainty as to the composition and purpose of the landing-party made them desperate. Fire was opened on the Germans, one of whom was here killed. The Germans returned it, and effected a lodgment on the beach; and the skirmish died again to silence. It was at this time, if not earlier, that Klein returned to Apia.

Here, then, were Spengler and the ninety men of the praam, landed on the beach in no very enviable posture, the woods in front filled with unnumbered enemies, but for the time successful. Meanwhile, Jaeckel and the boats had gone outside the reef, and were to land on the other side of the Vailele promontory, at Sunga, by the buildings of the plantation. It was Hufnagel's part to go and meet them. His way led straight into the woods and through the midst of the Samoans, who had but now ceased firing. He went in the saddle and at a foot's pace, feeling speed and concealment to be equally helpless, and that if he were to fall at all, he had best fall with dignity. Not a shot was fired at him; no effort made to arrest him on his errand. As he went, he spoke and even jested with the Samoans, and they answered in good part. One fellow was leaping, yelling, and tossing his axe in the air, after the way of an excited islander. "Faimalosi! go it!" said Hufnagel, and the fellow laughed and redoubled his exertions. As soon as the boats entered the lagoon, fire was again opened from the woods. The fifty blue-jackets

jumped overboard, hove down the boats to be a shield, and dragged them towards the landing-place. In this way, their rations, and (what was more unfortunate) some of their miserable provision of forty rounds got wetted; but the men came to shore and garrisoned the plantation house without a casualty. Meanwhile the sound of the firing from Sunga immediately renewed the hostilities at Fangalii. The civilians on shore decided that Spengler must be at once guided to the house, and Haideln, the surveyor, accepted the dangerous errand. Like Hufnagel, he was suffered to pass without question through the midst of these platonic enemies. He found Spengler some way inland on a knoll, disastrously engaged, the woods around him filled with Samoans, who were continuously reinforced. In three successive charges, cheering as they ran, the blue-jackets burst through their scattered opponents, and made good their junction with Jaeckel. Four men only remained upon the field, the other wounded being helped by their comrades or dragging themselves painfully along.

The force was now concentrated in the house and its immediate patch of garden. Their rear, to the seaward, was unmolested; but on three sides they were beleaguered. On the left, the Samoans occupied and fired from some of the plantation offices. In front, a long rising crest of land in the horse-pasture commanded the house, and was lined with the assailants. And on the right, the hedge of the same paddock afforded them a dangerous cover. It was in this place that a Samoan sharpshooter was knocked over by Jaeckel with his own hand. The fire was maintained by the Samoans in the usual wasteful style. The roof was made a sieve; the balls passed clean through the house; Lieutenant Sieger, as he lay, already dying, on

Hufnagel's bed, was despatched with a fresh wound. The Samoans showed themselves extremely enterprising: pushed their lines forward, ventured beyond cover, and continually threatened to envelop the garden. Thrice, at least, it was necessary to repel them by a sally. The men were brought into the house from the rear, the front doors were thrown suddenly open, and the gallant blue-jackets issued cheering: necessary, successful, but extremely costly sorties. Neither could these be pushed far. The foes were undaunted; so soon as the sailors advanced at all deep in the horse-pasture, the Samoans began to close in upon both flanks; and the sally had to be recalled. To add to the dangers of the German situation, ammunition began to run low; and the cartridge-boxes of the wounded and the dead had been already brought into use before, at about eight o'clock, the Eber steamed into the bay. Her commander, Wallis, threw some shells into Letongo, one of which killed five men about their cooking-pot. The Samoans began immediately to withdraw; their movements were hastened by a sortie, and the remains of the landing-party brought on board. This was an unfortunate movement; it gave an irremediable air of defeat to what might have been else claimed for a moderate success. The blue-jackets numbered a hundred and forty all told; they were engaged separately and fought under the worst conditions, in the dark and among woods; their position in the house was scarce tenable; they lost in killed and wounded fifty-six,--forty per cent.; and their spirit to the end was above question. Whether we think of the poor sailor lads, always so pleasantly behaved in times of peace, or whether we call to mind the behaviour of the two civilians, Haideln and Hufnagel, we can only regret that brave men should stand to be exposed upon so poor a quarrel, or lives cast away upon an enterprise so hopeless.

News of the affair reached Apia early, and Moors, always curious of these spectacles of war, was immediately in the saddle. Near Matafangatele he met a Manono chief, whom he asked if there were any German dead. "I think there are about thirty of them knocked over," said he. "Have you taken their heads?" asked Moors. "Yes," said the chief. "Some foolish people did it, but I have stopped them. We ought not to cut off their heads when they do not cut off ours." He was asked what had been done with the heads. "Two have gone to Mataafa," he replied, "and one is buried right under where your horse is standing, in a basket wrapped in tapa." This was afterwards dug up, and I am told on native authority that, besides the three heads, two ears were taken. Moors next asked the Manono man how he came to be going away. "The man-of-war is throwing shells," said he. "When they stopped firing out of the house, we stopped firing also; so it was as well to scatter when the shells began. We could have killed all the white men. I wish they had been Tamaseses." This is an ex parte statement, and I give it for such; but the course of the affair, and in particular the adventures of Haideln and Hufnagel, testify to a surprising lack of animosity against the Germans. About the same time or but a little earlier than this conversation, the same spirit was being displayed. Hufnagel, with a party of labour, had gone out to bring in the German dead, when he was surprised to be suddenly fired on from the wood. The boys he had with him were not negritos, but Polynesians from the Gilbert Islands; and he suddenly remembered that these might be easily mistaken for a detachment of Tamaseses. Bidding his boys conceal themselves in a thicket, this brave man walked into the open. So soon as he was recognised, the firing ceased, and the labourers

followed him in safety. This is chivalrous war; but there was a side to it less chivalrous. As Moors drew nearer to Vailele, he began to meet Samoans with hats, guns, and even shirts, taken from the German sailors. With one of these who had a hat and a gun he stopped and spoke. The hat was handed up for him to look at; it had the late owner's name on the inside. "Where is he?" asked Moors. "He is dead; I cut his head off." "You shot him?" "No, somebody else shot him in the hip. When I came, he put up his hands, and cried: 'Don't kill me; I am a Malietoa man.' I did not believe him, and I cut his head off..... Have you any ammunition to fit that gun?" "I do not know." "What has become of the cartridge-belt?" "Another fellow grabbed that and the cartridges, and he won't give them to me." A dreadful and silly picture of barbaric war. The words of the German sailor must be regarded as imaginary: how was the poor lad to speak native, or the Samoan to understand German? When Moors came as far as Sunga, the Eber was yet in the bay, the smoke of battle still lingered among the trees, which were themselves marked with a thousand bullet-wounds. But the affair was over, the combatants, German and Samoan, were all gone, and only a couple of negrito labour boys lurked on the scene. The village of Letongo beyond was equally silent; part of it was wrecked by the shells of the Eber, and still smoked; the inhabitants had fled. On the beach were the native boats, perhaps five thousand dollars' worth, deserted by the Mataafas and overlooked by the Germans, in their common hurry to escape. Still Moors held eastward by the sea-paths. It was his hope to get a view from the other side of the promontory, towards Laulii. In the way he found a house hidden in the

wood and among rocks, where an aged and sick woman was being tended by her elderly daughter. Last lingerers in that deserted piece of coast, they seemed indifferent to the events which had thus left them solitary, and, as the daughter said, did not know where Mataafa was, nor where Tamasese.

It is the official Samoan pretension that the Germans fired first at Fangalii. In view of all German and some native testimony, the text of Fritze's orders, and the probabilities of the case, no honest mind will believe it for a moment. Certainly the Samoans fired first. As certainly they were betrayed into the engagement in the agitation of the moment, and it was not till afterwards that they understood what they had done. Then, indeed, all Samoa drew a breath of wonder and delight. The invincible had fallen; the men of the vaunted war-ships had been met in the field by the braves of Mataafa: a superstition was no more. Conceive this people steadily as schoolboys; and conceive the elation in any school if the head boy should suddenly arise and drive the rector from the schoolhouse. I have received one instance of the feeling instantly aroused. There lay at the time in the consular hospital an old chief who was a pet of the colonel's. News reached him of the glorious event; he was sick, he thought himself sinking, sent for the colonel, and gave him his gun. "Don't let the Germans get it," said the old gentleman, and having received a promise, was at peace.