CHAPTER X--THE HURRICANE

March 1889

The so-called harbour of Apia is formed in part by a recess of the coast-line at Matautu, in part by the slim peninsula of Mulinuu, and in part by the fresh waters of the Mulivai and Vaisingano. The barrier reef--that singular breakwater that makes so much of the circuit of Pacific islands--is carried far to sea at Matautu and Mulinuu; inside of these two horns it runs sharply landward, and between them it is burst or dissolved by the fresh water. The shape of the enclosed anchorage may be compared to a high-shouldered jar or bottle with a funnel mouth. Its sides are almost everywhere of coral; for the reef not only bounds it to seaward and forms the neck and mouth, but skirting about the beach, it forms the bottom also. As in the bottle of commerce, the bottom is re-entrant, and the shore-reef runs prominently forth into the basin and makes a dangerous cape opposite the fairway of the entrance. Danger is, therefore, on all hands. The entrance gapes three cables wide at the narrowest, and the formidable surf of the Pacific thunders both outside and in. There are days when speech is difficult in the chambers of shore-side houses; days when no boat can land, and when men are broken by stroke of sea against the wharves. As I write these words, three miles in the mountains, and with the land-breeze still blowing from the island summit, the sound of that vexed harbour hums in my ears. Such a creek in my native coast of Scotland would scarce be dignified with the mark of an

anchor in the chart; but in the favoured climate of Samoa, and with the mechanical regularity of the winds in the Pacific, it forms, for ten or eleven months out of the twelve, a safe if hardly a commodious port. The ill-found island traders ride there with their insufficient moorings the year through, and discharge, and are loaded, without apprehension. Of danger, when it comes, the glass gives timely warning; and that any modern war-ship, furnished with the power of steam, should have been lost in Apia, belongs not so much to nautical as to political history.

The weather throughout all that winter (the turbulent summer of the islands) was unusually fine, and the circumstance had been commented on as providential, when so many Samoans were lying on their weapons in the bush. By February it began to break in occasional gales. On February 10th a German brigantine was driven ashore. On the 14th the same misfortune befell an American brigantine and a schooner. On both these days, and again on the 7th March, the men-of-war must steam to their anchors. And it was in this last month, the most dangerous of the twelve, that man's animosities crowded that indentation of the reef with costly, populous, and vulnerable ships.

I have shown, perhaps already at too great a length, how violently passion ran upon the spot; how high this series of blunders and mishaps had heated the resentment of the Germans against all other nationalities and of all other nationalities against the Germans. But there was one country beyond the borders of Samoa where the question had aroused a scarce less angry sentiment. The breach of the Washington Congress, the evidence of Sewall before a sub-committee on foreign relations, the

proposal to try Klein before a military court, and the rags of Captain Hamilton's flag, had combined to stir the people of the States to an unwonted fervour. Germany was for the time the abhorred of nations. Germans in America publicly disowned the country of their birth. In Honolulu, so near the scene of action, German and American young men fell to blows in the street. In the same city, from no traceable source, and upon no possible authority, there arose a rumour of tragic news to arrive by the next occasion, that the Nipsic had opened fire on the Adler, and the Adler had sunk her on the first reply. Punctually on the day appointed, the news came; and the two nations, instead of being plunged into war, could only mingle tears over the loss of heroes.

By the second week in March three American ships were in Apia bay,--the Nipsic, the Vandalia, and the Trenton, carrying the flag of Rear-Admiral Kimberley; three German,--the Adler, the Eber, and the Olga; and one British,--the Calliope, Captain Kane. Six merchant-men, ranging from twenty-five up to five hundred tons, and a number of small craft, further encumbered the anchorage. Its capacity is estimated by Captain Kane at four large ships; and the latest arrivals, the Vandalia and Trenton, were in consequence excluded, and lay without in the passage. Of the seven war-ships, the seaworthiness of two was questionable: the Trenton's, from an original defect in her construction, often reported, never remedied--her hawse-pipes leading in on the berth-deck; the Eber's, from an injury to her screw in the blow of February 14th. In this overcrowding of ships in an open entry of the reef, even the eye of the landsman could spy danger; and Captain-Lieutenant Wallis of the Eber openly blamed and lamented, not

many hours before the catastrophe, their helpless posture. Temper once more triumphed. The army of Mataafa still hung imminent behind the town; the German quarter was still daily garrisoned with fifty sailors from the squadron; what was yet more influential, Germany and the States, at least in Apia bay, were on the brink of war, viewed each other with looks of hatred, and scarce observed the letter of civility. On the day of the admiral's arrival, Knappe failed to call on him, and on the morrow called on him while he was on shore. The slight was remarked and resented, and the two squadrons clung more obstinately to their dangerous station.

On the 15th the barometer fell to 29.11 in. by 2 P.M. This was the moment when every sail in port should have escaped. Kimberley, who flew the only broad pennant, should certainly have led the way: he clung, instead, to his moorings, and the Germans doggedly followed his example: semi-belligerents, daring each other and the violence of heaven. Kane, less immediately involved, was led in error by the report of residents and a fallacious rise in the glass; he stayed with the others, a misjudgment that was like to cost him dear. All were moored, as is the custom in Apia, with two anchors practically east and west, clear hawse to the north, and a kedge astern. Topmasts were struck, and the ships made snug. The night closed black, with sheets of rain. By midnight it blew a gale; and by the morning watch, a tempest. Through what remained of darkness, the captains impatiently expected day, doubtful if they were dragging, steaming gingerly to their moorings, and afraid to steam too much.

Day came about six, and presented to those on shore a seizing and

terrific spectacle. In the pressure of the squalls the bay was obscured as if by midnight, but between them a great part of it was clearly if darkly visible amid driving mist and rain. The wind blew into the harbour mouth. Naval authorities describe it as of hurricane force. It had, however, few or none of the effects on shore suggested by that ominous word, and was successfully withstood by trees and buildings. The agitation of the sea, on the other hand, surpassed experience and description. Seas that might have awakened surprise and terror in the midst of the Atlantic ranged bodily and (it seemed to observers) almost without diminution into the belly of that flask-shaped harbour; and the war-ships were alternately buried from view in the trough, or seen standing on end against the breast of billows.

The Trenton at daylight still maintained her position in the neck of the bottle. But five of the remaining ships tossed, already close to the bottom, in a perilous and helpless crowd; threatening ruin to each other as they tossed; threatened with a common and imminent destruction on the reefs. Three had been already in collision: the Olga was injured in the quarter, the Adler had lost her bowsprit; the Nipsic had lost her smoke-stack, and was making steam with difficulty, maintaining her fire with barrels of pork, and the smoke and sparks pouring along the level of the deck. For the seventh war-ship the day had come too late; the Eber had finished her last cruise; she was to be seen no more save by the eyes of divers. A coral reef is not only an instrument of destruction, but a place of sepulchre; the submarine cliff is profoundly undercut, and presents the mouth of a huge antre in which the bodies of men and the hulls of ships are alike hurled down and buried. The Eber had dragged

anchors with the rest; her injured screw disabled her from steaming vigorously up; and a little before day she had struck the front of the coral, come off, struck again, and gone down stern foremost, oversetting as she went, into the gaping hollow of the reef. Of her whole complement of nearly eighty, four souls were cast alive on the beach; and the bodies of the remainder were, by the voluminous outpouring of the flooded streams, scoured at last from the harbour, and strewed naked on the seaboard of the island.

Five ships were immediately menaced with the same destruction. The Eber vanished--the four poor survivors on shore--read a dreadful commentary on their danger; which was swelled out of all proportion by the violence of their own movements as they leaped and fell among the billows. By seven the Nipsic was so fortunate as to avoid the reef and beach upon a space of sand; where she was immediately deserted by her crew, with the assistance of Samoans, not without loss of life. By about eight it was the turn of the Adler. She was close down upon the reef; doomed herself, it might yet be possible to save a portion of her crew; and for this end Captain Fritze placed his reliance on the very hugeness of the seas that threatened him. The moment was watched for with the anxiety of despair, but the coolness of disciplined courage. As she rose on the fatal wave, her moorings were simultaneously slipped; she broached to in rising; and the sea heaved her bodily upward and cast her down with a concussion on the summit of the reef, where she lay on her beam-ends, her back broken, buried in breaching seas, but safe. Conceive a table: the Eber in the darkness had been smashed against the rim and flung below; the Adler, cast free in the nick of opportunity, had been thrown

upon the top. Many were injured in the concussion; many tossed into the water; twenty perished. The survivors crept again on board their ship, as it now lay, and as it still remains, keel to the waves, a monument of the sea's potency. In still weather, under a cloudless sky, in those seasons when that ill-named ocean, the Pacific, suffers its vexed shores to rest, she lies high and dry, the spray scarce touching her--the hugest structure of man's hands within a circuit of a thousand miles--tossed up there like a schoolboy's cap upon a shelf; broken like an egg; a thing to dream of.

The unfriendly consuls of Germany and Britain were both that morning in Matautu, and both displayed their nobler qualities. De Coetlogon, the grim old soldier, collected his family and kneeled with them in an agony of prayer for those exposed. Knappe, more fortunate in that he was called to a more active service, must, upon the striking of the Adler, pass to his own consulate. From this he was divided by the Vaisingano, now a raging torrent, impetuously charioting the trunks of trees. A kelpie might have dreaded to attempt the passage; we may conceive this brave but unfortunate and now ruined man to have found a natural joy in the exposure of his life; and twice that day, coming and going, he braved the fury of the river. It was possible, in spite of the darkness of the hurricane and the continual breaching of the seas, to remark human movements on the Adler; and by the help of Samoans, always nobly forward in the work, whether for friend or enemy, Knappe sought long to get a line conveyed from shore, and was for long defeated. The shore guard of fifty men stood to their arms the while upon the beach, useless themselves, and a great deterrent of Samoan usefulness. It was perhaps

impossible that this mistake should be avoided. What more natural, to the mind of a European, than that the Mataafas should fall upon the Germans in this hour of their disadvantage? But they had no other thought than to assist; and those who now rallied beside Knappe braved (as they supposed) in doing so a double danger, from the fury of the sea and the weapons of their enemies. About nine, a quarter-master swam ashore, and reported all the officers and some sixty men alive but in pitiable case; some with broken limbs, others insensible from the drenching of the breakers. Later in the forenoon, certain valorous Samoans succeeded in reaching the wreck and returning with a line; but it was speedily broken; and all subsequent attempts proved unavailing, the strongest adventurers being cast back again by the bursting seas. Thenceforth, all through that day and night, the deafened survivors must continue to endure their martyrdom; and one officer died, it was supposed from agony of mind, in his inverted cabin.

Three ships still hung on the next margin of destruction, steaming desperately to their moorings, dashed helplessly together. The Calliope was the nearest in; she had the Vandalia close on her port side and a little ahead, the Olga close a-starboard, the reef under her heel; and steaming and veering on her cables, the unhappy ship fenced with her three dangers. About a quarter to nine she carried away the Vandalia's quarter gallery with her jib-boom; a moment later, the Olga had near rammed her from the other side. By nine the Vandalia dropped down on her too fast to be avoided, and clapped her stern under the bowsprit of the English ship, the fastenings of which were burst asunder as she rose. To avoid cutting her down, it was necessary for the

Calliope to stop and even to reverse her engines; and her rudder was at the moment--or it seemed so to the eyes of those on board--within ten feet of the reef. "Between the Vandalia and the reef" (writes Kane, in his excellent report) "it was destruction." To repeat Fritze's manoeuvre with the Adler was impossible; the Calliope was too heavy. The one possibility of escape was to go out. If the engines should stand, if they should have power to drive the ship against wind and sea, if she should answer the helm, if the wheel, rudder, and gear should hold out, and if they were favoured with a clear blink of weather in which to see and avoid the outer reef--there, and there only, were safety. Upon this catalogue of "ifs" Kane staked his all. He signalled to the engineer for every pound of steam--and at that moment (I am told) much of the machinery was already red-hot. The ship was sheered well to starboard of the Vandalia, the last remaining cable slipped. For a time--and there was no onlooker so cold-blooded as to offer a guess at its duration--the Calliope lay stationary; then gradually drew ahead. The highest speed claimed for her that day is of one sea-mile an hour. The question of times and seasons, throughout all this roaring business, is obscured by a dozen contradictions; I have but chosen what appeared to be the most consistent; but if I am to pay any attention to the time named by Admiral Kimberley, the Calliope, in this first stage of her escape, must have taken more than two hours to cover less than four cables. As she thus crept seaward, she buried bow and stem alternately under the billows.

In the fairway of the entrance the flagship Trenton still held on. Her rudder was broken, her wheel carried away; within she was flooded with water from the peccant hawse-pipes; she had just made the signal "fires

extinguished," and lay helpless, awaiting the inevitable end. Between this melancholy hulk and the external reef Kane must find a path. Steering within fifty yards of the reef (for which she was actually headed) and her foreyard passing on the other hand over the Trenton's quarter as she rolled, the Calliope sheered between the rival dangers, came to the wind triumphantly, and was once more pointed for the sea and safety. Not often in naval history was there a moment of more sickening peril, and it was dignified by one of those incidents that reconcile the chronicler with his otherwise abhorrent task. From the doomed flagship the Americans hailed the success of the English with a cheer. It was led by the old admiral in person, rang out over the storm with holiday vigour, and was answered by the Calliopes with an emotion easily conceived. This ship of their kinsfolk was almost the last external object seen from the Calliope for hours; immediately after, the mists closed about her till the morrow. She was safe at sea again--una de multis--with a damaged foreyard, and a loss of all the ornamental work about her bow and stern, three anchors, one kedge-anchor, fourteen lengths of chain, four boats, the jib-boom, bobstay, and bands and fastenings of the bowsprit.

Shortly after Kane had slipped his cable, Captain Schoonmaker, despairing of the Vandalia, succeeded in passing astern of the Olga, in the hope to beach his ship beside the Nipsic. At a quarter to eleven her stern took the reef, her hand swung to starboard, and she began to fill and settle. Many lives of brave men were sacrificed in the attempt to get a line ashore; the captain, exhausted by his exertions, was swept from deck by a sea; and the rail being soon awash, the survivors took refuge in the

tops.

Out of thirteen that had lain there the day before, there were now but two ships afloat in Apia harbour, and one of these was doomed to be the bane of the other. About 3 P.M. the Trenton parted one cable, and shortly after a second. It was sought to keep her head to wind with storm-sails and by the ingenious expedient of filling the rigging with seamen; but in the fury of the gale, and in that sea, perturbed alike by the gigantic billows and the volleying discharges of the rivers, the rudderless ship drove down stern foremost into the inner basin; ranging, plunging, and striking like a frightened horse; drifting on destruction for herself and bringing it to others. Twice the Olga (still well under command) avoided her impact by the skilful use of helm and engines. But about four the vigilance of the Germans was deceived, and the ships collided; the Olga cutting into the Trenton's quarters, first from one side, then from the other, and losing at the same time two of her own cables. Captain von Ehrhardt instantly slipped the remainder of his moorings, and setting fore and aft canvas, and going full steam ahead, succeeded in beaching his ship in Matautu; whither Knappe, recalled by this new disaster, had returned. The berth was perhaps the best in the harbour, and von Ehrhardt signalled that ship and crew were in security.

The Trenton, guided apparently by an under-tow or eddy from the discharge of the Vaisingano, followed in the course of the Nipsic and Vandalia, and skirted south-eastward along the front of the shore reef, which her keel was at times almost touching. Hitherto she had brought disaster to her foes; now she was bringing it to friends. She had

already proved the ruin of the Olga, the one ship that had rid out the hurricane in safety; now she beheld across her course the submerged Vandalia, the tops filled with exhausted seamen. Happily the approach of the Trenton was gradual, and the time employed to advantage. Rockets and lines were thrown into the tops of the friendly wreck; the approach of danger was transformed into a means of safety; and before the ships struck, the men from the Vandalia's main and mizzen masts, which went immediately by the board in the collision, were already mustered on the Trenton's decks. Those from the foremast were next rescued; and the flagship settled gradually into a position alongside her neighbour, against which she beat all night with violence. Out of the crew of the Vandalia forty-three had perished; of the four hundred and fifty on board the Trenton, only one.

The night of the 16th was still notable for a howling tempest and extraordinary floods of rain. It was feared the wreck could scarce continue to endure the breaching of the seas; among the Germans, the fate of those on board the Adler awoke keen anxiety; and Knappe, on the beach of Matautu, and the other officers of his consulate on that of Matafele, watched all night. The morning of the 17th displayed a scene of devastation rarely equalled: the Adler high and dry, the Olga and Nipsic beached, the Trenton partly piled on the Vandalia and herself sunk to the gun-deck; no sail afloat; and the beach heaped high with the debris of ships and the wreck of mountain forests. Already, before the day, Seumanu, the chief of Apia, had gallantly ventured forth by boat through the subsiding fury of the seas, and had succeeded in communicating with the admiral; already, or as soon after as the dawn

permitted, rescue lines were rigged, and the survivors were with difficulty and danger begun to be brought to shore. And soon the cheerful spirit of the admiral added a new feature to the scene. Surrounded as he was by the crews of two wrecked ships, he paraded the band of the Trenton, and the bay was suddenly enlivened with the strains of "Hail Columbia."

During a great part of the day the work of rescue was continued, with many instances of courage and devotion; and for a long time succeeding, the almost inexhaustible harvest of the beach was to be reaped. In the first employment, the Samoans earned the gratitude of friend and foe; in the second, they surprised all by an unexpected virtue, that of honesty. The greatness of the disaster, and the magnitude of the treasure now rolling at their feet, may perhaps have roused in their bosoms an emotion too serious for the rule of greed, or perhaps that greed was for the moment satiated. Sails that twelve strong Samoans could scarce drag from the water, great guns (one of which was rolled by the sea on the body of a man, the only native slain in all the hurricane), an infinite wealth of rope and wood, of tools and weapons, tossed upon the beach. Yet I have never heard that much was stolen; and beyond question, much was very honestly returned. On both accounts, for the saving of life and the restoration of property, the government of the United States showed themselves generous in reward. A fine boat was fitly presented to Seumanu; and rings, watches, and money were lavished on all who had assisted. The Germans also gave money at the rate (as I receive the tale) of three dollars a head for every German saved. The obligation was in this instance incommensurably deep, those with whom they were at war

had saved the German blue-jackets at the venture of their lives; Knappe was, besides, far from ungenerous; and I can only explain the niggard figure by supposing it was paid from his own pocket. In one case, at least, it was refused. "I have saved three Germans," said the rescuer; "I will make you a present of the three."

The crews of the American and German squadrons were now cast, still in a bellicose temper, together on the beach. The discipline of the Americans was notoriously loose; the crew of the Nipsic had earned a character for lawlessness in other ports; and recourse was had to stringent and indeed extraordinary measures. The town was divided in two camps, to which the different nationalities were confined. Kimberley had his quarter sentinelled and patrolled. Any seaman disregarding a challenge was to be shot dead; any tavern-keeper who sold spirits to an American sailor was to have his tavern broken and his stock destroyed. Many of the publicans were German; and Knappe, having narrated these rigorous but
necessary dispositions, wonders (grinning to himself over his despatch) how far these Americans will go in their assumption of jurisdiction over Germans. Such as they were, the measures were successful. The incongruous mass of castaways was kept in peace, and at last shipped in peace out of the islands.

Kane returned to Apia on the 19th, to find the Calliope the sole survivor of thirteen sail. He thanked his men, and in particular the engineers, in a speech of unusual feeling and beauty, of which one who was present remarked to another, as they left the ship, "This has been a

means of grace." Nor did he forget to thank and compliment the admiral; and I cannot deny myself the pleasure of transcribing from Kimberley's reply some generous and engaging words. "My dear captain," he wrote, "your kind note received. You went out splendidly, and we all felt from our hearts for you, and our cheers came with sincerity and admiration for the able manner in which you handled your ship. We could not have been gladder if it had been one of our ships, for in a time like that I can truly say with old Admiral Josiah Latnall, 'that blood is thicker than water.'" One more trait will serve to build up the image of this typical sea-officer. A tiny schooner, the Equator, Captain Edwin Reid, dear to myself from the memories of a six months' cruise, lived out upon the high seas the fury of that tempest which had piled with wrecks the harbour of Apia, found a refuge in Pango-Pango, and arrived at last in the desolated port with a welcome and lucrative cargo of pigs. The admiral was glad to have the pigs; but what most delighted the man's noble and childish soul, was to see once more afloat the colours of his country.

Thus, in what seemed the very article of war, and within the duration of a single day, the sword-arm of each of the two angry Powers was broken; their formidable ships reduced to junk; their disciplined hundreds to a horde of castaways, fed with difficulty, and the fear of whose misconduct marred the sleep of their commanders. Both paused aghast; both had time to recognise that not the whole Samoan Archipelago was worth the loss in men and costly ships already suffered. The so-called hurricane of March 16th made thus a marking epoch in world-history; directly, and at once, it brought about the congress and treaty of Berlin; indirectly, and by a process still continuing, it founded the modern navy of the States.

Coming years and other historians will declare the influence of that.

CHAPTER XI--LAUPEPA AND MATAAFA

1889-1892

With the hurricane, the broken war-ships, and the stranded sailors, I am at an end of violence, and my tale flows henceforth among carpet incidents. The blue-jackets on Apia beach were still jealously held apart by sentries, when the powers at home were already seeking a peaceable solution. It was agreed, so far as might be, to obliterate two years of blundering; and to resume in 1889, and at Berlin, those negotiations which had been so unhappily broken off at Washington in 1887. The example thus offered by Germany is rare in history; in the career of Prince Bismarck, so far as I am instructed, it should stand unique. On a review of these two years of blundering, bullying, and failure in a little isle of the Pacific, he seems magnanimously to have owned his policy was in the wrong. He left Fangalii unexpiated; suffered that house of cards, the Tamasese government, to fall by its own frailty and without remark or lamentation; left the Samoan question openly and fairly to the conference: and in the meanwhile, to allay the local heats engendered by Becker and Knappe, he sent to Apia that invaluable public servant, Dr. Stuebel. I should be a dishonest man if I did not bear testimony to the loyalty since shown by Germans in Samoa. Their position was painful; they had talked big in the old days, now they had to sing small. Even Stuebel returned to the islands under the prejudice of an unfortunate record. To the minds of the Samoans his name represented the