PART III: THE GILBERTS

CHAPTER I--BUTARITARI

At Honolulu we had said farewell to the Casco and to Captain Otis, and our next adventure was made in changed conditions. Passage was taken for myself, my wife, Mr. Osbourne, and my China boy, Ah Fu, on a pigmy trading schooner, the Equator, Captain Dennis Reid; and on a certain bright June day in 1889, adorned in the Hawaiian fashion with the garlands of departure, we drew out of port and bore with a fair wind for Micronesia.

The whole extent of the South Seas is a desert of ships; more especially that part where we were now to sail. No post runs in these islands; communication is by accident; where you may have designed to go is one thing, where you shall be able to arrive another. It was my hope, for instance, to have reached the Carolines, and returned to the light of day by way of Manila and the China ports; and it was in Samoa that we were destined to re-appear and be once more refreshed with the sight of mountains. Since the sunset faded from the peaks of Oahu six months had intervened, and we had seen no spot of earth so high as an ordinary

cottage. Our path had been still on the flat sea, our dwellings upon unerected coral, our diet from the pickle-tub or out of tins; I had learned to welcome shark's flesh for a variety; and a mountain, an onion, an Irish potato or a beef-steak, had been long lost to sense and dear to aspiration.

The two chief places of our stay, Butaritari and Apemama, lie near the line; the latter within thirty miles. Both enjoy a superb ocean climate, days of blinding sun and bracing wind, nights of a heavenly brightness. Both are somewhat wider than Fakarava, measuring perhaps (at the widest) a quarter of a mile from beach to beach. In both, a coarse kind of taro thrives; its culture is a chief business of the natives, and the consequent mounds and ditches make miniature scenery and amuse the eye. In all else they show the customary features of an atoll: the low horizon, the expanse of the lagoon, the sedge-like rim of palm-tops, the sameness and smallness of the land, the hugely superior size and interest of sea and sky. Life on such islands is in many points like life on shipboard. The atoll, like the ship, is soon taken for granted; and the islanders, like the ship's crew, become soon the centre of attention. The isles are populous, independent, seats of kinglets, recently civilised, little visited. In the last decade many changes have crept in; women no longer go unclothed till marriage; the widow no longer sleeps at night and goes abroad by day with the skull of her dead husband; and, fire-arms being introduced, the spear and the shark-tooth sword are sold for curiosities. Ten years ago all these things and practices were to

be seen in use; yet ten years more, and the old society will have entirely vanished. We came in a happy moment to see its institutions still erect and (in Apemama) scarce decayed.

Populous and independent--warrens of men, ruled over with some rustic pomp--such was the first and still the recurring impression of these tiny lands. As we stood across the lagoon for the town of Butaritari, a stretch of the low shore was seen to be crowded with the brown roofs of houses; those of the palace and king's summer parlour (which are of corrugated iron) glittered near one end conspicuously bright; the royal colours flew hard by on a tall flagstaff; in front, on an artificial islet, the gaol played the part of a martello. Even upon this first and distant view, the place had scarce the air of what it truly was, a village; rather of that which it was also, a petty metropolis, a city rustic and yet royal.

The lagoon is shoal. The tide being out, we waded for some quarter of a mile in tepid shallows, and stepped ashore at last into a flagrant stagnancy of sun and heat. The lee side of a line island after noon is indeed a breathless place; on the ocean beach the trade will be still blowing, boisterous and cool; out in the lagoon it will be blowing also, speeding the canoes; but the screen of bush completely intercepts it from the shore, and sleep and silence and companies of mosquitoes brood upon the towns.

We may thus be said to have taken Butaritari by surprise. A few

inhabitants were still abroad in the north end, at which we landed. As we advanced, we were soon done with encounter, and seemed to explore a city of the dead. Only, between the posts of open houses, we could see the townsfolk stretched in the siesta, sometimes a family together veiled in a mosquito-net, sometimes a single sleeper on a platform like a corpse on a bier.

The houses were of all dimensions, from those of toys to those of churches. Some might hold a battalion, some were so minute they could scarce receive a pair of lovers; only in the playroom, when the toys are mingled, do we meet such incongruities of scale. Many were open sheds; some took the form of roofed stages; others were walled and the walls pierced with little windows. A few were perched on piles in the lagoon; the rest stood at random on a green, through which the roadway made a ribbon of sand, or along the embankments of a sheet of water like a shallow dock. One and all were the creatures of a single tree; palm-tree wood and palm-tree leaf their materials; no nail had been driven, no hammer sounded, in their building, and they were held together by lashings of palm-tree sinnet.

In the midst of the thoroughfare, the church stands like an island, a lofty and dim house with rows of windows; a rich tracery of framing sustains the roof; and through the door at either end the street shows in a vista. The proportions of the place, in such surroundings, and built of such materials, appeared august; and we threaded the nave with a sentiment befitting visitors in a

cathedral. Benches run along either side. In the midst, on a crazy dais, two chairs stand ready for the king and queen when they shall choose to worship; over their heads a hoop, apparently from a hogshead, depends by a strip of red cotton; and the hoop (which hangs askew) is dressed with streamers of the same material, red and white.

This was our first advertisement of the royal dignity, and presently we stood before its seat and centre. The palace is built of imported wood upon a European plan; the roof of corrugated iron, the yard enclosed with walls, the gate surmounted by a sort of lych-house. It cannot be called spacious; a labourer in the States is sometimes more commodiously lodged; but when we had the chance to see it within, we found it was enriched (beyond all island expectation) with coloured advertisements and cuts from the illustrated papers. Even before the gate some of the treasures of the crown stand public: a bell of a good magnitude, two pieces of cannon, and a single shell. The bell cannot be rung nor the guns fired; they are curiosities, proofs of wealth, a part of the parade of the royalty, and stand to be admired like statues in a square. A straight gut of water like a canal runs almost to the palace door; the containing quay-walls excellently built of coral; over against the mouth, by what seems an effect of landscape art, the martello-like islet of the gaol breaks the lagoon. Vassal chiefs with tribute, neighbour monarchs come a-roving, might here sail in, view with surprise these extensive public works, and be awed by these mouths of silent cannon. It was impossible to see the place

and not to fancy it designed for pageantry. But the elaborate theatre then stood empty; the royal house deserted, its doors and windows gaping; the whole quarter of the town immersed in silence. On the opposite bank of the canal, on a roofed stage, an ancient gentleman slept publicly, sole visible inhabitant; and beyond on the lagoon a canoe spread a striped lateen, the sole thing moving.

The canal is formed on the south by a pier or causeway with a parapet. At the far end the parapet stops, and the quay expands into an oblong peninsula in the lagoon, the breathing-place and summer parlour of the king. The midst is occupied by an open house or permanent marquee--called here a maniapa, or, as the word is now pronounced, a maniap'--at the lowest estimation forty feet by sixty. The iron roof, lofty but exceedingly low-browed, so that a woman must stoop to enter, is supported externally on pillars of coral, within by a frame of wood. The floor is of broken coral, divided in aisles by the uprights of the frame; the house far enough from shore to catch the breeze, which enters freely and disperses the mosquitoes; and under the low eaves the sun is seen to glitter and the waves to dance on the lagoon.

It was now some while since we had met any but slumberers; and when we had wandered down the pier and stumbled at last into this bright shed, we were surprised to find it occupied by a society of wakeful people, some twenty souls in all, the court and guardsmen of Butaritari. The court ladies were busy making mats; the guardsmen yawned and sprawled. Half a dozen rifles lay on a rock and a

cutlass was leaned against a pillar: the armoury of these drowsy musketeers. At the far end, a little closed house of wood displayed some tinsel curtains, and proved, upon examination, to be a privy on the European model. In front of this, upon some mats, lolled Tebureimoa, the king; behind him, on the panels of the house, two crossed rifles represented fasces. He wore pyjamas which sorrowfully misbecame his bulk; his nose was hooked and cruel, his body overcome with sodden corpulence, his eye timorous and dull: he seemed at once oppressed with drowsiness and held awake by apprehension: a pepper rajah muddled with opium, and listening for the march of a Dutch army, looks perhaps not otherwise. We were to grow better acquainted, and first and last I had the same impression; he seemed always drowsy, yet always to hearken and start; and, whether from remorse or fear, there is no doubt he seeks a refuge in the abuse of drugs.

The rajah displayed no sign of interest in our coming. But the queen, who sat beside him in a purple sacque, was more accessible; and there was present an interpreter so willing that his volubility became at last the cause of our departure. He had greeted us upon our entrance:- 'That is the honourable King, and I am his interpreter,' he had said, with more stateliness than truth. For he held no appointment in the court, seemed extremely ill-acquainted with the island language, and was present, like ourselves, upon a visit of civility. Mr. Williams was his name: an American darkey, runaway ship's cook, and bar-keeper at The Land we Live in tavern, Butaritari. I never knew a man who had more

words in his command or less truth to communicate; neither the gloom of the monarch, nor my own efforts to be distant, could in the least abash him; and when the scene closed, the darkey was left talking.

The town still slumbered, or had but just begun to turn and stretch itself; it was still plunged in heat and silence. So much the more vivid was the impression that we carried away of the house upon the islet, the Micronesian Saul wakeful amid his guards, and his unmelodious David, Mr. Williams, chattering through the drowsy hours.

CHAPTER II--THE FOUR BROTHERS

The kingdom of Tebureimoa includes two islands, Great and Little Makin; some two thousand subjects pay him tribute, and two semi-independent chieftains do him qualified homage. The importance of the office is measured by the man; he may be a nobody, he may be absolute; and both extremes have been exemplified within the memory of residents.

On the death of king Tetimararoa, Tebureimoa's father, Nakaeia, the eldest son, succeeded. He was a fellow of huge physical strength, masterful, violent, with a certain barbaric thrift and some intelligence of men and business. Alone in his islands, it was he who dealt and profited; he was the planter and the merchant; and his subjects toiled for his behoof in servitude. When they wrought long and well their taskmaster declared a holiday, and supplied and shared a general debauch. The scale of his providing was at times magnificent; six hundred dollars' worth of gin and brandy was set forth at once; the narrow land resounded with the noise of revelry: and it was a common thing to see the subjects (staggering themselves) parade their drunken sovereign on the fore-hatch of a wrecked vessel, king and commons howling and singing as they went. At a word from Nakaeia's mouth the revel ended; Makin became once more an isle of slaves and of teetotalers; and on the morrow all the population must be on the roads or in the taro-patches toiling

under his bloodshot eye.

The fear of Nakaeia filled the land. No regularity of justice was affected; there was no trial, there were no officers of the law; it seems there was but one penalty, the capital; and daylight assault and midnight murder were the forms of process. The king himself would play the executioner: and his blows were dealt by stealth, and with the help and countenance of none but his own wives. These were his oarswomen; one that caught a crab, he slew incontinently with the tiller; thus disciplined, they pulled him by night to the scene of his vengeance, which he would then execute alone and return well-pleased with his connubial crew. The inmates of the harem held a station hard for us to conceive. Beasts of draught, and driven by the fear of death, they were yet implicitly trusted with their sovereign's life; they were still wives and queens, and it was supposed that no man should behold their faces. They killed by the sight like basilisks; a chance view of one of those boatwomen was a crime to be wiped out with blood. In the days of Nakaeia the palace was beset with some tall coco-palms which commanded the enclosure. It chanced one evening, while Nakaeia sat below at supper with his wives, that the owner of the grove was in a tree-top drawing palm-tree wine; it chanced that he looked down, and the king at the same moment looking up, their eyes encountered. Instant flight preserved the involuntary criminal. But during the remainder of that reign he must lurk and be hid by friends in remote parts of the isle; Nakaeia hunted him without remission, although still in vain; and the palms, accessories to the fact,

were ruthlessly cut down. Such was the ideal of wifely purity in an isle where nubile virgins went naked as in paradise. And yet scandal found its way into Nakaeia's well-guarded harem. He was at that time the owner of a schooner, which he used for a pleasure-house, lodging on board as she lay anchored; and thither one day he summoned a new wife. She was one that had been sealed to him; that is to say (I presume), that he was married to her sister, for the husband of an elder sister has the call of the cadets. She would be arrayed for the occasion; she would come scented, garlanded, decked with fine mats and family jewels, for marriage, as her friends supposed; for death, as she well knew. 'Tell me the man's name, and I will spare you,' said Nakaeia. But the girl was staunch; she held her peace, saved her lover and the queens strangled her between the mats.

Nakaeia was feared; it does not appear that he was hated. Deeds that smell to us of murder wore to his subjects the reverend face of justice; his orgies made him popular; natives to this day recall with respect the firmness of his government; and even the whites, whom he long opposed and kept at arm's-length, give him the name (in the canonical South Sea phrase) of 'a perfect gentleman when sober.'

When he came to lie, without issue, on the bed of death, he summoned his next brother, Nanteitei, made him a discourse on royal policy, and warned him he was too weak to reign. The warning was taken to heart, and for some while the government moved on the

model of Nakaeia's. Nanteitei dispensed with guards, and walked abroad alone with a revolver in a leather mail-bag. To conceal his weakness he affected a rude silence; you might talk to him all day; advice, reproof, appeal, and menace alike remained unanswered.

The number of his wives was seventeen, many of them heiresses; for the royal house is poor, and marriage was in these days a chief means of buttressing the throne. Nakaeia kept his harem busy for himself; Nanteitei hired it out to others. In his days, for instance, Messrs. Wightman built a pier with a verandah at the north end of the town. The masonry was the work of the seventeen queens, who toiled and waded there like fisher lasses; but the man who was to do the roofing durst not begin till they had finished, lest by chance he should look down and see them.

It was perhaps the last appearance of the harem gang. For some time already Hawaiian missionaries had been seated at Butaritari--Maka and Kanoa, two brave childlike men. Nakaeia would none of their doctrine; he was perhaps jealous of their presence; being human, he had some affection for their persons. In the house, before the eyes of Kanoa, he slew with his own hand three sailors of Oahu, crouching on their backs to knife them, and menacing the missionary if he interfered; yet he not only spared him at the moment, but recalled him afterwards (when he had fled) with some expressions of respect. Nanteitei, the weaker man, fell more completely under the spell. Maka, a light-hearted, lovable, yet in his own trade very rigorous man, gained and improved an influence

on the king which soon grew paramount. Nanteitei, with the royal house, was publicly converted; and, with a severity which liberal missionaries disavow, the harem was at once reduced. It was a compendious act. The throne was thus impoverished, its influence shaken, the queen's relatives mortified, and sixteen chief women (some of great possessions) cast in a body on the market. I have been shipmates with a Hawaiian sailor who was successively married to two of these impromptu widows, and successively divorced by both for misconduct. That two great and rich ladies (for both of these were rich) should have married 'a man from another island' marks the dissolution of society. The laws besides were wholly remodelled, not always for the better. I love Maka as a man; as a legislator he has two defects: weak in the punishment of crime, stern to repress innocent pleasures.

War and revolution are the common successors of reform; yet Nanteitei died (of an overdose of chloroform), in quiet possession of the throne, and it was in the reign of the third brother, Nabakatokia, a man brave in body and feeble of character, that the storm burst. The rule of the high chiefs and notables seems to have always underlain and perhaps alternated with monarchy. The Old Men (as they were called) have a right to sit with the king in the Speak House and debate: and the king's chief superiority is a form of closure--'The Speaking is over.' After the long monocracy of Nakaeia and the changes of Nanteitei, the Old Men were doubtless grown impatient of obscurity, and they were beyond question jealous of the influence of Maka. Calumny, or rather caricature, was

called in use; a spoken cartoon ran round society; Maka was reported to have said in church that the king was the first man in the island and himself the second; and, stung by the supposed affront, the chiefs broke into rebellion and armed gatherings. In the space of one forenoon the throne of Nakaeia was humbled in the dust. The king sat in the maniap' before the palace gate expecting his recruits; Maka by his side, both anxious men; and meanwhile, in the door of a house at the north entry of the town, a chief had taken post and diverted the succours as they came. They came singly or in groups, each with his gun or pistol slung about his neck. 'Where are you going?' asked the chief. 'The king called us,' they would reply. 'Here is your place. Sit down,' returned the chief. With incredible disloyalty, all obeyed; and sufficient force being thus got together from both sides, Nabakatokia was summoned and surrendered. About this period, in almost every part of the group, the kings were murdered; and on Tapituea, the skeleton of the last hangs to this day in the chief Speak House of the isle, a menace to ambition. Nabakatokia was more fortunate; his life and the royal style were spared to him, but he was stripped of power. The Old Men enjoyed a festival of public speaking; the laws were continually changed, never enforced; the commons had an opportunity to regret the merits of Nakaeia; and the king, denied the resource of rich marriages and the service of a troop of wives, fell not only in disconsideration but in debt.

He died some months before my arrival on the islands, and no one regretted him; rather all looked hopefully to his successor. This

was by repute the hero of the family. Alone of the four brothers, he had issue, a grown son, Natiata, and a daughter three years old; it was to him, in the hour of the revolution, that Nabakatokia turned too late for help; and in earlier days he had been the right hand of the vigorous Nakaeia. Nontemat', Mr. Corpse, was his appalling nickname, and he had earned it well. Again and again, at the command of Nakaeia, he had surrounded houses in the dead of night, cut down the mosquito bars and butchered families. Here was the hand of iron; here was Nakaeia redux. He came, summoned from the tributary rule of Little Makin: he was installed, he proved a puppet and a trembler, the unwieldy shuttlecock of orators; and the reader has seen the remains of him in his summer parlour under the name of Tebureimoa.

The change in the man's character was much commented on in the island, and variously explained by opium and Christianity. To my eyes, there seemed no change at all, rather an extreme consistency. Mr. Corpse was afraid of his brother: King Tebureimoa is afraid of the Old Men. Terror of the first nerved him for deeds of desperation; fear of the second disables him for the least act of government. He played his part of bravo in the past, following the line of least resistance, butchering others in his own defence: to-day, grown elderly and heavy, a convert, a reader of the Bible, perhaps a penitent, conscious at least of accumulated hatreds, and his memory charged with images of violence and blood, he capitulates to the Old Men, fuddles himself with opium, and sits among his guards in dreadful expectation. The same cowardice that

put into his hand the knife of the assassin deprives him of the sceptre of a king.

A tale that I was told, a trifling incident that fell in my observation, depicts him in his two capacities. A chief in Little Makin asked, in an hour of lightness, 'Who is Kaeia?' A bird carried the saying; and Nakaeia placed the matter in the hands of a committee of three. Mr. Corpse was chairman; the second commissioner died before my arrival; the third was yet alive and green, and presented so venerable an appearance that we gave him the name of Abou ben Adhem. Mr. Corpse was troubled with a scruple; the man from Little Makin was his adopted brother; in such a case it was not very delicate to appear at all, to strike the blow (which it seems was otherwise expected of him) would be worse than awkward. 'I will strike the blow,' said the venerable Abou; and Mr. Corpse (surely with a sigh) accepted the compromise. The quarry was decoyed into the bush; he was set to carrying a log; and while his arms were raised Abou ripped up his belly at a blow. Justice being thus done, the commission, in a childish horror, turned to flee. But their victim recalled them to his side. 'You need not run away now,' he said. 'You have done this thing to me. Stay.' He was some twenty minutes dying, and his murderers sat with him the while: a scene for Shakespeare. All the stages of a violent death, the blood, the failing voice, the decomposing features, the changed hue, are thus present in the memory of Mr. Corpse; and since he studied them in the brother he betrayed, he has some reason to reflect on the possibilities of treachery. I

was never more sure of anything than the tragic quality of the king's thoughts; and yet I had but the one sight of him at unawares. I had once an errand for his ear. It was once more the hour of the siesta; but there were loiterers abroad, and these directed us to a closed house on the bank of the canal where Tebureimoa lay unguarded. We entered without ceremony, being in some haste. He lay on the floor upon a bed of mats, reading in his Gilbert Island Bible with compunction. On our sudden entrance the unwieldy man reared himself half-sitting so that the Bible rolled on the floor, stared on us a moment with blank eyes, and, having recognised his visitors, sank again upon the mats. So Eglon looked on Ehud.

The justice of facts is strange, and strangely just; Nakaeia, the author of these deeds, died at peace discoursing on the craft of kings; his tool suffers daily death for his enforced complicity. Not the nature, but the congruity of men's deeds and circumstances damn and save them; and Tebureimoa from the first has been incongruously placed. At home, in a quiet bystreet of a village, the man had been a worthy carpenter, and, even bedevilled as he is, he shows some private virtues. He has no lands, only the use of such as are impignorate for fines; he cannot enrich himself in the old way by marriages; thrift is the chief pillar of his future, and he knows and uses it. Eleven foreign traders pay him a patent of a hundred dollars, some two thousand subjects pay capitation at the rate of a dollar for a man, half a dollar for a woman, and a shilling for a child: allowing for the exchange, perhaps a total

of three hundred pounds a year. He had been some nine months on the throne: had bought his wife a silk dress and hat, figure unknown, and himself a uniform at three hundred dollars; had sent his brother's photograph to be enlarged in San Francisco at two hundred and fifty dollars; had greatly reduced that brother's legacy of debt and had still sovereigns in his pocket. An affectionate brother, a good economist; he was besides a handy carpenter, and cobbled occasionally on the woodwork of the palace. It is not wonderful that Mr. Corpse has virtues; that Tebureimoa should have a diversion filled me with surprise.

CHAPTER III--AROUND OUR HOUSE

When we left the palace we were still but seafarers ashore; and within the hour we had installed our goods in one of the six foreign houses of Butaritari, namely, that usually occupied by Maka, the Hawaiian missionary. Two San Francisco firms are here established, Messrs. Crawford and Messrs. Wightman Brothers; the first hard by the palace of the mid town, the second at the north entry; each with a store and bar-room. Our house was in the Wightman compound, betwixt the store and bar, within a fenced enclosure. Across the road a few native houses nestled in the margin of the bush, and the green wall of palms rose solid, shutting out the breeze. A little sandy cove of the lagoon ran in behind, sheltered by a verandah pier, the labour of queens' hands. Here, when the tide was high, sailed boats lay to be loaded; when the tide was low, the boats took ground some half a mile away, and an endless series of natives descended the pier stair, tailed across the sand in strings and clusters, waded to the waist with the bags of copra, and loitered backward to renew their charge. The mystery of the copra trade tormented me, as I sat and watched the profits drip on the stair and the sands.

In front, from shortly after four in the morning until nine at night, the folk of the town streamed by us intermittingly along the road: families going up the island to make copra on their lands;

women bound for the bush to gather flowers against the evening toilet; and, twice a day, the toddy-cutters, each with his knife and shell. In the first grey of the morning, and again late in the afternoon, these would straggle past about their tree-top business, strike off here and there into the bush, and vanish from the face of the earth. At about the same hour, if the tide be low in the lagoon, you are likely to be bound yourself across the island for a bath, and may enter close at their heels alleys of the palm wood. Right in front, although the sun is not yet risen, the east is already lighted with preparatory fires, and the huge accumulations of the trade-wind cloud glow with and heliograph the coming day. The breeze is in your face; overhead in the tops of the palms, its playthings, it maintains a lively bustle; look where you will, above or below, there is no human presence, only the earth and shaken forest. And right overhead the song of an invisible singer breaks from the thick leaves; from farther on a second tree-top answers; and beyond again, in the bosom of the woods, a still more distant minstrel perches and sways and sings. So, all round the isle, the toddy-cutters sit on high, and are rocked by the trade, and have a view far to seaward, where they keep watch for sails, and like huge birds utter their songs in the morning. They sing with a certain lustiness and Bacchic glee; the volume of sound and the articulate melody fall unexpected from the tree-top, whence we anticipate the chattering of fowls. And yet in a sense these songs also are but chatter; the words are ancient, obsolete, and sacred; few comprehend them, perhaps no one perfectly; but it was understood the cutters 'prayed to have good toddy, and sang of

their old wars.' The prayer is at least answered; and when the foaming shell is brought to your door, you have a beverage well 'worthy of a grace.' All forenoon you may return and taste; it only sparkles, and sharpens, and grows to be a new drink, not less delicious; but with the progress of the day the fermentation quickens and grows acid; in twelve hours it will be yeast for bread, in two days more a devilish intoxicant, the counsellor of crime.

The men are of a marked Arabian cast of features, often bearded and mustached, often gaily dressed, some with bracelets and anklets, all stalking hidalgo-like, and accepting salutations with a haughty lip. The hair (with the dandies of either sex) is worn turban-wise in a frizzled bush; and like the daggers of the Japanese a pointed stick (used for a comb) is thrust gallantly among the curls. The women from this bush of hair look forth enticingly: the race cannot be compared with the Tahitian for female beauty; I doubt even if the average be high; but some of the prettiest girls, and one of the handsomest women I ever saw, were Gilbertines. Butaritari, being the commercial centre of the group, is Europeanised; the coloured sacque or the white shift are common wear, the latter for the evening; the trade hat, loaded with flowers, fruit, and ribbons, is unfortunately not unknown; and the characteristic female dress of the Gilberts no longer universal. The ridi is its name: a cutty petticoat or fringe of the smoked fibre of cocoa-nut leaf, not unlike tarry string: the lower edge not reaching the mid-thigh, the upper adjusted so low upon the

haunches that it seems to cling by accident. A sneeze, you think, and the lady must surely be left destitute. 'The perilous, hairbreadth ridi' was our word for it; and in the conflict that rages over women's dress it has the misfortune to please neither side, the prudish condemning it as insufficient, the more frivolous finding it unlovely in itself. Yet if a pretty Gilbertine would look her best, that must be her costume. In that and naked otherwise, she moves with an incomparable liberty and grace and life, that marks the poetry of Micronesia. Bundle her in a gown, the charm is fled, and she wriggles like an Englishwoman.

Towards dusk the passers-by became more gorgeous. The men broke out in all the colours of the rainbow--or at least of the trade-room,--and both men and women began to be adorned and scented with new flowers. A small white blossom is the favourite, sometimes sown singly in a woman's hair like little stars, now composed in a thick wreath. With the night, the crowd sometimes thickened in the road, and the padding and brushing of bare feet became continuous; the promenades mostly grave, the silence only interrupted by some giggling and scampering of girls; even the children quiet. At nine, bed-time struck on a bell from the cathedral, and the life of the town ceased. At four the next morning the signal is repeated in the darkness, and the innocent prisoners set free; but for seven hours all must lie--I was about to say within doors, of a place where doors, and even walls, are an exception--housed, at least, under their airy roofs and clustered in the tents of the mosquito-nets. Suppose a necessary errand to occur, suppose it imperative

to send abroad, the messenger must then go openly, advertising himself to the police with a huge brand of cocoa-nut, which flares from house to house like a moving bonfire. Only the police themselves go darkling, and grope in the night for misdemeanants. I used to hate their treacherous presence; their captain in particular, a crafty old man in white, lurked nightly about my premises till I could have found it in my heart to beat him. But the rogue was privileged.

Not one of the eleven resident traders came to town, no captain cast anchor in the lagoon, but we saw him ere the hour was out. This was owing to our position between the store and the bar--the Sans Souci, as the last was called. Mr. Rick was not only Messrs. Wightman's manager, but consular agent for the States; Mrs. Rick was the only white woman on the island, and one of the only two in the archipelago; their house besides, with its cool verandahs, its bookshelves, its comfortable furniture, could not be rivalled nearer than Jaluit or Honolulu. Every one called in consequence, save such as might be prosecuting a South Sea quarrel, hingeing on the price of copra and the odd cent, or perhaps a difference about poultry. Even these, if they did not appear upon the north, would be presently visible to the southward, the Sans Souci drawing them as with cords. In an island with a total population of twelve white persons, one of the two drinking-shops might seem superfluous: but every bullet has its billet, and the double accommodation of Butaritari is found in practice highly convenient by the captains and the crews of ships: The Land we Live in being

tacitly resigned to the forecastle, the Sans Souci tacitly reserved for the afterguard. So aristocratic were my habits, so commanding was my fear of Mr. Williams, that I have never visited the first; but in the other, which was the club or rather the casino of the island, I regularly passed my evenings. It was small, but neatly fitted, and at night (when the lamp was lit) sparkled with glass and glowed with coloured pictures like a theatre at Christmas. The pictures were advertisements, the glass coarse enough, the carpentry amateur; but the effect, in that incongruous isle, was of unbridled luxury and inestimable expense. Here songs were sung, tales told, tricks performed, games played. The Ricks, ourselves, Norwegian Tom the bar-keeper, a captain or two from the ships, and perhaps three or four traders come down the island in their boats or by the road on foot, made up the usual company. The traders, all bred to the sea, take a humorous pride in their new business; 'South Sea Merchants' is the title they prefer. 'We are all sailors here'--'Merchants, if you please'--'South Sea Merchants,'-- was a piece of conversation endlessly repeated, that never seemed to lose in savour. We found them at all times simple, genial, gay, gallant, and obliging; and, across some interval of time, recall with pleasure the traders of Butaritari. There was one black sheep indeed. I tell of him here where he lived, against my rule; for in this case I have no measure to preserve, and the man is typical of a class of ruffians that once disgraced the whole field of the South Seas, and still linger in the rarely visited isles of Micronesia. He had the name on the beach of 'a perfect gentleman when sober,' but I never saw him otherwise than drunk. The few

shocking and savage traits of the Micronesian he has singled out with the skill of a collector, and planted in the soil of his original baseness. He has been accused and acquitted of a treacherous murder; and has since boastfully owned it, which inclines me to suppose him innocent. His daughter is defaced by his erroneous cruelty, for it was his wife he had intended to disfigure, and in the darkness of the night and the frenzy of coco-brandy, fastened on the wrong victim. The wife has since fled and harbours in the bush with natives; and the husband still demands from deaf ears her forcible restoration. The best of his business is to make natives drink, and then advance the money for the fine upon a lucrative mortgage. 'Respect for whites' is the man's word: 'What is the matter with this island is the want of respect for whites.' On his way to Butaritari, while I was there, he spied his wife in the bush with certain natives and made a dash to capture her; whereupon one of her companions drew a knife and the husband retreated: 'Do you call that proper respect for whites?' he cried. At an early stage of the acquaintance we proved our respect for his kind of white by forbidding him our enclosure under pain of death. Thenceforth he lingered often in the neighbourhood with I knew not what sense of envy or design of mischief; his white, handsome face (which I beheld with loathing) looked in upon us at all hours across the fence; and once, from a safe distance, he avenged himself by shouting a recondite island insult, to us quite inoffensive, on his English lips incredibly incongruous.

Our enclosure, round which this composite of degradations wandered,

was of some extent. In one corner was a trellis with a long table of rough boards. Here the Fourth of July feast had been held not long before with memorable consequences, yet to be set forth; here we took our meals; here entertained to a dinner the king and notables of Makin. In the midst was the house, with a verandah front and back, and three is rooms within. In the verandah we slung our man-of-war hammocks, worked there by day, and slept at night. Within were beds, chairs, a round table, a fine hanging lamp, and portraits of the royal family of Hawaii. Queen Victoria proves nothing; Kalakaua and Mrs. Bishop are diagnostic; and the truth is we were the stealthy tenants of the parsonage. On the day of our arrival Maka was away; faithless trustees unlocked his doors; and the dear rigorous man, the sworn foe of liquor and tobacco, returned to find his verandah littered with cigarettes and his parlour horrible with bottles. He made but one condition--on the round table, which he used in the celebration of the sacraments, he begged us to refrain from setting liquor; in all else he bowed to the accomplished fact, refused rent, retired across the way into a native house, and, plying in his boat, beat the remotest quarters of the isle for provender. He found us pigs--I could not fancy where--no other pigs were visible; he brought us fowls and taro; when we gave our feast to the monarch and gentry, it was he who supplied the wherewithal, he who superintended the cooking, he who asked grace at table, and when the king's health was proposed, he also started the cheering with an English hip-hip-hip. There was never a more fortunate conception; the heart of the fatted king exulted in his bosom at the sound.

Take him for all in all, I have never known a more engaging creature than this parson of Butaritari: his mirth, his kindness, his noble, friendly feelings, brimmed from the man in speech and gesture. He loved to exaggerate, to act and overact the momentary part, to exercise his lungs and muscles, and to speak and laugh with his whole body. He had the morning cheerfulness of birds and healthy children; and his humour was infectious. We were next neighbours and met daily, yet our salutations lasted minutes at a stretch--shaking hands, slapping shoulders, capering like a pair of Merry-Andrews, laughing to split our sides upon some pleasantry that would scarce raise a titter in an infant-school. It might be five in the morning, the toddy-cutters just gone by, the road empty, the shade of the island lying far on the lagoon: and the ebullition cheered me for the day.

Yet I always suspected Maka of a secret melancholy--these jubilant extremes could scarce be constantly maintained. He was besides long, and lean, and lined, and corded, and a trifle grizzled; and his Sabbath countenance was even saturnine. On that day we made a procession to the church, or (as I must always call it) the cathedral: Maka (a blot on the hot landscape) in tall hat, black frock-coat, black trousers; under his arm the hymn-book and the Bible; in his face, a reverent gravity:- beside him Mary his wife, a quiet, wise, and handsome elderly lady, seriously attired:- myself following with singular and moving thoughts. Long before, to the sound of bells and streams and birds, through a green

Lothian glen, I had accompanied Sunday by Sunday a minister in whose house I lodged; and the likeness, and the difference, and the series of years and deaths, profoundly touched me. In the great, dusky, palm-tree cathedral the congregation rarely numbered thirty: the men on one side, the women on the other, myself posted (for a privilege) amongst the women, and the small missionary contingent gathered close around the platform, we were lost in that round vault. The lessons were read antiphonally, the flock was catechised, a blind youth repeated weekly a long string of psalms, hymns were sung--I never heard worse singing,--and the sermon followed. To say I understood nothing were untrue; there were points that I learned to expect with certainty; the name of Honolulu, that of Kalakaua, the word Cap'n-man-o'-wa', the word ship, and a description of a storm at sea, infallibly occurred; and I was not seldom rewarded with the name of my own Sovereign in the bargain. The rest was but sound to the ears, silence for the mind: a plain expanse of tedium, rendered unbearable by heat, a hard chair, and the sight through the wide doors of the more happy heathen on the green. Sleep breathed on my joints and eyelids, sleep hummed in my ears; it reigned in the dim cathedral. The congregation stirred and stretched; they moaned, they groaned aloud; they yawned upon a singing note, as you may sometimes hear a dog when he has reached the tragic bitterest of boredom. In vain the preacher thumped the table; in vain he singled and addressed by name particular hearers. I was myself perhaps a more effective excitant; and at least to one old gentleman the spectacle of my successful struggles against sleep--and I hope they were

successful--cheered the flight of time. He, when he was not catching flies or playing tricks upon his neighbours, gloated with a fixed, truculent eye upon the stages of my agony; and once, when the service was drawing towards a close, he winked at me across the church.

I write of the service with a smile; yet I was always there--always with respect for Maka, always with admiration for his deep seriousness, his burning energy, the fire of his roused eye, the sincere and various accents of his voice. To see him weekly flogging a dead horse and blowing a cold fire was a lesson in fortitude and constancy. It may be a question whether if the mission were fully supported, and he was set free from business avocations, more might not result; I think otherwise myself; I think not neglect but rigour has reduced his flock, that rigour which has once provoked a revolution, and which to-day, in a man so lively and engaging, amazes the beholder. No song, no dance, no tobacco, no liquor, no alleviative of life--only toil and church-going; so says a voice from his face; and the face is the face of the Polynesian Esau, but the voice is the voice of a Jacob from a different world. And a Polynesian at the best makes a singular missionary in the Gilberts, coming from a country recklessly unchaste to one conspicuously strict; from a race hag-ridden with bogies to one comparatively bold against the terrors of the dark. The thought was stamped one morning in my mind, when I chanced to be abroad by moonlight, and saw all the town lightless, but the lamp faithfully burning by the missionary's bed. It requires no

law, no fire, and no scouting police, to withhold Maka and his countrymen from wandering in the night unlighted.

CHAPTER IV--A TALE OF A TAPU

On the morrow of our arrival (Sunday, 14th July 1889) our photographers were early stirring. Once more we traversed a silent town; many were yet abed and asleep; some sat drowsily in their open houses; there was no sound of intercourse or business. In that hour before the shadows, the quarter of the palace and canal seemed like a landing-place in the Arabian Nights or from the classic poets; here were the fit destination of some 'faery frigot,' here some adventurous prince might step ashore among new characters and incidents; and the island prison, where it floated on the luminous face of the lagoon, might have passed for the repository of the Grail. In such a scene, and at such an hour, the impression received was not so much of foreign travel--rather of past ages; it seemed not so much degrees of latitude that we had crossed, as centuries of time that we had re-ascended; leaving, by the same steps, home and to-day. A few children followed us, mostly nude, all silent; in the clear, weedy waters of the canal some silent damsels waded, baring their brown thighs; and to one of the maniap's before the palace gate we were attracted by a low but stirring hum of speech.

The oval shed was full of men sitting cross-legged. The king was there in striped pyjamas, his rear protected by four guards with Winchesters, his air and bearing marked by unwonted spirit and

decision; tumblers and black bottles went the round; and the talk, throughout loud, was general and animated. I was inclined at first to view this scene with suspicion. But the hour appeared unsuitable for a carouse; drink was besides forbidden equally by the law of the land and the canons of the church; and while I was yet hesitating, the king's rigorous attitude disposed of my last doubt. We had come, thinking to photograph him surrounded by his guards, and at the first word of the design his piety revolted. We were reminded of the day--the Sabbath, in which thou shalt take no photographs--and returned with a flea in our ear, bearing the rejected camera.

At church, a little later, I was struck to find the throne unoccupied. So nice a Sabbatarian might have found the means to be present; perhaps my doubts revived; and before I got home they were transformed to certainties. Tom, the bar-keeper of the Sans Souci, was in conversation with two emissaries from the court. The 'keen,' they said, wanted 'din,' failing which 'perandi.' No din, was Tom's reply, and no perandi; but 'pira' if they pleased. It seems they had no use for beer, and departed sorrowing.

'Why, what is the meaning of all this?' I asked. 'Is the island on the spree?'

Such was the fact. On the 4th of July a feast had been made, and the king, at the suggestion of the whites, had raised the tapu against liquor. There is a proverb about horses; it scarce applies

to the superior animal, of whom it may be rather said, that any one can start him drinking, not any twenty can prevail on him to stop. The tapu, raised ten days before, was not yet re-imposed; for ten days the town had been passing the bottle or lying (as we had seen it the afternoon before) in hoggish sleep; and the king, moved by the Old Men and his own appetites, continued to maintain the liberty, to squander his savings on liquor, and to join in and lead the debauch. The whites were the authors of this crisis; it was upon their own proposal that the freedom had been granted at the first; and for a while, in the interests of trade, they were doubtless pleased it should continue. That pleasure had now sometime ceased; the bout had been prolonged (it was conceded) unduly; and it now began to be a question how it might conclude. Hence Tom's refusal. Yet that refusal was avowedly only for the moment, and it was avowedly unavailing; the king's foragers, denied by Tom at the Sans Souci, would be supplied at The Land we Live in by the gobbling Mr. Williams.

The degree of the peril was not easy to measure at the time, and I am inclined to think now it was easy to exaggerate. Yet the conduct of drunkards even at home is always matter for anxiety; and at home our populations are not armed from the highest to the lowest with revolvers and repeating rifles, neither do we go on a debauch by the whole townful--and I might rather say, by the whole polity--king, magistrates, police, and army joining in one common scene of drunkenness. It must be thought besides that we were here in barbarous islands, rarely visited, lately and partly civilised.

First and last, a really considerable number of whites have perished in the Gilberts, chiefly through their own misconduct; and the natives have displayed in at least one instance a disposition to conceal an accident under a butchery, and leave nothing but dumb bones. This last was the chief consideration against a sudden closing of the bars; the bar-keepers stood in the immediate breach and dealt direct with madmen; too surly a refusal might at any moment precipitate a blow, and the blow might prove the signal for a massacre.

Monday, 15th.--At the same hour we returned to the same muniap'. Kummel (of all drinks) was served in tumblers; in the midst sat the crown prince, a fatted youth, surrounded by fresh bottles and busily plying the corkscrew; and king, chief, and commons showed the loose mouth, the uncertain joints, and the blurred and animated eye of the early drinker. It was plain we were impatiently expected; the king retired with alacrity to dress, the guards were despatched after their uniforms; and we were left to await the issue of these preparations with a shedful of tipsy natives. The orgie had proceeded further than on Sunday. The day promised to be of great heat; it was already sultry, the courtiers were already fuddled; and still the kummel continued to go round, and the crown prince to play butler. Flemish freedom followed upon Flemish excess; and a funny dog, a handsome fellow, gaily dressed, and with a full turban of frizzed hair, delighted the company with a humorous courtship of a lady in a manner not to be described. It was our diversion, in this time of waiting, to observe the

gathering of the guards. They have European arms, European uniforms, and (to their sorrow) European shoes. We saw one warrior (like Mars) in the article of being armed; two men and a stalwart woman were scarce strong enough to boot him; and after a single appearance on parade the army is crippled for a week.

At last, the gates under the king's house opened; the army issued, one behind another, with guns and epaulettes; the colours stooped under the gateway; majesty followed in his uniform bedizened with gold lace; majesty's wife came next in a hat and feathers, and an ample trained silk gown; the royal imps succeeded; there stood the pageantry of Makin marshalled on its chosen theatre. Dickens might have told how serious they were; how tipsy; how the king melted and streamed under his cocked hat; how he took station by the larger of his two cannons--austere, majestic, but not truly vertical; how the troops huddled, and were straightened out, and clubbed again; how they and their firelocks raked at various inclinations like the masts of ships; and how an amateur photographer reviewed, arrayed, and adjusted them, to see his dispositions change before he reached the camera.

The business was funny to see; I do not know that it is graceful to laugh at; and our report of these transactions was received on our return with the shaking of grave heads.

The day had begun ill; eleven hours divided us from sunset; and at any moment, on the most trifling chance, the trouble might begin.

The Wightman compound was in a military sense untenable, commanded on three sides by houses and thick bush; the town was computed to contain over a thousand stand of excellent new arms; and retreat to the ships, in the case of an alert, was a recourse not to be thought of. Our talk that morning must have closely reproduced the talk in English garrisons before the Sepoy mutiny; the sturdy doubt that any mischief was in prospect, the sure belief that (should any come) there was nothing left but to go down fighting, the half-amused, half-anxious attitude of mind in which we were awaiting fresh developments.

The kummel soon ran out; we were scarce returned before the king had followed us in quest of more. Mr. Corpse was now divested of his more awful attitude, the lawless bulk of him again encased in striped pyjamas; a guardsman brought up the rear with his rifle at the trail: and his majesty was further accompanied by a Rarotongan whalerman and the playful courtier with the turban of frizzed hair. There was never a more lively deputation. The whalerman was gapingly, tearfully tipsy: the courtier walked on air; the king himself was even sportive. Seated in a chair in the Ricks' sitting-room, he bore the brunt of our prayers and menaces unmoved. He was even rated, plied with historic instances, threatened with the men-of-war, ordered to restore the tapu on the spot--and nothing in the least affected him. It should be done to-morrow, he said; to-day it was beyond his power, to-day he durst not. 'Is that royal?' cried indignant Mr. Rick. No, it was not royal; had the king been of a royal character we should ourselves have held a

different language; and royal or not, he had the best of the dispute. The terms indeed were hardly equal; for the king was the only man who could restore the tapu, but the Ricks were not the only people who sold drink. He had but to hold his ground on the first question, and they were sure to weaken on the second. A little struggle they still made for the fashion's sake; and then one exceedingly tipsy deputation departed, greatly rejoicing, a case of brandy wheeling beside them in a barrow. The Rarotongan (whom I had never seen before) wrung me by the hand like a man bound on a far voyage. 'My dear frien'!' he cried, 'good-bye, my dear frien'!'--tears of kummel standing in his eyes; the king lurched as he went, the courtier ambled,--a strange party of intoxicated children to be entrusted with that barrowful of madness.

You could never say the town was quiet; all morning there was a ferment in the air, an aimless movement and congregation of natives in the street. But it was not before half-past one that a sudden hubbub of voices called us from the house, to find the whole white colony already gathered on the spot as by concerted signal. The Sans Souci was overrun with rabble, the stair and verandah thronged. From all these throats an inarticulate babbling cry went up incessantly; it sounded like the bleating of young lambs, but angrier. In the road his royal highness (whom I had seen so lately in the part of butler) stood crying upon Tom; on the top step, tossed in the hurly-burly, Tom was shouting to the prince. Yet a while the pack swayed about the bar, vociferous. Then came a

brutal impulse; the mob reeled, and returned, and was rejected; the stair showed a stream of heads; and there shot into view, through the disbanding ranks, three men violently dragging in their midst a fourth. By his hair and his hands, his head forced as low as his knees, his face concealed, he was wrenched from the verandah and whisked along the road into the village, howling as he disappeared. Had his face been raised, we should have seen it bloodied, and the blood was not his own. The courtier with the turban of frizzed hair had paid the costs of this disturbance with the lower part of one ear.

So the brawl passed with no other casualty than might seem comic to the inhumane. Yet we looked round on serious faces and--a fact that spoke volumes--Tom was putting up the shutters on the bar. Custom might go elsewhere, Mr. Williams might profit as he pleased, but Tom had had enough of bar-keeping for that day. Indeed the event had hung on a hair. A man had sought to draw a revolver--on what quarrel I could never learn, and perhaps he himself could not have told; one shot, when the room was so crowded, could scarce have failed to take effect; where many were armed and all tipsy, it could scarce have failed to draw others; and the woman who spied the weapon and the man who seized it may very well have saved the white community.

The mob insensibly melted from the scene; and for the rest of the day our neighbourhood was left in peace and a good deal in solitude. But the tranquillity was only local; din and perandi

still flowed in other quarters: and we had one more sight of Gilbert Island violence. In the church, where we had wandered photographing, we were startled by a sudden piercing outcry. The scene, looking forth from the doors of that great hall of shadow, was unforgettable. The palms, the quaint and scattered houses, the flag of the island streaming from its tall staff, glowed with intolerable sunshine. In the midst two women rolled fighting on the grass. The combatants were the more easy to be distinguished, because the one was stripped to the ridi and the other wore a holoku (sacque) of some lively colour. The first was uppermost, her teeth locked in her adversary's face, shaking her like a dog; the other impotently fought and scratched. So for a moment we saw them wallow and grapple there like vermin; then the mob closed and shut them in.

It was a serious question that night if we should sleep ashore. But we were travellers, folk that had come far in quest of the adventurous; on the first sign of an adventure it would have been a singular inconsistency to have withdrawn; and we sent on board instead for our revolvers. Mindful of Taahauku, Mr. Rick, Mr. Osbourne, and Mrs. Stevenson held an assault of arms on the public highway, and fired at bottles to the admiration of the natives. Captain Reid of the Equator stayed on shore with us to be at hand in case of trouble, and we retired to bed at the accustomed hour, agreeably excited by the day's events. The night was exquisite, the silence enchanting; yet as I lay in my hammock looking on the strong moonshine and the quiescent palms, one ugly picture haunted

me of the two women, the naked and the clad, locked in that hostile embrace. The harm done was probably not much, yet I could have looked on death and massacre with less revolt. The return to these primeval weapons, the vision of man's beastliness, of his ferality, shocked in me a deeper sense than that with which we count the cost of battles. There are elements in our state and history which it is a pleasure to forget, which it is perhaps the better wisdom not to dwell on. Crime, pestilence, and death are in the day's work; the imagination readily accepts them. It instinctively rejects, on the contrary, whatever shall call up the image of our race upon its lowest terms, as the partner of beasts, beastly itself, dwelling pell-mell and hugger-mugger, hairy man with hairy woman, in the caves of old. And yet to be just to barbarous islanders we must not forget the slums and dens of our cities; I must not forget that I have passed dinnerward through Soho, and seen that which cured me of my dinner.

Tuesday, July 16.--It rained in the night, sudden and loud, in Gilbert Island fashion. Before the day, the crowing of a cock aroused me and I wandered in the compound and along the street. The squall was blown by, the moon shone with incomparable lustre, the air lay dead as in a room, and yet all the isle sounded as under a strong shower, the eaves thickly pattering, the lofty palms dripping at larger intervals and with a louder note. In this bold nocturnal light the interior of the houses lay inscrutable, one lump of blackness, save when the moon glinted under the roof, and made a belt of silver, and drew the slanting shadows of the pillars on the floor. Nowhere in all the town was any lamp or ember; not a creature stirred; I thought I was alone to be awake; but the police were faithful to their duty; secretly vigilant, keeping account of time; and a little later, the watchman struck slowly and repeatedly on the cathedral bell; four o'clock, the warning signal. It seemed strange that, in a town resigned to drunkenness and tumult, curfew and reveille should still be sounded and still obeyed.

The day came, and brought little change. The place still lay silent; the people slept, the town slept. Even the few who were awake, mostly women and children, held their peace and kept within under the strong shadow of the thatch, where you must stop and peer to see them. Through the deserted streets, and past the sleeping

houses, a deputation took its way at an early hour to the palace; the king was suddenly awakened, and must listen (probably with a headache) to unpalatable truths. Mrs. Rick, being a sufficient mistress of that difficult tongue, was spokeswoman; she explained to the sick monarch that I was an intimate personal friend of Queen Victoria's; that immediately on my return I should make her a report upon Butaritari; and that if my house should have been again invaded by natives, a man-of-war would be despatched to make reprisals. It was scarce the fact--rather a just and necessary parable of the fact, corrected for latitude; and it certainly told upon the king. He was much affected; he had conceived the notion (he said) that I was a man of some importance, but not dreamed it was as bad as this; and the missionary house was tapu'd under a fine of fifty dollars.

So much was announced on the return of the deputation; not any more; and I gathered subsequently that much more had passed. The protection gained was welcome. It had been the most annoying and not the least alarming feature of the day before, that our house was periodically filled with tipsy natives, twenty or thirty at a time, begging drink, fingering our goods, hard to be dislodged, awkward to quarrel with. Queen Victoria's friend (who was soon promoted to be her son) was free from these intrusions. Not only my house, but my neighbourhood as well, was left in peace; even on our walks abroad we were guarded and prepared for; and, like great persons visiting a hospital, saw only the fair side. For the matter of a week we were thus suffered to go out and in and live in

a fool's paradise, supposing the king to have kept his word, the tapu to be revived and the island once more sober.

Tuesday, July 23.--We dined under a bare trellis erected for the Fourth of July; and here we used to linger by lamplight over coffee and tobacco. In that climate evening approaches without sensible chill; the wind dies out before sunset; heaven glows a while and fades, and darkens into the blueness of the tropical night; swiftly and insensibly the shadows thicken, the stars multiply their number; you look around you and the day is gone. It was then that we would see our Chinaman draw near across the compound in a lurching sphere of light, divided by his shadows; and with the coming of the lamp the night closed about the table. The faces of the company, the spars of the trellis, stood out suddenly bright on a ground of blue and silver, faintly designed with palm-tops and the peaked roofs of houses. Here and there the gloss upon a leaf, or the fracture of a stone, returned an isolated sparkle. All else had vanished. We hung there, illuminated like a galaxy of stars in vacuo; we sat, manifest and blind, amid the general ambush of the darkness; and the islanders, passing with light footfalls and low voices in the sand of the road, lingered to observe us, unseen.

On Tuesday the dusk had fallen, the lamp had just been brought, when a missile struck the table with a rattling smack and rebounded past my ear. Three inches to one side and this page had never been written; for the thing travelled like a cannon ball. It was supposed at the time to be a nut, though even at the time I thought

it seemed a small one and fell strangely.

Wednesday, July 24.--The dusk had fallen once more, and the lamp been just brought out, when the same business was repeated. And again the missile whistled past my ear. One nut I had been willing to accept; a second, I rejected utterly. A cocoa-nut does not come slinging along on a windless evening, making an angle of about fifteen degrees with the horizon; cocoa-nuts do not fall on successive nights at the same hour and spot; in both cases, besides, a specific moment seemed to have been chosen, that when the lamp was just carried out, a specific person threatened, and that the head of the family. I may have been right or wrong, but I believed I was the mark of some intimidation; believed the missile was a stone, aimed not to hit, but to frighten.

No idea makes a man more angry. I ran into the road, where the natives were as usual promenading in the dark; Maka joined me with a lantern; and I ran from one to another, glared in quite innocent faces, put useless questions, and proffered idle threats. Thence I carried my wrath (which was worthy the son of any queen in history) to the Ricks. They heard me with depression, assured me this trick of throwing a stone into a family dinner was not new; that it meant mischief, and was of a piece with the alarming disposition of the natives. And then the truth, so long concealed from us, came out. The king had broken his promise, he had defied the deputation; the tapu was still dormant, The Land we Live in still selling drink, and that quarter of the town disturbed and menaced by perpetual

broils. But there was worse ahead: a feast was now preparing for the birthday of the little princess; and the tributary chiefs of Kuma and Little Makin were expected daily. Strong in a following of numerous and somewhat savage clansmen, each of these was believed, like a Douglas of old, to be of doubtful loyalty. Kuma (a little pot-bellied fellow) never visited the palace, never entered the town, but sat on the beach on a mat, his gun across his knees, parading his mistrust and scorn; Karaiti of Makin, although he was more bold, was not supposed to be more friendly; and not only were these vassals jealous of the throne, but the followers on either side shared in the animosity. Brawls had already taken place; blows had passed which might at any moment be repaid in blood. Some of the strangers were already here and already drinking; if the debauch continued after the bulk of them had come, a collision, perhaps a revolution, was to be expected.

The sale of drink is in this group a measure of the jealousy of traders; one begins, the others are constrained to follow; and to him who has the most gin, and sells it the most recklessly, the lion's share of copra is assured. It is felt by all to be an extreme expedient, neither safe, decent, nor dignified. A trader on Tarawa, heated by an eager rivalry, brought many cases of gin. He told me he sat afterwards day and night in his house till it was finished, not daring to arrest the sale, not venturing to go forth, the bush all round him filled with howling drunkards. At night, above all, when he was afraid to sleep, and heard shots and voices about him in the darkness, his remorse was black.

'My God!' he reflected, 'if I was to lose my life on such a wretched business!' Often and often, in the story of the Gilberts, this scene has been repeated; and the remorseful trader sat beside his lamp, longing for the day, listening with agony for the sound of murder, registering resolutions for the future. For the business is easy to begin, but hazardous to stop. The natives are in their way a just and law-abiding people, mindful of their debts, docile to the voice of their own institutions; when the tapu is re-enforced they will cease drinking; but the white who seeks to antedate the movement by refusing liquor does so at his peril.

Hence, in some degree, the anxiety and helplessness of Mr. Rick. He and Tom, alarmed by the rabblement of the Sans Souci, had stopped the sale; they had done so without danger, because The Land we Live in still continued selling; it was claimed, besides, that they had been the first to begin. What step could be taken? Could Mr. Rick visit Mr. Muller (with whom he was not on terms) and address him thus: 'I was getting ahead of you, now you are getting ahead of me, and I ask you to forego your profit. I got my place closed in safety, thanks to your continuing; but now I think you have continued long enough. I begin to be alarmed; and because I am afraid I ask you to confront a certain danger'? It was not to be thought of. Something else had to be found; and there was one person at one end of the town who was at least not interested in copra. There was little else to be said in favour of myself as an ambassador. I had arrived in the Wightman schooner, I was living

in the Wightman compound, I was the daily associate of the Wightman coterie. It was egregious enough that I should now intrude unasked in the private affairs of Crawford's agent, and press upon him the sacrifice of his interests and the venture of his life. But bad as I might be, there was none better; since the affair of the stone I was, besides, sharp-set to be doing, the idea of a delicate interview attracted me, and I thought it policy to show myself abroad.

The night was very dark. There was service in the church, and the building glimmered through all its crevices like a dim Kirk Allowa'. I saw few other lights, but was indistinctly aware of many people stirring in the darkness, and a hum and sputter of low talk that sounded stealthy. I believe (in the old phrase) my beard was sometimes on my shoulder as I went. Muller's was but partly lighted, and quite silent, and the gate was fastened. I could by no means manage to undo the latch. No wonder, since I found it afterwards to be four or five feet long--a fortification in itself. As I still fumbled, a dog came on the inside and sniffed suspiciously at my hands, so that I was reduced to calling 'House ahoy!' Mr. Muller came down and put his chin across the paling in the dark. 'Who is that?' said he, like one who has no mind to welcome strangers.

'My name is Stevenson,' said I.

'O, Mr. Stevens! I didn't know you. Come inside.' We stepped

into the dark store, when I leaned upon the counter and he against the wall. All the light came from the sleeping-room, where I saw his family being put to bed; it struck full in my face, but Mr. Muller stood in shadow. No doubt he expected what was Coming, and sought the advantage of position; but for a man who wished to persuade and had nothing to conceal, mine was the preferable.

'Look here,' I began, 'I hear you are selling to the natives.'

'Others have done that before me,' he returned pointedly.

'No doubt,' said I, 'and I have nothing to do with the past, but the future. I want you to promise you will handle these spirits carefully.'

'Now what is your motive in this?' he asked, and then, with a sneer, 'Are you afraid of your life?'

'That is nothing to the purpose,' I replied. 'I know, and you know, these spirits ought not to be used at all.'

'Tom and Mr. Rick have sold them before.'

'I have nothing to do with Tom and Mr. Rick. All I know is I have heard them both refuse.'

'No, I suppose you have nothing to do with them. Then you are just

afraid of your life.'

'Come now,' I cried, being perhaps a little stung, 'you know in your heart I am asking a reasonable thing. I don't ask you to lose your profit--though I would prefer to see no spirits brought here, as you would--'

'I don't say I wouldn't. I didn't begin this,' he interjected.

'No, I don't suppose you did,' said I. 'And I don't ask you to lose; I ask you to give me your word, man to man, that you will make no native drunk.'

Up to now Mr. Muller had maintained an attitude very trying to my temper; but he had maintained it with difficulty, his sentiment being all upon my side; and here he changed ground for the worse. 'It isn't me that sells,' said he.

'No, it's that nigger,' I agreed. 'But he's yours to buy and sell; you have your hand on the nape of his neck; and I ask you--I have my wife here--to use the authority you have.'

He hastily returned to his old ward. 'I don't deny I could if I wanted,' said he. 'But there's no danger, the natives are all quiet. You're just afraid of your life.'

I do not like to be called a coward, even by implication; and here

I lost my temper and propounded an untimely ultimatum. 'You had better put it plain,' I cried. 'Do you mean to refuse me what I ask?'

'I don't want either to refuse it or grant it,' he replied.

'You'll find you have to do the one thing or the other, and right now!' I cried, and then, striking into a happier vein, 'Come,' said I, 'you're a better sort than that. I see what's wrong with you--you think I came from the opposite camp. I see the sort of man you are, and you know that what I ask is right.'

Again he changed ground. 'If the natives get any drink, it isn't safe to stop them,' he objected.

'I'll be answerable for the bar,' I said. 'We are three men and four revolvers; we'll come at a word, and hold the place against the village.'

'You don't know what you're talking about; it's too dangerous!' he cried.

'Look here,' said I, 'I don't mind much about losing that life you talk so much of; but I mean to lose it the way I want to, and that is, putting a stop to all this beastliness.'

He talked a while about his duty to the firm; I minded not at all,

I was secure of victory. He was but waiting to capitulate, and looked about for any potent to relieve the strain. In the gush of light from the bedroom door I spied a cigar-holder on the desk. 'That is well coloured,' said I.

'Will you take a cigar?' said he.

I took it and held it up unlighted. 'Now,' said I, 'you promise me.'

'I promise you you won't have any trouble from natives that have drunk at my place,' he replied.

'That is all I ask,' said I, and showed it was not by immediately offering to try his stock.

So far as it was anyway critical our interview here ended. Mr. Muller had thenceforth ceased to regard me as an emissary from his rivals, dropped his defensive attitude, and spoke as he believed. I could make out that he would already, had he dared, have stopped the sale himself. Not quite daring, it may be imagined how he resented the idea of interference from those who had (by his own statement) first led him on, then deserted him in the breach, and now (sitting themselves in safety) egged him on to a new peril, which was all gain to them, all loss to him! I asked him what he thought of the danger from the feast.

'I think worse of it than any of you,' he answered. 'They were shooting around here last night, and I heard the balls too. I said to myself, "That's bad." What gets me is why you should be making this row up at your end. I should be the first to go.'

It was a thoughtless wonder. The consolation of being second is not great; the fact, not the order of going--there was our concern.

Scott talks moderately of looking forward to a time of fighting 'with a feeling that resembled pleasure.' The resemblance seems rather an identity. In modern life, contact is ended; man grows impatient of endless manoeuvres; and to approach the fact, to find ourselves where we can push an advantage home, and stand a fair risk, and see at last what we are made of, stirs the blood. It was so at least with all my family, who bubbled with delight at the approach of trouble; and we sat deep into the night like a pack of schoolboys, preparing the revolvers and arranging plans against the morrow. It promised certainly to be a busy and eventful day. The Old Men were to be summoned to confront me on the question of the tapu; Muller might call us at any moment to garrison his bar; and suppose Muller to fail, we decided in a family council to take that matter into our own hands, The Land we Live in at the pistol's mouth, and with the polysyllabic Williams, dance to a new tune. As I recall our humour I think it would have gone hard with the mulatto.

Wednesday, July 24.--It was as well, and yet it was disappointing

that these thunder-clouds rolled off in silence. Whether the Old Men recoiled from an interview with Queen Victoria's son, whether Muller had secretly intervened, or whether the step flowed naturally from the fears of the king and the nearness of the feast, the tapu was early that morning re-enforced; not a day too soon, from the manner the boats began to arrive thickly, and the town was filled with the big rowdy vassals of Karaiti.

The effect lingered for some time on the minds of the traders; it was with the approval of all present that I helped to draw up a petition to the United States, praying for a law against the liquor trade in the Gilberts; and it was at this request that I added, under my own name, a brief testimony of what had passed;--useless pains; since the whole reposes, probably unread and possibly unopened, in a pigeon-hole at Washington.

Sunday, July 28.--This day we had the afterpiece of the debauch. The king and queen, in European clothes, and followed by armed guards, attended church for the first time, and sat perched aloft in a precarious dignity under the barrel-hoops. Before sermon his majesty clambered from the dais, stood lopsidedly upon the gravel floor, and in a few words abjured drinking. The queen followed suit with a yet briefer allocution. All the men in church were next addressed in turn; each held up his right hand, and the affair was over--throne and church were reconciled.

CHAPTER VI--THE FIVE DAYS' FESTIVAL

Thursday, July 25.--The street was this day much enlivened by the presence of the men from Little Makin; they average taller than Butaritarians, and being on a holiday, went wreathed with yellow leaves and gorgeous in vivid colours. They are said to be more savage, and to be proud of the distinction. Indeed, it seemed to us they swaggered in the town, like plaided Highlanders upon the streets of Inverness, conscious of barbaric virtues.

In the afternoon the summer parlour was observed to be packed with people; others standing outside and stooping to peer under the eaves, like children at home about a circus. It was the Makin company, rehearsing for the day of competition. Karaiti sat in the front row close to the singers, where we were summoned (I suppose in honour of Queen Victoria) to join him. A strong breathless heat reigned under the iron roof, and the air was heavy with the scent of wreaths. The singers, with fine mats about their loins, cocoa-nut feathers set in rings upon their fingers, and their heads crowned with yellow leaves, sat on the floor by companies. A varying number of soloists stood up for different songs; and these bore the chief part in the music. But the full force of the companies, even when not singing, contributed continuously to the effect, and marked the ictus of the measure, mimicking, grimacing,

casting up their heads and eyes, fluttering the feathers on their fingers, clapping hands, or beating (loud as a kettledrum) on the left breast; the time was exquisite, the music barbarous, but full of conscious art. I noted some devices constantly employed. A sudden change would be introduced (I think of key) with no break of the measure, but emphasised by a sudden dramatic heightening of the voice and a swinging, general gesticulation. The voices of the soloists would begin far apart in a rude discord, and gradually draw together to a unison; which, when, they had reached, they were joined and drowned by the full chorus. The ordinary, hurried, barking unmelodious movement of the voices would at times be broken and glorified by a psalm-like strain of melody, often well constructed, or seeming so by contrast. There was much variety of measure, and towards the end of each piece, when the fun became fast and furious, a recourse to this figure -

[Musical notation which cannot be produced. It means two/four time with quaver, quaver, crotchet repeated for three bars.]

It is difficult to conceive what fire and devilry they get into these hammering finales; all go together, voices, hands, eyes, leaves, and fluttering finger-rings; the chorus swings to the eye, the song throbs on the ear; the faces are convulsed with enthusiasm and effort.

Presently the troop stood up in a body, the drums forming a half-circle for the soloists, who were sometimes five or even more in

number. The songs that followed were highly dramatic; though I had none to give me any explanation, I would at times make out some shadowy but decisive outline of a plot; and I was continually reminded of certain quarrelsome concerted scenes in grand operas at home; just so the single voices issue from and fall again into the general volume; just so do the performers separate and crowd together, brandish the raised hand, and roll the eye to heaven--or the gallery. Already this is beyond the Thespian model; the art of this people is already past the embryo: song, dance, drums, quartette and solo--it is the drama full developed although still in miniature. Of all so-called dancing in the South Seas, that which I saw in Butaritari stands easily the first. The hula, as it may be viewed by the speedy globe-trotter in Honolulu, is surely the most dull of man's inventions, and the spectator yawns under its length as at a college lecture or a parliamentary debate. But the Gilbert Island dance leads on the mind; it thrills, rouses, subjugates; it has the essence of all art, an unexplored imminent significance. Where so many are engaged, and where all must make (at a given moment) the same swift, elaborate, and often arbitrary movement, the toil of rehearsal is of course extreme. But they begin as children. A child and a man may often be seen together in a maniap': the man sings and gesticulates, the child stands before him with streaming tears and tremulously copies him in act and sound; it is the Gilbert Island artist learning (as all artists must) his art in sorrow.

I may seem to praise too much; here is a passage from my wife's

diary, which proves that I was not alone in being moved, and completes the picture:- 'The conductor gave the cue, and all the dancers, waving their arms, swaying their bodies, and clapping their breasts in perfect time, opened with an introductory. The performers remained seated, except two, and once three, and twice a single soloist. These stood in the group, making a slight movement with the feet and rhythmical quiver of the body as they sang. There was a pause after the introductory, and then the real business of the opera--for it was no less--began; an opera where every singer was an accomplished actor. The leading man, in an impassioned ecstasy which possessed him from head to foot, seemed transfigured; once it was as though a strong wind had swept over the stage--their arms, their feathered fingers thrilling with an emotion that shook my nerves as well: heads and bodies followed like a field of grain before a gust. My blood came hot and cold, tears pricked my eyes, my head whirled, I felt an almost irresistible impulse to join the dancers. One drama, I think, I very nearly understood. A fierce and savage old man took the solo part. He sang of the birth of a prince, and how he was tenderly rocked in his mother's arms; of his boyhood, when he excelled his fellows in swimming, climbing, and all athletic sports; of his youth, when he went out to sea with his boat and fished; of his manhood, when he married a wife who cradled a son of his own in her arms. Then came the alarm of war, and a great battle, of which for a time the issue was doubtful; but the hero conquered, as he always does, and with a tremendous burst of the victors the piece closed. There were also comic pieces, which caused great amusement. During

one, an old man behind me clutched me by the arm, shook his finger in my face with a roguish smile, and said something with a chuckle, which I took to be the equivalent of "O, you women, you women; it is true of you all!" I fear it was not complimentary. At no time was there the least sign of the ugly indecency of the eastern islands. All was poetry pure and simple. The music itself was as complex as our own, though constructed on an entirely different basis; once or twice I was startled by a bit of something very like the best English sacred music, but it was only for an instant. At last there was a longer pause, and this time the dancers were all on their feet. As the drama went on, the interest grew. The performers appealed to each other, to the audience, to the heaven above; they took counsel with each other, the conspirators drew together in a knot; it was just an opera, the drums coming in at proper intervals, the tenor, baritone, and bass all where they should be--except that the voices were all of the same calibre. A woman once sang from the back row with a very fine contralto voice spoilt by being made artificially nasal; I notice all the women affect that unpleasantness. At one time a boy of angelic beauty was the soloist; and at another, a child of six or eight, doubtless an infant phenomenon being trained, was placed in the centre. The little fellow was desperately frightened and embarrassed at first, but towards the close warmed up to his work and showed much dramatic talent. The changing expressions on the faces of the dancers were so speaking, that it seemed a great stupidity not to understand them.'

Our neighbour at this performance, Karaiti, somewhat favours his Butaritarian majesty in shape and feature, being, like him, portly, bearded, and Oriental. In character he seems the reverse: alert, smiling, jovial, jocular, industrious. At home in his own island, he labours himself like a slave, and makes his people labour like a slave-driver. He takes an interest in ideas. George the trader told him about flying-machines. 'Is that true, George?' he asked. 'It is in the papers,' replied George. 'Well,' said Karaiti, 'if that man can do it with machinery, I can do it without'; and he designed and made a pair of wings, strapped them on his shoulders, went to the end of a pier, launched himself into space, and fell bulkily into the sea. His wives fished him out, for his wings hindered him in swimming. 'George,' said he, pausing as he went up to change, 'George, you lie.' He had eight wives, for his small realm still follows ancient customs; but he showed embarrassment when this was mentioned to my wife. 'Tell her I have only brought one here,' he said anxiously. Altogether the Black Douglas pleased us much; and as we heard fresh details of the king's uneasiness, and saw for ourselves that all the weapons in the summer parlour had been hid, we watched with the more admiration the cause of all this anxiety rolling on his big legs, with his big smiling face, apparently unarmed, and certainly unattended, through the hostile town. The Red Douglas, pot-bellied Kuma, having perhaps heard word of the debauch, remained upon his fief; his vassals thus came uncommanded to the feast, and swelled the following of Karaiti.

Friday, July 26.--At night in the dark, the singers of Makin

paraded in the road before our house and sang the song of the princess. 'This is the day; she was born to-day; Nei Kamaunave was born to-day--a beautiful princess, Queen of Butaritari.' So I was told it went in endless iteration. The song was of course out of season, and the performance only a rehearsal. But it was a serenade besides; a delicate attention to ourselves from our new friend, Karaiti.

Saturday, July 27.--We had announced a performance of the magic lantern to-night in church; and this brought the king to visit us. In honour of the Black Douglas (I suppose) his usual two guardsmen were now increased to four; and the squad made an outlandish figure as they straggled after him, in straw hats, kilts and jackets. Three carried their arms reversed, the butts over their shoulders, the muzzles menacing the king's plump back; the fourth had passed his weapon behind his neck, and held it there with arms extended like a backboard. The visit was extraordinarily long. The king, no longer galvanised with gin, said and did nothing. He sat collapsed in a chair and let a cigar go out. It was hot, it was sleepy, it was cruel dull; there was no resource but to spy in the countenance of Tebureimoa for some remaining trait of Mr. Corpse the butcher. His hawk nose, crudely depressed and flattened at the point, did truly seem to us to smell of midnight murder. When he took his leave, Maka bade me observe him going down the stair (or rather ladder) from the verandah. 'Old man,' said Maka. 'Yes,' said I, 'and yet I suppose not old man.' 'Young man,' returned Maka, 'perhaps fo'ty.' And I have heard since he is most likely

younger.

While the magic lantern was showing, I skulked without in the dark. The voice of Maka, excitedly explaining the Scripture slides, seemed to fill not the church only, but the neighbourhood. All else was silent. Presently a distant sound of singing arose and approached; and a procession drew near along the road, the hot clean smell of the men and women striking in my face delightfully. At the corner, arrested by the voice of Maka and the lightening and darkening of the church, they paused. They had no mind to go nearer, that was plain. They were Makin people, I believe, probably staunch heathens, contemners of the missionary and his works. Of a sudden, however, a man broke from their company, took to his heels, and fled into the church; next moment three had followed him; the next it was a covey of near upon a score, all pelting for their lives. So the little band of the heathen paused irresolute at the corner, and melted before the attractions of a magic lantern, like a glacier in spring. The more staunch vainly taunted the deserters; three fled in a guilty silence, but still fled; and when at length the leader found the wit or the authority to get his troop in motion and revive the singing, it was with much diminished forces that they passed musically on up the dark road.

Meanwhile inside the luminous pictures brightened and faded. I stood for some while unobserved in the rear of the spectators, when I could hear just in front of me a pair of lovers following the show with interest, the male playing the part of interpreter and

(like Adam) mingling caresses with his lecture. The wild animals, a tiger in particular, and that old school-treat favourite, the sleeper and the mouse, were hailed with joy; but the chief marvel and delight was in the gospel series. Maka, in the opinion of his aggrieved wife, did not properly rise to the occasion. 'What is the matter with the man? Why can't he talk?' she cried. The matter with the man, I think, was the greatness of the opportunity; he reeled under his good fortune; and whether he did ill or well, the exposure of these pious 'phantoms' did as a matter of fact silence in all that part of the island the voice of the scoffer. 'Why then,' the word went round, 'why then, the Bible is true!' And on our return afterwards we were told the impression was yet lively, and those who had seen might be heard telling those who had not, 'O yes, it is all true; these things all happened, we have seen the pictures.' The argument is not so childish as it seems; for I doubt if these islanders are acquainted with any other mode of representation but photography; so that the picture of an event (on the old melodrama principle that 'the camera cannot lie, Joseph,') would appear strong proof of its occurrence. The fact amused us the more because our slides were some of them ludicrously silly, and one (Christ before Pilate) was received with shouts of merriment, in which even Maka was constrained to join.

Sunday, July 28.--Karaiti came to ask for a repetition of the 'phantoms'--this was the accepted word--and, having received a promise, turned and left my humble roof without the shadow of a salutation. I felt it impolite to have the least appearance of

pocketing a slight; the times had been too difficult, and were still too doubtful; and Queen Victoria's son was bound to maintain the honour of his house. Karaiti was accordingly summoned that evening to the Ricks, where Mrs. Rick fell foul of him in words, and Queen Victoria's son assailed him with indignant looks. I was the ass with the lion's skin; I could not roar in the language of the Gilbert Islands; but I could stare. Karaiti declared he had meant no offence; apologised in a sound, hearty, gentlemanly manner; and became at once at his ease. He had in a dagger to examine, and announced he would come to price it on the morrow, to-day being Sunday; this nicety in a heathen with eight wives surprised me. The dagger was 'good for killing fish,' he said roguishly; and was supposed to have his eye upon fish upon two legs. It is at least odd that in Eastern Polynesia fish was the accepted euphemism for the human sacrifice. Asked as to the population of his island, Karaiti called out to his vassals who sat waiting him outside the door, and they put it at four hundred and fifty; but (added Karaiti jovially) there will soon be plenty more, for all the women are in the family way. Long before we separated I had quite forgotten his offence. He, however, still bore it in mind; and with a very courteous inspiration returned early on the next day, paid us a long visit, and punctiliously said farewell when he departed.

Monday, July 29.--The great day came round at last. In the first hours the night was startled by the sound of clapping hands and the chant of Nei Kamaunava; its melancholy, slow, and somewhat menacing

measures broken at intervals by a formidable shout. The little morsel of humanity thus celebrated in the dark hours was observed at midday playing on the green entirely naked, and equally unobserved and unconcerned.

The summer parlour on its artificial islet, relieved against the shimmering lagoon, and shimmering itself with sun and tinned iron, was all day crowded about by eager men and women. Within, it was boxed full of islanders, of any age and size, and in every degree of nudity and finery. So close we squatted, that at one time I had a mighty handsome woman on my knees, two little naked urchins having their feet against my back. There might be a dame in full attire of holoku and hat and flowers; and her next neighbour might the next moment strip some little rag of a shift from her fat shoulders and come out a monument of flesh, painted rather than covered by the hairbreadth ridi. Little ladies who thought themselves too great to appear undraped upon so high a festival were seen to pause outside in the bright sunshine, their miniature ridis in their hand; a moment more and they were full-dressed and entered the concert-room.

At either end stood up to sing, or sat down to rest, the alternate companies of singers; Kuma and Little Makin on the north, Butaritari and its conjunct hamlets on the south; both groups conspicuous in barbaric bravery. In the midst, between these rival camps of troubadours, a bench was placed; and here the king and queen throned it, some two or three feet above the crowded audience

on the floor--Tebureimoa as usual in his striped pyjamas with a satchel strapped across one shoulder, doubtless (in the island fashion) to contain his pistols; the queen in a purple holoku, her abundant hair let down, a fan in her hand. The bench was turned facing to the strangers, a piece of well-considered civility; and when it was the turn of Butaritari to sing, the pair must twist round on the bench, lean their elbows on the rail, and turn to us the spectacle of their broad backs. The royal couple occasionally solaced themselves with a clay pipe; and the pomp of state was further heightened by the rifles of a picket of the guard.

With this kingly countenance, and ourselves squatted on the ground, we heard several songs from one side or the other. Then royalty and its guards withdrew, and Queen Victoria's son and daughter-in-law were summoned by acclamation to the vacant throne. Our pride was perhaps a little modified when we were joined on our high places by a certain thriftless loafer of a white; and yet I was glad too, for the man had a smattering of native, and could give me some idea of the subject of the songs. One was patriotic, and dared Tembinok' of Apemama, the terror of the group, to an invasion. One mixed the planting of taro and the harvest-home. Some were historical, and commemorated kings and the illustrious chances of their time, such as a bout of drinking or a war. One, at least, was a drama of domestic interest, excellently played by the troop from Makin. It told the story of a man who has lost his wife, at first bewails her loss, then seeks another: the earlier strains (or acts) are played exclusively by men; but towards the

end a woman appears, who has just lost her husband; and I suppose the pair console each other, for the finale seemed of happy omen. Of some of the songs my informant told me briefly they were 'like about the weemen'; this I could have guessed myself. Each side (I should have said) was strengthened by one or two women. They were all soloists, did not very often join in the performance, but stood disengaged at the back part of the stage, and looked (in ridi, necklace, and dressed hair) for all the world like European ballet-dancers. When the song was anyway broad these ladies came particularly to the front; and it was singular to see that, after each entry, the premiere danseuse pretended to be overcome by shame, as though led on beyond what she had meant, and her male assistants made a feint of driving her away like one who had disgraced herself. Similar affectations accompany certain truly obscene dances of Samoa, where they are very well in place. Here it was different. The words, perhaps, in this free-spoken world, were gross enough to make a carter blush; and the most suggestive feature was this feint of shame. For such parts the women showed some disposition; they were pert, they were neat, they were acrobatic, they were at times really amusing, and some of them were pretty. But this is not the artist's field; there is the whole width of heaven between such capering and ogling, and the strange rhythmic gestures, and strange, rapturous, frenzied faces with which the best of the male dancers held us spellbound through a Gilbert Island ballet.

Almost from the first it was apparent that the people of the city

were defeated. I might have thought them even good, only I had the other troop before my eyes to correct my standard, and remind me continually of 'the little more, and how much it is.' Perceiving themselves worsted, the choir of Butaritari grew confused, blundered, and broke down; amid this hubbub of unfamiliar intervals I should not myself have recognised the slip, but the audience were quick to catch it, and to jeer. To crown all, the Makin company began a dance of truly superlative merit. I know not what it was about, I was too much absorbed to ask. In one act a part of the chorus, squealing in some strange falsetto, produced very much the effect of our orchestra; in another, the dancers, leaping like jumping-jacks, with arms extended, passed through and through each other's ranks with extraordinary speed, neatness, and humour. A more laughable effect I never saw; in any European theatre it would have brought the house down, and the island audience roared with laughter and applause. This filled up the measure for the rival company, and they forgot themselves and decency. After each act or figure of the ballet, the performers pause a moment standing, and the next is introduced by the clapping of hands in triplets. Not until the end of the whole ballet do they sit down, which is the signal for the rivals to stand up. But now all rules were to be broken. During the interval following on this great applause, the company of Butaritari leaped suddenly to their feet and most unhandsomely began a performance of their own. It was strange to see the men of Makin staring; I have seen a tenor in Europe stare with the same blank dignity into a hissing theatre; but presently, to my surprise, they sobered down, gave up the unsung remainder of

their ballet, resumed their seats, and suffered their ungallant adversaries to go on and finish. Nothing would suffice. Again, at the first interval, Butaritari unhandsomely cut in; Makin, irritated in turn, followed the example; and the two companies of dancers remained permanently standing, continuously clapping hands, and regularly cutting across each other at each pause. I expected blows to begin with any moment; and our position in the midst was highly unstrategical. But the Makin people had a better thought; and upon a fresh interruption turned and trooped out of the house. We followed them, first because these were the artists, second because they were guests and had been scurvily ill-used. A large population of our neighbours did the same, so that the causeway was filled from end to end by the procession of deserters; and the Butaritari choir was left to sing for its own pleasure in an empty house, having gained the point and lost the audience. It was surely fortunate that there was no one drunk; but, drunk or sober, where else would a scene so irritating have concluded without blows?

The last stage and glory of this auspicious day was of our own providing--the second and positively the last appearance of the phantoms. All round the church, groups sat outside, in the night, where they could see nothing; perhaps ashamed to enter, certainly finding some shadowy pleasure in the mere proximity. Within, about one-half of the great shed was densely packed with people. In the midst, on the royal dais, the lantern luminously smoked; chance rays of light struck out the earnest countenance of our Chinaman

grinding the hand-organ; a fainter glimmer showed off the rafters and their shadows in the hollow of the roof; the pictures shone and vanished on the screen; and as each appeared, there would run a hush, a whisper, a strong shuddering rustle, and a chorus of small cries among the crowd. There sat by me the mate of a wrecked schooner. 'They would think this a strange sight in Europe or the States,' said he, 'going on in a building like this, all tied with bits of string.'

CHAPTER VII--HUSBAND AND WIFE

The trader accustomed to the manners of Eastern Polynesia has a lesson to learn among the Gilberts. The ridi is but a spare attire; as late as thirty years back the women went naked until marriage; within ten years the custom lingered; and these facts, above all when heard in description, conveyed a very false idea of the manners of the group. A very intelligent missionary described it (in its former state) as a 'Paradise of naked women' for the resident whites. It was at least a platonic Paradise, where Lothario ventured at his peril. Since 1860, fourteen whites have perished on a single island, all for the same cause, all found where they had no business, and speared by some indignant father of a family; the figure was given me by one of their contemporaries who had been more prudent and survived. The strange persistence of these fourteen martyrs might seem to point to monomania or a series of romantic passions; gin is the more likely key. The poor buzzards sat alone in their houses by an open case; they drank; their brain was fired; they stumbled towards the nearest houses on chance; and the dart went through their liver. In place of a Paradise the trader found an archipelago of fierce husbands and of virtuous women. 'Of course if you wish to make love to them, it's the same as anywhere else,' observed a trader innocently; but he and his companions rarely so choose.

The trader must be credited with a virtue: he often makes a kind and loyal husband. Some of the worst beachcombers in the Pacific, some of the last of the old school, have fallen in my path, and some of them were admirable to their native wives, and one made a despairing widower. The position of a trader's wife in the Gilberts is, besides, unusually enviable. She shares the immunities of her husband. Curfew in Butaritari sounds for her in vain. Long after the bell is rung and the great island ladies are confined for the night to their own roof, this chartered libertine may scamper and giggle through the deserted streets or go down to bathe in the dark. The resources of the store are at her hand; she goes arrayed like a queen, and feasts delicately everyday upon tinned meats. And she who was perhaps of no regard or station among natives sits with captains, and is entertained on board of schooners. Five of these privileged dames were some time our neighbours. Four were handsome skittish lasses, gamesome like children, and like children liable to fits of pouting. They wore dresses by day, but there was a tendency after dark to strip these lendings and to career and squall about the compound in the aboriginal ridi. Games of cards were continually played, with shells for counters; their course was much marred by cheating; and the end of a round (above all if a man was of the party) resolved itself into a scrimmage for the counters. The fifth was a matron. It was a picture to see her sail to church on a Sunday, a parasol in hand, a nursemaid following, and the baby buried in a trade hat and armed with a patent feeding-bottle. The service was enlivened by her continual supervision and correction of the maid. It was

impossible not to fancy the baby was a doll, and the church some European playroom. All these women were legitimately married. It is true that the certificate of one, when she proudly showed it, proved to run thus, that she was 'married for one night,' and her gracious partner was at liberty to 'send her to hell' the next morning; but she was none the wiser or the worse for the dastardly trick. Another, I heard, was married on a work of mine in a pirated edition; it answered the purpose as well as a Hall Bible. Notwithstanding all these allurements of social distinction, rare food and raiment, a comparative vacation from toil, and legitimate marriage contracted on a pirated edition, the trader must sometimes seek long before he can be mated. While I was in the group one had been eight months on the quest, and he was still a bachelor.

Within strictly native society the old laws and practices were harsh, but not without a certain stamp of high-mindedness. Stealthy adultery was punished with death; open elopement was properly considered virtue in comparison, and compounded for a fine in land. The male adulterer alone seems to have been punished. It is correct manners for a jealous man to hang himself; a jealous woman has a different remedy--she bites her rival. Ten or twenty years ago it was a capital offence to raise a woman's ridi; to this day it is still punished with a heavy fine; and the garment itself is still symbolically sacred. Suppose a piece of land to be disputed in Butaritari, the claimant who shall first hang a ridi on the tapu-post has gained his cause, since no one can remove or touch it but himself.

The ridi was the badge not of the woman but the wife, the mark not of her sex but of her station. It was the collar on the slave's neck, the brand on merchandise. The adulterous woman seems to have been spared; were the husband offended, it would be a poor consolation to send his draught cattle to the shambles. Karaiti, to this day, calls his eight wives 'his horses,' some trader having explained to him the employment of these animals on farms; and Nanteitei hired out his wives to do mason-work. Husbands, at least when of high rank, had the power of life and death; even whites seem to have possessed it; and their wives, when they had transgressed beyond forgiveness, made haste to pronounce the formula of deprecation--I KANA KIM. This form of words had so much virtue that a condemned criminal repeating it on a particular day to the king who had condemned him, must be instantly released. It is an offer of abasement, and, strangely enough, the reverse--the imitation--is a common vulgar insult in Great Britain to this day. I give a scene between a trader and his Gilbert Island wife, as it was told me by the husband, now one of the oldest residents, but then a freshman in the group.

'Go and light a fire,' said the trader, 'and when I have brought this oil I will cook some fish.' The woman grunted at him, island fashion. 'I am not a pig that you should grunt at me,' said he.

'I know you are not a pig,' said the woman, 'neither am I your slave.'

'To be sure you are not my slave, and if you do not care to stop with me, you had better go home to your people,' said he. 'But in the mean time go and light the fire; and when I have brought this oil I will cook some fish.'

She went as if to obey; and presently when the trader looked she had built a fire so big that the cook-house was catching in flames.

'I Kana Kim!' she cried, as she saw him coming; but he recked not, and hit her with a cooking-pot. The leg pierced her skull, blood spouted, it was thought she was a dead woman, and the natives surrounded the house in a menacing expectation. Another white was present, a man of older experience. 'You will have us both killed if you go on like this,' he cried. 'She had said I Kana Kim!' If she had not said I Kana Kim he might have struck her with a caldron. It was not the blow that made the crime, but the disregard of an accepted formula.

Polygamy, the particular sacredness of wives, their semi-servile state, their seclusion in kings' harems, even their privilege of biting, all would seem to indicate a Mohammedan society and the opinion of the soullessness of woman. And not so in the least. It is a mere appearance. After you have studied these extremes in one house, you may go to the next and find all reversed, the woman the mistress, the man only the first of her thralls. The authority is not with the husband as such, nor the wife as such. It resides in

the chief or the chief-woman; in him or her who has inherited the lands of the clan, and stands to the clansman in the place of parent, exacting their service, answerable for their fines. There is but the one source of power and the one ground of dignity--rank. The king married a chief-woman; she became his menial, and must work with her hands on Messrs. Wightman's pier. The king divorced her; she regained at once her former state and power. She married the Hawaiian sailor, and behold the man is her flunkey and can be shown the door at pleasure. Nay, and such low-born lords are even corrected physically, and, like grown but dutiful children, must endure the discipline.

We were intimate in one such household, that of Nei Takauti and Nan Tok'; I put the lady first of necessity. During one week of fool's paradise, Mrs. Stevenson had gone alone to the sea-side of the island after shells. I am very sure the proceeding was unsafe; and she soon perceived a man and woman watching her. Do what she would, her guardians held her steadily in view; and when the afternoon began to fall, and they thought she had stayed long enough, took her in charge, and by signs and broken English ordered her home. On the way the lady drew from her earring-hole a clay pipe, the husband lighted it, and it was handed to my unfortunate wife, who knew not how to refuse the incommodious favour; and when they were all come to our house, the pair sat down beside her on the floor, and improved the occasion with prayer. From that day they were our family friends; bringing thrice a day the beautiful island garlands of white flowers, visiting us any evening, and

frequently carrying us down to their own maniap' in return, the woman leading Mrs. Stevenson by the hand like one child with another.

Nan Tok', the husband, was young, extremely handsome, of the most approved good humour, and suffering in his precarious station from suppressed high spirits. Nei Takauti, the wife, was getting old; her grown son by a former marriage had just hanged himself before his mother's eyes in despair at a well-merited rebuke. Perhaps she had never been beautiful, but her face was full of character, her eye of sombre fire. She was a high chief-woman, but by a strange exception for a person of her rank, was small, spare, and sinewy, with lean small hands and corded neck. Her full dress of an evening was invariably a white chemise--and for adornment, green leaves (or sometimes white blossoms) stuck in her hair and thrust through her huge earring-holes. The husband on the contrary changed to view like a kaleidoscope. Whatever pretty thing my wife might have given to Nei Takauti--a string of beads, a ribbon, a piece of bright fabric--appeared the next evening on the person of Nan Tok'. It was plain he was a clothes-horse; that he wore livery; that, in a word, he was his wife's wife. They reversed the parts indeed, down to the least particular; it was the husband who showed himself the ministering angel in the hour of pain, while the wife displayed the apathy and heartlessness of the proverbial man.

When Nei Takauti had a headache Nan Tok' was full of attention and concern. When the husband had a cold and a racking toothache the

wife heeded not, except to jeer. It is always the woman's part to fill and light the pipe; Nei Takauti handed hers in silence to the wedded page; but she carried it herself, as though the page were not entirely trusted. Thus she kept the money, but it was he who ran the errands, anxiously sedulous. A cloud on her face dimmed instantly his beaming looks; on an early visit to their maniap' my wife saw he had cause to be wary. Nan Tok' had a friend with him, a giddy young thing, of his own age and sex; and they had worked themselves into that stage of jocularity when consequences are too often disregarded. Nei Takauti mentioned her own name. Instantly Nan Tok' held up two fingers, his friend did likewise, both in an ecstasy of slyness. It was plain the lady had two names; and from the nature of their merriment, and the wrath that gathered on her brow, there must be something ticklish in the second. The husband pronounced it; a well-directed cocoa-nut from the hand of his wife caught him on the side of the head, and the voices and the mirth of these indiscreet young gentlemen ceased for the day.

The people of Eastern Polynesia are never at a loss; their etiquette is absolute and plenary; in every circumstance it tells them what to do and how to do it. The Gilbertines are seemingly more free, and pay for their freedom (like ourselves) in frequent perplexity. This was often the case with the topsy-turvy couple. We had once supplied them during a visit with a pipe and tobacco; and when they had smoked and were about to leave, they found themselves confronted with a problem: should they take or leave what remained of the tobacco? The piece of plug was taken up, it

was laid down again, it was handed back and forth, and argued over, till the wife began to look haggard and the husband elderly. They ended by taking it, and I wager were not yet clear of the compound before they were sure they had decided wrong. Another time they had been given each a liberal cup of coffee, and Nan Tok' with difficulty and disaffection made an end of his. Nei Takauti had taken some, she had no mind for more, plainly conceived it would be a breach of manners to set down the cup unfinished, and ordered her wedded retainer to dispose of what was left. 'I have swallowed all I can, I cannot swallow more, it is a physical impossibility,' he seemed to say; and his stern officer reiterated her commands with secret imperative signals. Luckless dog! but in mere humanity we came to the rescue and removed the cup.

I cannot but smile over this funny household; yet I remember the good souls with affection and respect. Their attention to ourselves was surprising. The garlands are much esteemed, the blossoms must be sought far and wide; and though they had many retainers to call to their aid, we often saw themselves passing afield after the blossoms, and the wife engaged with her own in putting them together. It was no want of only that disregard so incident to husbands, that made Nei Takauti despise the sufferings of Nan Tok'. When my wife was unwell she proved a diligent and kindly nurse; and the pair, to the extreme embarrassment of the sufferer, became fixtures in the sick-room. This rugged, capable, imperious old dame, with the wild eyes, had deep and tender qualities: her pride in her young husband it seemed that she

dissembled, fearing possibly to spoil him; and when she spoke of her dead son there came something tragic in her face. But I seemed to trace in the Gilbertines a virility of sense and sentiment which distinguishes them (like their harsh and uncouth language) from their brother islanders in the east.