



Sur le bord de la Vaitapina TAHITI

L.G. 40

The Beach at Tautira, Tahiti

Reminiscences of Stevenson in Tahiti

By MARC TIFFANY GREENE

SIR JAMES M. BARRIE, speaking to a large gathering of rather notable persons at a recent dinner in London, observed that most of them were probably writing their reminiscences, and that in so doing they would be well-advised to remember that reminiscences were of little value nowadays unless they included some recollection of Robert Louis Stevenson. Whimsical as that may have been, it was true to the extent that anyone who has anything new to tell of friendship or of association with R.L.S. is as certain to find attentive listeners now as at any time; in point of fact, rather more certain, since one would say that about everything Stevenson ever wrote or ever did of possible interest to anyone has been told and re-told. Letters have been produced from everywhere, and just the other day I saw a Honolulu newspaper which contained a photograph copy of a few congratulatory lines written from Vailima to Queen Liliuokalani, in 1891, on the occasion of her accession to the throne of Hawaii. But the period of Stevenson's life which has been discussed least of all is, it seems to me, that of the few brief, but interesting and piquant months which he spent in Tahiti, in the autumn of 1888. And although the present chief of the

village where R.L.S. spent those months remembers the white stranger of nearly forty years ago, and much of his doings and sayings, there is little likelihood of any reminiscences appearing from that quarter. Yet the chief, whose name is Timaree, is an adopted son of the chief—now dead for some years—who entertained R.L.S. at the little village of Tautira, in Tahiti. It was that chief, Oreore, who conferred upon his guest the high honour of "blood brotherhood," the deepest manifestation of affection the Tahitians could bestow. This included, naturally, the name and title, and Stevenson was always thereafter known to the natives of Tautira as "the chief Oreore," and held in equal regard with the tribal chieftain.

THE *Casco* and her party sailed from San Francisco for the South Seas on June 28, 1888. That is a well-known fact and date. But there are other facts in the connection not so well known; and I should like to depart from my main theme long enough to mention them. One of Stevenson's dreams had always been, of course, a South Sea cruise. The hire of the *Pacific* and its palm-

shaded islands was felt strongly in the San Francisco of the latter part of the last century, when there always lay at the wharves along the Embarcadero a dozen trading-schooners with their atmosphere of tropic seas and exotic lands. About those wharves has lingered and dreamed many a wanderer; and their romantic appeal to R.L.S. was potent. His determination some day to cruise the South Seas was no doubt born among the San Francisco wharves. But his frail health barred any possibility of joining the crew of a trading vessel, which would have been the average wanderer's logical course. So, then, when material conditions permitted, on his second visit to America, Stevenson chartered the *Casco* for the South Pacific cruise. But this came very near not happening, and literature quite as nearly lost many notable South Sea stories and sketches.

STEVENSON, or rather S. S. McClure on his behalf, wrote from New York to friends in San Francisco to charter and fit out a suitable yacht for a long voyage in the Pacific. But such a project was not so easily carried out as one might

fancy, even then; and a thorough search of the Bay revealed nothing suitable for the proposed cruise. Some time passed, and R.L.S., having become impatient, concluded to abandon the whole idea, and to make a trip to the West Indies instead. For that purpose McClure was already negotiating for a yacht in New York, and Stevenson wrote to San Francisco that he should not come west after all. But just at that moment the *Casco* was discovered, having recently arrived in San Francisco. "Have found boat" was wired to New York, and Stevenson promptly telegraphed back "Starting at once." The West Indies yacht had practically been chartered, and McClure was keen for a trip to the Caribbean, but the instant R.L.S. learned that the South Sea cruise was possible after all, he had no heart for anything else. All of which I have on the authority of Mr. Charles G. Yale, who is at present an honorary life member, and librarian, of the Bohemian Club, in San Francisco. And, something more which has never been related, Mr. Yale, who was at that time a well-known journalist and also an official of the Coast and Geodetic Survey Service, was the very man who car-

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