

THE TRADER'S WIFE

Vivid Adventures of a White Trader in Samoa.

BY J. F. ROSE-SOLEY.

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"NO, SHE is not my wife," said the old trader as he glanced at the pretty young Samoan woman who had just entered and greeted the strange papalagi with a graceful talofa all.

He was not at all offended at my random suggestion. It was quite excusable, for in these regions a trader without a native wife is a phenomenon. But I might, if I had used my faculties of observation, have known better. There was no trace of womanly care in the dingy, unkempt little dining room, the wooden walls were dirty and bare of adornment, the table was littered with old books and ragged, much worn newspapers, while the floor looked as if it were a stranger to the broom.

The girl, her smiling greetings over, squatted cross legged on the floor and busied herself preparing a bowl of kava, which, of course, had been suggested as soon as I arrived. An ample lava-lava of blue checkered stuff was wrapped around her loins, her full, maidenly bosom was partially concealed by the black silk handkerchief knotted carelessly over her shoulders, and a single flower of the red hibiscus lit up her long, carefully dressed black hair.

It was the ordinary native costume, such as any girl will put on when called in to make kava for a stranger. But she wore it with an air of grace, everything she had on was new and clean; she looked certainly more favored than her dingy Samoan sisters who passed to and from among the huts outside or hung around the edge of the veranda striving to obtain a glimpse of the new arrival. They could not get any nearer, because the veranda was inclosed with a high fence of barbed wire, a device of the trader to keep the too curious natives at a distance.

I watched the girl closely, but the trader took no notice. He seemed absorbed in his sulufu, or native cigarette, which gave forth great clouds of smoke at each vigorous puff. The lithe, slender wrists, with muscles like fine drawn wire, were wringing out the fau, or strainer of bark fiber, with which the pounded kava root is separated from the water. The viselike grip on the fiber never ceased until every drop of juice had been expressed, and then, with a pretty, graceful gesture, she tossed the strainer over her shoulder to a boy standing outside, who shook the dry dust free and threw it back.

Again and again the process was repeated. With the utmost care every grain of sediment was drawn from the bowl, and the dark brown liquid, nauseous, but refreshing, was ready.

The first cup seemed to arouse the old man's dormant loquacity. "She is a strange girl," he remarked, letting his eyes rest for a moment on the kava maiden. "Not like any of the other Samoans. I can't make her out. She never goes gadding about with the other girls nor flirts with the young men. She just stays quietly at home and refuses all the suitors who ask for her hand. She might have been married a dozen times during the past year had she chosen."

"Perhaps"—and I hesitated. He nodded. "Yes, perhaps she has an eye on this establishment. People do say so, and they chaff me about the girl. But she's nothing to me. She just washes the clothes and looks after me. That is all."

There was no trace of unseemly levity in his tone. I waited in respectful silence, for he was one of those kindly men who wear their hearts upon their sleeves, and I knew that he would, if left to do it in his own way, tell me the tragedy of his life.

He took another bowl of kava, rolled a fresh cigarette and sighed. I smoked



"There is my wife," he said.

patiently. Then he rose and, opening a small writing desk which stood in a corner, drew from it an old and faded photograph.

"There is my wife," he said. It was just an ordinary common picture taken by a cheap photographer and, thanks to the climate, rapidly fading into obscurity. One could make out the features of a Samoan woman, rather stout and showily dressed, a baby in her arms and a little girl of about 2 holding on by the skirts.

As a work of art it was beneath contempt, but the old man handled it reverently, and, before he spoke again, laid the picture back in its receptacle. "It's fading quickly," he remarked sorrowfully, "though I keep it from

the light all I can. It was taken by a traveling photographer in New Britain just before— But it's all I have left of her. There's only the boy and I alone now."

A smile lit up his thin face. "Here he is," he exclaimed, as a fine little fellow of about 10 rushed into the room. "Faa-mole-mole, pa," began the youngster, in that strange mixture of Samoan and English which half caste boys speak in this country. Then he stopped, noticing my presence.

"All right, Jacky," said the father, giving the curly head a kindly pat, "go and say talofa to the gentleman." And bashfully the boy, who had not seen a strange white man for months, held out his hand, and then took the first opportunity of escaping from the room to join his playmates outside.

"He's all I have left," continued the trader, "and I'm doing my best to bring him up as an Englishman. But what can I do here? He must play with the Samoan boys, or with no one, and I cannot afford to send him away to school. The little girl's better off; she's gone with a missionary to Sydney, and he takes good care of her. She'll grow up into a white lady, I suppose, some day, and won't know her old father."

There was a long pause, and we drank more kava and smoked in silence. Then the old gentleman became reminiscent.

"She was 3 years old when the old woman died, and the boy here, well, he could just toddle about, holding on to his mother's skirts. There were some who blamed me for taking her to that outlandish New Britain, where the people are real savages, and not civilized, like here. But what was I to do? I'd been trading for McAllister & Co.—you've heard of them, I suppose—when the firm broke up, and I was left stranded on the beach. I hadn't had a chance to save much, and there were the wife and child to keep. When I got the offer to go to New Britain and open up some new trading stations, I jumped at it, without thinking over-much of the risk."

"I was a fool, I know, and now—if I could only take it all back!" He took another cup of kava to hide his emotion.

I could think of nothing appropriate to say, so I sat and waited, while the girl, squatting on the floor, looked up in her master's face and thoughtfully began to prepare a second bowl of kava.

At last he resumed the broken narrative: "We got on all right as long as we were at the head station, where there were several whites, and the natives had in a way learned some manners. But when I went away to distant parts of the island to open up new stations I began to feel sorry that I'd brought the missis with me. But she would not hear of going back, not she! She swore she'd stick to me through thick and thin, and so she did till the end."

"But, to cut a long story short, we opened up three or four stations safely enough. We used to go, just ourselves, in a boat with our boxes of trade and a crew of four boys from the Duke of York's Isle. They were more afraid of being eaten than we were, so they stuck to us pretty close."

"It was the cheek of the thing did it, and I wonder now, when I look back, that we were not killed and cooked a dozen times over. The natives simply could not understand a white man coming among them like that all alone, and they were so astonished that they forgot to attack us. They were a poor lot of savages, going about quite naked, and if you gave one of them a piece of print he would hang it around his neck and walk away as proud as Punch. They were always fighting among themselves and thought no more of killing a man than we would of shooting a pigeon. Why, I've seen a young fellow executed there just for stealing a cocoanut off a chief's tree, and if they had dared they would have killed me as readily for the sake of my trade."

"They hadn't much to buy goods with, either—a little copra and some beche demer and pearl shells. They wanted axes and tomahawks and knives; but, most of all, they wanted tobacco pipes—common clay tobacco pipes. What they did with them I don't know, for they did not buy any tobacco; kept them as a sort of idol or fetish, I suppose. They would sell everything they had to get a pipe, and especially a black one, and it was because of those cursed pipes that I lost my wife, and nearly lost my own life too. Perhaps it might have been as well," he added despondently.

"Nonsense, man," I interposed, as cheerfully as I could, "but how did it happen? Tell me all about it." "It was the fourth place I was at, I think, a wild part, where no missionary had ever dared to set his foot. We were a long way from the main station, and I had to depend upon myself entirely. It was up at the head of a deep bay, and there were a lot of mangroves, I remember, growing along the beach, and then you went up a steep bank 10 or 12 feet high, on top of which was the village."

"Well, the chief was very glad to see me. He said they wanted a white trader badly and invited me to stay. So I pitched on a likely spot in the middle of a grove of palms close to the beach, you may be sure. We soon ran up a rough bamboo house, and I got the wife and children, for there were two by this time, into it. Then we carried the goods ashore, hauled up the boat, and I sat down to wait for my customers."

"I might have been waiting till this day for all the business I did. The chief was very pleasant and fair spoken and took all the presents I gave him with the greatest condescension. But when it came to trading I found the people were so poor that they'd nothing to trade with. I got about 100 pounds of copra and a little pearl shell in a week. That was all. I soon made up my mind that the place was not

good enough for my business, and besides, from one or two little things I'd noticed, I came to the conclusion that it would be healthier to leave as soon as possible.

"It would not do, I knew, to appear in a hurry to get away, so I took matters easily and gradually packed up the trade and got everything ready for starting. But quiet as I was about it the natives were too smart for me. They saw what I was up to, and the word went round the village that the white man was not to be allowed to go away and to take all that lovely trade with him. I was in a tight place, and I knew it, and the boat's crew just sat shivering in their naked feet, for they felt that their fate would be the same as mine."

"But the old woman was not afraid at all. It was wonderful the way she kept up, with the two babies to look after, and all cooking and work of the house to do. As for me, I was pretty well worn out with watching, and did not get a wink of sleep for three nights. The natives would come around friendly enough during the daytime and look at our goods, and we had to treat them pleasant, for it would never do to let them see that we were afraid. But at night we had to be all on guard, for we never knew at what moment a rush might be made. I had raised a kind of rough stockade of bamboo about the



At the same instant she fell.

house, and within this I posted the four men of the crew, each with a gun. I had a Winchester myself, but what good would these arms be if the natives should make a rush in a body on us? I didn't dare sleep, I can tell you. I was up and around every few minutes to see that the guards were awake and keeping a bright lookout. At last, on the third night, we had everything packed, and I made up my mind to start at once. The boys got the whale-boat out from the shed under which she had been lying, and together we pushed her down the steep bank into the bay. But we had no sooner launched her than she filled, the water was up to her thwart, and there was nothing for it but to haul her ashore again."

"I could not make it out at all, for a week before she had been a perfectly sound and seaworthy boat, and I knew she could not have dried up so much in the time. Still there was no doubt about her leaking, and I soon found out the reason. Those devils of natives had been at her, and some time, it must have been during the previous night, had managed to knock a lot of holes in her bottom. They were quiet over the work, too, for, though the boat was close by, we never heard a sound. They had stayed in the planks with the heads of their stone axes. It was a good job I had not sold them any iron tomahawks, or else the boat would have been cut to pieces beyond repair. It was bad enough, but, as the wrecked craft lay there in the mangrove swamp, I saw a glimmer of hope. If we could patch her up we might still get away. If we couldn't—well, I knew none of us would see another dawn. It was touch and go, but there was just a chance."

"I posted the men on guard all around the palisade, with strict injunctions to fire at every native they saw approaching. Then the wife and I—and she was a brave little woman—set to work. We collected all the old meat tins we could find about the place, and as we had been living on nothing but tinned stuff for the past week, there were plenty. I made a fire and melted the solder out of the tins, so that I had a number of strips of clean metal to use as patches. It was hard work, I can tell you, lying on my back in the mud amid the prickly mangrove stumps nailing little bits of tin on each broken place. We put the children to sleep in the bottom of the boat, while my wife held the candle for me. How many hours I toiled I don't know, but I thought I would never have finished. Now and again an alligator—and there are plenty in those parts—would crawl out of the water to see what was going on or perhaps in search of his supper, but the wife would dash the light in his face, and he would go back quicker than he came."

"The first flush of dawn was in the sky by the time I had finished. I was stiff and sore and worn out, but there was no time to think about these things. We launched the boat, and she seemed pretty tight, so I had the men bundle the trade boxes into her and make ready to shove off, while the wife and I went up to the house to get the few little personal effects we had not yet carried down to the beach."

"I remember, just as well as if I could see it now, scrambling up the slippery bank and making our way to the little house. We were careless, perhaps, but we did not anticipate any attack. I walked straight up to the hut. The door was closed, and I was going to push it open when my wife,

who was just behind, caught me round the waist and threw me backward with all her force. She was a strong woman, and I was weak and tired, and I rolled over like a baby. At the same instant she fell, a dozen spears through her body, the door burst open, and a crowd of naked savages dashed out and made a rush for the boat. They thought me dead or badly wounded, I suppose; but, at any rate, they did not stop to look they were in such a hurry to get the goods, and the oversight saved my life. I yelled out to the boat's crew to shove off, and then I crawled up to where my wife was lying. It was all over with her, I could see at a glance, and all she could whisper was, 'Vave, vave, run quick and save yourself!'"

"Perhaps I should have staid. I do not know; but, at any rate, I had no time to reason over the matter. There were the savages coming back from the beach full of rage and disappointment at finding the boat out of their reach. I crawled to the right and made a circle round to gain the shore, and luckily I got away unobserved. The boat was lying 100 yards off, and, fortunately, the men had had the sense to wait and see if we escaped. I swam off to them and found the children all well and the native boys shivering with fear. But a kick or two soon roused them, and I had the boat pulled as close inshore as I dared."

"The savages were rushing about and shouting and making a tremendous row. Evidently they were searching for me, and they had lit great torches of dry cocoanut leaves, which showed them up as bright as day. This was just what I wanted, for I emptied my rifle into the midst of them, and the boys gave them a volley with theirs. They scattered like magic in every direction. I made a rush up the shore and carried the wife down, for I was beginning by this time to feel a bit ashamed of myself for having left her so quickly. But what could I do? My gun was in the boat, and if I had stopped I should only have been killed, too, and the children would have been left without a father. I found her lying in the same spot, but she was dead, and the wretches had even tied her up ready to carry her away."

"By the time I had lain her in the boat it was nearly daylight, and I thought I would wait a bit and see it through. My blood was up, and I felt ready for any devilment. I took a big drink of schnapps and gave the boys a strong dose too. This, as they were not used to liquor, made them quite mad, and they wanted to land at once and wipe out the whole settlement. But I thought it wise to rest awhile, and, with my rifle on my knee, I sat still and looked at the dead woman as she lay on the bottom boards of the boat and at the little children sleeping so peacefully by her side. We pulled the boat off just out of range of their spears. By and by, when the sun was up, a great big savage stole down to the beach to have a look round, and I potted him as neatly as I would have done a wild pig—then another and another until they began to see that the business was a dangerous one and gave it up. Having scared them sufficiently, we anchored the boat close in and waited ashore. It took me half a day to do it, but I cleaned that town out thoroughly. Their houses were little bits of huts, not like our fine Samoan dwellings, raised off the ground on poles and each fenced in as if they were always afraid of attack. Most of the people had cleared out into the bush, but any that I found I shot, and I burned every hut in the place. I don't think they will forget me there in a hurry. Next day I buried the wife at the head station and resigned my billet. I had had enough of New Britain."

The old man stopped suddenly. "Pass the kava silel," he said to the girl, who was still squatting patiently on the floor. "And now you will understand, young man, why I do not wish to marry again."

Unburied Coffins.
A common and shocking sight in China is the unburied coffin. It is everywhere. Every village has its houses for storing coffins for which no suitable burial place has been found, and whole hamlets are given over to this ghastly use. The interment depending on the good will of the wind and water devil, Fong-Shul, and his favor being closely intertwined with that of the priest who is employed to choose the site, it sometimes happens that the ancestral remains occupy a corner of the dwelling house for 50 years before the two powers that be can agree upon a proper resting place. Even after the bones are laid in the ground it is by no means certain that they are finally disposed of, for if the relatives have money the priest is apt to discover that the site is not a good one, or perhaps Fong-Shul has changed his mind, and up comes the ancestor. If the coffin has decayed, the fleshless bones are stowed in a covered jar, and these frightful objects, awaiting reinterment, dot the country thickly.

They Tethered Him.
Edale is a primitive village in the midmost depths of "The Peak," in Derbyshire. The inhabitants are all of the roughest type and keep as much as possible out of sight of strangers. The following excellent story is told of one of them who, some 50 years ago, was so adventurous as to make a journey to Sheffield, about 20 miles distant from the village: When he set off to return, it was raining hard, and his host lent him an umbrella, opening it himself, in order to save his friend all possible trouble. A fortnight afterward this man of Edale was seen to return in the finest possible weather, but with the umbrella still up.

"Why," he explained, "we had a pack of troubles w' un. There wasn't a doorway in the village we could get un through, so we tethered un in a field."—Stare Moments.

Impression Correct.
"Dinguss, didn't I lend you \$10 a month or two ago?"
"Shadbolit, you did. If you had a good business head on your shoulders, you would be able to remember a loan like that with absolute certainty and wouldn't have to ask anybody about it."
Frowns and passes on.—Exchange.

Up in the Air.
This cyclone story is vouched for by the Minneapolis Better Way. It is that a cow which was picketed on a rope was picked up by the cyclone and carried up the length of her rope, about 60 feet, where she remained until the storm had passed, when she quietly climbed down the rope and resumed her grazing.

Scene Painting.
A good scene painter may get anywhere from \$400 to \$1,000 for a scene. The average price paid to the best half dozen scene painters for a scene is \$500. But there are a great many more scenes painted for \$100 than \$500.

As soon as a married man gets a comfortable home built he begins to worry his wife by talking about selling it.—Indianapolis Journal.

There is nobody quite so busy as the editor who tries to publish a ten page newspaper in a four page town.—Washington Post.

He Lifted the Ticker.

A London detective visiting Glasgow met a Scotch police official on the street and in the talk that followed spoke contemptuously of the ability of Scotch thieves as compared with the English experts.

Taking this as an aspersion cast on the astuteness of the Scottish police as well, the Glasgow detective was nettled and thirsted for revenge. Looking around, he espied a little fellow who had been dogging them and who was known as an expert pickpocket. Crossing the street he addressed the boy, and, pointing to the retreating figure of the English detective, he asked if he would know him again.

"Aye," replied the boy. "What about it?"

"I want you to lift his ticker. He says no one in Glasgow can relieve him of it."

"Ah, it's a' richt. See ony green?"

"Honor bright, Tommy! I'll give you half a crown when you deliver up the watch to me."

"Ye will? An what else?"

"Nothing else."

"Let's see, then. I'm to lift the ticker, an you're to pay half a crown for't on the spot?"

"Yes, that's it."

"An wad ye ken it if ye seen it?"

"I would among a thousand."

"Is that it, then?" And the boy, diving into his trousers pocket, displayed the identical watch and explained that he had secured it "while the gent was chaffin about the prigs."

Oriental Punishments.
The heathen Chinese deems the desecration of graves one of the most unpardonable of crimes, and, according to law, any man finding another in the act of robbing a graveyard may legally kill the villain on the spot without fear of consequences.

If a Turkish baker palms off a loaf of bread on you that is proved to be of less weight than it is represented, you can instruct a policeman to nail the defaulter by one of his ears to the door of his shop so as to be in full view of the passersby. The poor wretch will then be provided with a sharp dagger or knife, with which he can cut himself free so soon as he can summon up the necessary courage required for the operation of self maiming.

In many of the oriental countries, where precious stones are looked upon as well nigh sacred objects, it is no uncommon thing for a jewel robber to be punished with death. In Tibet the penalty for falling from your horse when taking part in any military operations or public athletics is death.

One writer recalls how he saw a man shot in Montenegro for appearing at a review wearing a stained uniform.

Sacrificed the Mustache.

Thomas B. Reed at one time wore a mustache of a few straggling hairs, so often seen on the upper lip of extremely fleshy men. How Mr. Reed parted with his hairs, a certain barber in the house of representatives who attended the gentleman's wants:

"One day the big man from Maine settled himself in the barber's chair and requested a shave. When the operation was completed, Mr. Reed straightened himself and asked, 'Have you any of that old fashioned pomade to wax mustaches with?'"

"The barber hustled among his pots and jars and produced a French preparation in vogue a quarter of a century ago and then proceeded to wax the ends of the Maine statesman's few wirelike hairs.

"When the man of snapshot sentences arose and contemplated himself in the glass, he turned to the astonished barber and said, 'Cut this blanked blank mustache off, for you have made me look like a confounded catfish.'"—New England Home Magazine.

Old Teeth Bought.

The following curious advertisement recently appeared in a London paper: "Old False Teeth Bought.—Many ladies and gentlemen have by their old or disused false teeth, which might as well be turned into money. Messrs. R. D. and J. B., of — (established since 1833), buy old false teeth. If you send your teeth to them, they will remit you by return post the utmost value; or if preferred they will make you the best offer and hold the teeth over for your reply. If reference is necessary, apply to Messrs. —, bankers, Ipswich."

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