

**ROBERT LOUIS  
STEVENSON**

---

A Footnote to History:  
Eight Years of Trouble in  
Samoa

## A FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY

---

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850-1894) spent his childhood in Scotland. He later travelled widely in Europe and the United States, and became admired for his style, imagination and narrative skill as a writer. In search of warmer climes and better health, Stevenson and his family eventually travelled to the Pacific, settling in Samoa where he became known as Tusitala, the teller of tales. Stevenson died there four years later, and was buried on Mount Vaea, 'Upolu.

MALAMA MELEISEA is an historian and the Director of the Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

## THE PASIFIKA LIBRARY

### EDITORIAL BOARD

<b>Brij V Lal</b>	<b>Robert C Kiste</b>	<b>Malama Meleisea</b>
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University	Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i	Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland

THE PASIFIKA LIBRARY emphasises the variety and depth of literature from the Pacific Islands. Works on environment, people, history and travel in this fascinating region are offered with fresh and insightful commentaries by contemporary Pacific writers and academics. Much like the spirits of the Pacific Islands themselves, each volume in the Pasifika Library has a character and a force of its own.

Pasifika Press thanks  
the Alexander Turnbull Library,  
Wellington, New Zealand,  
for supplying many of the photographs  
in this book.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



A FOOTNOTE  
TO HISTORY

EIGHT YEARS OF TROUBLE  
IN SAMOA

*Arma*

*Nondum in expiatis uncta cruoribus,*

*Periculosæ plenum opus aleæ,*

*Tractas et incedis per ignes*

*Suppositos cineri doloso.*



This edition: © Pasifika Press 1996  
Postal Address: PO Box 68446,  
Newton, Auckland, New Zealand  
Email: [press@pasifika.co.nz](mailto:press@pasifika.co.nz)  
© Introduction: Malama Meleisea 1996

First edition published in 1892.

*All rights reserved.*

ISBN 0 908597 24 X

Spellings of Samoan and other Pacific Islands words and names  
have been left in Stevenson's original form.

Published with the assistance  
of the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund.

Photographs supplied by the Alexander Turnbull Library,  
Wellington, New Zealand; the Auckland Institute and Museum  
and the Writer's Museum, Edinburgh.

Cover design: Christine Hansen  
Editing and layout: Raewyn Leong  
Printed in Hong Kong by Acorn Press

## CONTENTS

Introduction by Malama Meleisea	vii
Preface	xvii
Map	xviii
CHAPTER I	
Elements of Discord: Native	1
CHAPTER II	
Elements of Discord: Foreign	10
CHAPTER III	
The Sorrows of Laupepa 1883 - September 1887	20
CHAPTER IV	
Brandeis September 1887 - August 1888	42
CHAPTER V	
The Battle of Matautu September 1888	56
CHAPTER VI	
Last Exploits of Becker September - November 1888	67
CHAPTER VII	
The Samoan Camps November 1888	84

CHAPTER VIII	
Affairs of Lauilii and Fangalii	92
<i>November – December 1888</i>	
CHAPTER IX	
“Furor Consularis”	106
<i>December 1888 – March 1889</i>	
CHAPTER X	
The Hurricane	118
<i>March 1889</i>	
CHAPTER XI	
Laupepa and Mataafa	130
<i>1889 – 1892</i>	
Index	156

## INTRODUCTION

Malama Meleisea

*A FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY* is Robert Louis Stevenson's account of the extraordinarily complicated political and military events which occurred in Samoa between 1882 and 1892. These events were ultimately to seal Samoa's destiny and lead to its colonisation in 1900. Stevenson, an internationally renowned writer, arrived in Samoa with his family in 1889. He was seeking a home in the tropics because his health was badly affected by the cold climate of his homeland. Like most members of the settler community, he became deeply involved in the political struggles of the period. He supported one of Samoa's paramount chiefs, Mata'afa Iosefo.

Stevenson wrote popular tales of mystery and adventure, but his writing style is admired to the present day. Samoa appealed to his romantic sense; as he indicates in the opening chapter, his imagination was captured by the Samoans. He compared our values and customs with those of his ancestral Scots in earlier centuries, and he lived at Vailima as he imagined a Scottish lord might have done in ancient times.

There seems no doubt that among those Samoans whose cause he supported, he was liked and respected. And he was a powerful ally; his celebrity status meant that his letters to the *Times* of London on events in Samoa were widely read and may have been influential in Britain. Like his letters, this book aims to inform the outside world of the injustices and misunderstandings brought about by misguided and often predatory foreign interference in Samoan affairs. With humour and insight, but