

**THE EBB TIDE, A
TRIO & QUARTETTE**

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The ebb tide, a trio & quartette by Robert Louis Stevenson & Lloyd Osbourne

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON & LLOYD OSBOURNE

**THE EBB TIDE, A
TRIO & QUARTETTE**

THE EBB TIDE
A TRIO & QUARTETTE

BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
&
LLOYD OSBOURNE

"THERE IS A TIME
IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN."



STONE & KIMBALL
CHICAGO & CAMBRIDGE

M DCCCXC IV

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AND LLOYD OSBOURNE

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The Ebb Tide.

A TRIO AND QUARTETTE.

PART I.—THE TRIO.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT ON THE BEACH.

THROUGHOUT the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate. Some have mounted the steps of thrones and owned islands and navies. Others, again, must marry for a livelihood; a strapping, merry, chocolate-colored dame supports them in sheer idleness; and dressed like natives, but still retaining some foreign element of gait or attitude, still perhaps with some relic (such as a single eye-glass) of the officer and gentleman, they sprawl in palm-leaf verandas, and entertain an island audience with memoirs of the music-hall. And there are still others,

less pliable, less capable, less fortunate, perhaps less base, who continue, even in these isles of plenty, to lack bread.

At the far end of the town of Papeete, three such men were seated on the beach, under a *purao* tree.

It was late. Long ago the band had broken up and marched musically home, a motley troop of men and women, merchant clerks and navy officers dancing in its wake, arms about waist and crowned with garlands. Long ago darkness and silence had gone from house to house about the tiny pagan city. Only the street lamps shone on, making a glow-worm halo in the umbrageous alleys, or drawing a tremulous image on the waters of the port. A sound of snoring ran among the piles of lumber by the Government pier. It was wafted ashore from the graceful, clipper-bottomed schooners, where they lay moored close in like dinghies, and their crews were stretched upon the deck, under the open sky, or huddled in a rude tent amidst the disorder of merchandise.

But the men under the *purao* had no thought of sleep. The same temperature in England would have passed without remark in summer; but it was bitter cold for the South Seas. Inanimate nature knew it, and the bottle of cocoanut oil stood frozen in every bird-cage house about the island; and the men knew it, and shivered. They wore flimsy cotton clothes, the same they had sweated in by day and run the gantlet of the tropic showers; and to

complete their evil case, they had had no breakfast to mention, less dinner, and no supper at all.

In the telling South Sea phrase, these three men were *on the beach*. Common calamity had brought them acquainted, as the three most miserable English-speaking creatures in Tahiti; and beyond their misery, they knew next to nothing of each other, not even their true names. For each had made a long apprenticeship in going downward; and each, at some stage of the descent, had been shamed into the adoption of an *alias*. And yet not one of them had figured in a court of justice. Two were men of kindly virtues; and one, as he sat and shivered under the *purao*, had a tattered Virgil in his pocket.

Certainly, if money could have been raised upon the book, Robert Herrick would long ago have sacrificed that last possession. But the demand for literature, which is so marked a feature in some parts of the South Seas, extends not so far as the dead tongues; and the Virgil, which he could not exchange against a meal, had often consoled him in his hunger. He would study it, as he lay with tightened belt on the floor of the old calaboose, seeking favorite passages, and finding new ones only less beautiful because they lacked the consecration of remembrance. Or he would pause on random country walks, sit on the pathside, gazing over the sea, on the mountains of Eimeo, and dip into the *Æneid*, seeking *sortes*. And if the oracle (as is the way of oracles) replied with no very cer-

tain or encouraging voice, visions of England, at least, would throng upon the exile's memory, — the busy schoolroom; the green playing-fields; holidays at home, and the perennial roar of London; and the fireside, and the white head of his father. For it is the destiny of those grave, restrained, and classic writers, with whom we make enforced and often painful acquaintanceship at school, to pass into the blood and become native in the memory; so that a phrase of Virgil speaks not so much of Mantua or Augustus, but of English places and the student's own irrevocable youth.

Robert Herrick was the son of an intelligent, active, and ambitious man, small partner in a considerable London house. Hopes were conceived of the boy; he was sent to a good school, gained there an Oxford scholarship, and proceeded in course to the Western university. With all his talent and taste (and he had much of both) Robert was deficient in consistency and intellectual manhood, wandered in by-paths of study, worked at music or at metaphysics when he should have been at Greek, and took at last a paltry degree. Almost at the same time the London house was disastrously wound up; Mr. Herrick must begin the world again as a clerk in a strange office, and Robert relinquish his ambitions, and accept with gratitude a career that he detested and despised. He had no head for figures, no interest in affairs, detested the constraint of hours, and despised the aims and the success of merchants. To grow rich