

**ISLAND NIGHTS'  
ENTERTAINMENTS**

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Island nights' entertainments by Robert Louis Stevenson

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**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**

**ISLAND NIGHTS'  
ENTERTAINMENTS**



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THE BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION  
OF THE WORKS OF  
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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ENTERTAINMENTS

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*BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION*

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ISLAND NIGHTS'  
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BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

*WITH A PREFACE BY MRS. STEVENSON*

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
1917

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1812-1813

P R E F A C E  
TO  
THE BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION

**A**MONG our English friends whom we first met in Bournemouth were Sir Percy Shelley, the son of the poet, and his charming wife. They lived at Boscombe Manor, in a rambling, comfortable house set in the midst of trees and lawn and shrubbery, where Sir Percy was always seriously busied in play of a more or less practical nature. He even worked with carpenter's tools — much to the disgust of his butler, who once gave warning for that reason, his dignity being unable to stand the strain of his master's low occupation. Sir Percy also took photographs in a studio he helped to build with his own hands. For backgrounds for his pictures he painted out-of-door scenes in the most realistic manner, his sitters being

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posed on a piece of canvas made to represent a greensward.

One wing of the house had been turned into a private theatre holding about three hundred guests. All the stage accessories were planned and many of them made by Sir Percy. Both he and Lady Shelley took part in the plays — usually old-fashioned melodramas — that they produced for the pleasure and amusement of their friends. Of these melodramas Sir Percy had a large assortment, principally by an author, even then almost forgotten, named Fitzball. After Sir Percy's death (my husband's dedication to *The Master of Ballantrae* reached him just before the end) the little theatre being closed forever, Lady Shelley gave the stock of Fitzball melodramas to my husband.

Fitzball, following the example of greater dramatists, took ideas for his plays where he could find them, and after changing or elaborating them as the occasion required, reproduced them as melodramas. One of these, adapted from an old German legend, caught my husband's fancy; he spoke of it several times when we were living in

Honolulu, as being, in its ingenuity and imaginative qualities, singularly like the Hawaiian tales. No doubt Fitzball's melodrama differed widely from the original *German Bottle Imp*; certainly there was very little resemblance between his version and my husband's story that was meant to appeal more particularly to the native mind. The tale was first published in England in *Black and White*, and then translated by one of the missionaries into the Samoan tongue for the *Sulu* (the torch of Samoa) under the title of *O Le Fangu Aitu*, running in weekly numbers as a serial.

*The Bottle Imp* was the first piece of fiction ever offered to the Samoan people, its publication raising the circulation of the paper to an unprecedented extent. Samoans are in the habit of speaking in parables; they found many different morals in *The Bottle Imp*, some very ingeniously extracted. Yet the story was so circumstantial in its details, and its incidents seemed so like reality, that doubts would occasionally assail some inquiring mind; perhaps, after all, it might be true, and the magic bottle still be in existence. We wondered