**KAVA DRINKING AMONG THE SAMOANS**

S. Percy Smith

Guests on arriving, like ourselves, approach the house slowly in order to allow the women time to spread mats on the gravelly floor of the house.  We always enter at the side of the house, never at the end, for that is the place of honor reserved to the chief of our hosts, and in this country it is becoming to appear modest.  If the chiefs are at home they advance and shake hands, saying, *"Talofa"* or *" Talofa-lava,"* meaning "love to you" or "great love to you." every one then sits down cross-legged, the *Tulafale* on Mr. Churchill's left, I on the right, and one of us sitting with his back against one of the double posts supporting the side of the house, for that is the proper position, not against one of the single posts. It is very rude to sit with one's legs pointing towards anyone else in the house, because the soles of the feet are thereby seen. If a change of position is required on account of the fatigue of sitting cross-legged, then the proper thing to do is to draw up one of the floor mats over the feet.

On Tupuola's arrival and that of some other chiefs, the usual complimentary speeches were uttered which I copy here from the book of "Fa'alupega," kindly sent me by my travelling companion.  There are many other "sayings" applicable to this village, but one group will suffice. These are spoken by the *Tulafale* on behalf of Mr. Churchill, but I have not got the responses of our host. A considerable interval occurs between the utterance of each sentence, while all present sit cross-legged in solemn silence:—

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| "Tulou-na a 'oe le Aua-luma". | "Saving the grace of thee, the Aua-luma." |
| "Tulou-na a Lau Susuga a Tauiti ‘iti alii tua ‘i le itu o Matua" | "Saving the grace of thy Susuga Tau-iti'iti who art the chief upstanding among the elders" |
| "Tulou-na a alo tutusa o le Mata-‘afa" | "Saving the grace of equal sons of'Mata*-*'afa." |
| "Tulou-na a Tama a pa'a." | "Saving the grace of child of the crab."  |
| "Tulou-na a le Tama aiga." | "Saving the grace of the child of the family" |

Our *Tulafale* now produces a piece of *kava* root, and creeping outside the limits of the house, presents it to the *Tulafale* of our host, at the same time making many depreciatory remarks as to the quality of the root.  He says, "I present this root with many apologies, for it is of so execrable a kind that it is not worthy of this company of chiefs."  Our host's Tulafale takes the root, examines it carefully, and says "Why, surely this is the finest specimen of *kava* root I have ever seen; many, many thanks."  If the visitors have not roots with them, the host’s *Tulafale* comes quietly behind the guests' *Tulafale* and gives him a root.  The root is now handed over to the Aua-luma, or bevy of young maidens, who always accompany the *Taupou* and aid her in making the *kava*, entertaining the guests, etc.  Three or four of these Ladies were sitting in a row on the opposite side of the house to that occupied by our party, with the *kava* bowl, or *tanoa*, in front of them.  The girls now proceed to wash their hands in coconut shells which are slung two and two together, the water being poured into the open hands by one of the others.  After this the girls very carefully rinse out their mouths and fill them with fragments of the *kava* root which has been pounded up on a stone for the purpose.  These fragments they proceed to masticate until reduced to a pulp, which is then cast into the bowl. The above is the proper and ancient method of preparing the root, but it is now more generally pounded up with a stone.  The bowl, or *tanoa*, is made of wood, circular in form, and generally about eighteen inches in diameter and six inches deep; it stands on six legs, and is usually highly polished; the inside is of a light purple colour caused by the stain of the *kava*; and this is also the case with the cups made of half-coconut shells very highly polished and often carved.

The chief girl, (but not the *Taupou)* now takes a long whisp of white hibiscus bark *(Fau,* or *Purau*) and with it works the pulp backwards and forwards in the bowl for some time; then gathers up the fibre in a roll and twists it in a graceful manner, always the same, to strain out the liquor into the bowl, water having been added to the pulp previously. She then hands the whisp to one of the attendant girls who flicks out all the insoluble matter of the *kava* root. This is repeated several times until nothing is left in the bowl but a soap-sud coloured liquid, which is now ready for serving.

By this time the *Taupou* has taken up a position in front of the girls, and taking one of the cups she fills it with the prepared *kava* from the bowl, which she does by dipping into it a whisp of fibre and twisting it draws the liquid into the cup.  But before doing so she says:

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| " 'Ava\* taute i le afiafi, | "*Kava* prepared for the evening,  |
| 'Ava taute i le taeao." | *Kava* prepared for the morning*."*  |
|    The presiding chief says: |  |
| " 'Ia faasoasoa ma sue foi." | "Make it ready and dilute it." |
|    He adds: |  |
| "Toe sue." | "Further dilute it" |
|    The Taupou says: |  |
| "Silasila ma le manu, 'ua tonu ma le manu." | "That is correct and now bless it*"* |
|    At this all present clap their hands. | The host's *Tulafale* then says: |
| "Au mai le ipu a le ali'i... | "Give the cup to chief so and so. |
| Lau 'ava a Tui-samau." | Kava to Tui-saman (our *Tulafale*)." |

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| http://kavaroot.com/_themes/nature/anabull1.gif | While *kava* is the usual name, the Samoans, Hawaiians and Tahitians not having the letter "k" in their languages where others use it, use the word ‘ava instead. |

Great care is taken to ensure that the cup is first taken to the person of principal rank in the company; it is the duty of the *Tulafale to* call out the names in their proper order; and woe betide him if he makes a mistake.  Every one at a *kava* drinking has aspecial name for that occasion.  I have already stated that mine was Le Alii sue-fanua. These names are called "*Se ingoa ipu"* or cup names. In our case the rule was that Mr. Churchill's name was the first called under his native name Vanivania (I think), then myself, then the principal chief present, or the *Taupou*, then our *Tulafale* whose cup-name was Tui-sumau and so on through the names of those present.  On naming the person to whom the cup is to be presented, all present clap their hands.

The *Taupou* now arises, and taking the coconut cup in her hand advances to the person who has been named, who claps his hands, and as she advances she holds the cup up to her forehead, and at two paces from the recipient, with a graceful movement brings the cup with a curve outward from herself to near her feet, and with another curve delivers the cup to the recipient, who spills a few drops on the floor or over his left shoulder as a libation to the gods, saying at the same time:

"'Ia taumafa 'ava le aitu ia matangofie le fesilasila lenei."
Let the god drink *kava* that this gathering (lit., this seeing one another) may be pleasant."

The girl meanwhile has retreated to the central posts of the house, and stands there while the recipient drinks, after which he gives the cup a twirl and sends it twisting over the mats to the girl's feet. And so it goes on until all have drank. Generally the *Taupou* will not partake of the drink, but just gives the bottom of the cup a flick with her finger, after which a few drops of the liquid are added to the contents of the cup before it goes to the next name called.

After going all round he who has called out the names receives the last cup at the same time saying:

" Le 'ava 'ua motu, 'ua matefa le fau, 'ua pa'u le alofi."
"The *kava is* broken off, the strainer is poor, the company of chiefs has fallen down."

Thus ends this ceremony, which is a very pleasing one to witness.  The decorum of all present makes it somewhat of a solemn ceremony while the graceful movements of the girls with their bare arms are all very pleasing.  *Kava* is usually spoken of as an intoxicating liquor but it does not affect the head at all, though it is said that frequent indulgence in it tends to an unsteadiness in the legs, and eventually drinking to excess produces a scaly appearance of the skin.  It is a refreshing drink very slightly exhilarating.  The shrub from which the roots are obtained is so like the New Zealand *Kawakawa,* that it is difficult to tell the difference when growing; but botanists find a distinction as proved by the names, that of New Zealand being *Piper excelsum* while the island variety named *Piper mythisticum*.

After the *kava,* comes the talking, always conducted in such low tones of voice that it is a wonder how those on the far side of the house can hear at all; but it is the correct thing for chiefs to speak in a low tone so that the voice does not grate on the ear—from which some of our civilized assemblies might take a lesson.  All the time the talking is going on the girls are preparing *selue,* or native cigarettes, which they light and then hand round when each one takes a few draws and passes it on. The native cigarette is made of a piece of native grown tobacco rolled up in a dry leaf. It is pleasant smoking though rather strong. I have omitted to mention, in its proper place, that while the *kava* is being prepared some of the girls bring round garlands of sweet-scented leaves, or the hard red segments of the pandanus fruit, also scented, and hang them around the necks of the guests.