VI

THE GIRL IN THE COMMUNITY

THE community ignores both boys and girls from birth until they are fifteen or sixteen years of age. Children under this age have no social standing, no recognised group activities, no part in the social life except when they are conscripted for the informal dance floor. But at a year or two beyond puberty—the age varies from village to village so that boys of sixteen will in one place still be classed as small boys, in another as *taule'ale'as*, young men—both boys and girls are grouped into a rough approximation of the adult groupings, given a name for their organisation, and are invested with definite obligations and privileges in the community life.

The organisation of young men, the *Aumaga*, of young girls and the wives of untitled men and widows, the *Aualuma*, and of the wives of titled men, are all echoes of the central political structure of the village, the *Fono*, the organisation of *matais*, men who have the titles of chiefs or of talking chiefs. The *Fono* is always conceived as a round house in which each title has a special position, must be addressed with certain ceremonial phrases, and given a fixed place in the order of precedence in the serving of the kava. This ideal house has certain fixed divisions, in the right sector sit the high chief and his special assistant chiefs; in the

front of the house sit the talking chiefs whose business it is to make the speeches, welcome strangers, accept gifts, preside over the distribution of food and make all plans and arrangements for group activities. Against the posts at the back of the house sit the *matais* of low rank, and between the posts and at the centre sit those of so little importance that no place is reserved for them. This framework of titles continues from generation to generation and holds a fixed place in the larger ideal structure of the titles of the whole island, the whole archipelago, the whole of Samoa. With some of these titles, which are in the gift of certain families, go certain privileges, a right to a house name, a right to confer a *taupo* name, a princess title, upon some young girl relative and an heir-apparent title, the *manaia*, on some boy of the household. Besides these prerogatives of the high chiefs, each member of the two classes of *matais*, chiefs and talking chiefs, has certain ceremonial rights. A talking chief must be served his kava with a special gesture, must be addressed with a separate set of verbs and nouns suitable to his rank, must be rewarded by the chiefs in tapa or fine mats for his ceromonially rendered services. The chiefs must be addressed with still another set of nouns and verbs, must be served with a different and more honourable gesture in the kava ceremony, must be furnished with food by their talking chiefs, must be honoured and escorted by the talking chiefs on every important occasion. The name of the village, the ceremonial name of the public square in which great cere-

monies are held, the name of the meeting house of the *Fono*, the names of the principal chiefs and talking chiefs, the names of *taupo* and *manaia*, of the *Aualuma* and the *Aumaga*, are contained in a set of ceremonial salutations called the *Fa'alupega*, or courtesy titles of a village or district. Visitors on formally entering a village must recite the *Fa'alupega* as their initial courtesy to their hosts.

The *Aumaga* mirrors this organisation of the older men. Here the young men learn to make speeches, to conduct themselves with gravity and decorum, to serve and drink the kava, to plan and execute group enterprises. When a boy is old enough to enter the *Aumaga*, the head of his household either sends a present of food to the group, announcing the addition of the boy to their number, or takes him to a house where they are meeting and lays down a great kava root as a present. Henceforth the boy is a member of a group which is almost constantly together. Upon them falls all the heavy work of the village and also the greater part of the social intercourse between villages which centres about the young unmarried people. When a visiting village comes, it is the *Aumaga* which calls in a body upon the visiting *taupo*, taking gifts, dancing and singing for her benefit.

The organisation of the *Aualuma* is a less formalised version of the *Aumaga*. When a girl is of age, two or three years past puberty, varying with the village practice, her *matai* will send an offering of food to the house of the chief *taupo* of the village, thus announc-

ing that he wishes the daughter of his house to be henceforth counted as one of the group of young girls who form her court. But while the *Aumaga* is centred about the *Fono*, the young men meeting outside or in a separate house, but exactly mirroring the forms and ceremonies of their elders, the *Aualuma* is centred about the person of the *taupo*, forming a group of maids of honour. They have no organisation as have the *Aumaga*, and furthermore, they do hardly any work. Occasionally the young girls may be called upon to sew thatch or gather paper mulberry; more occasionally they plant and cultivate a paper mulberry crop, but their main function is to be ceremonial helpers for the meetings of the wives of *matais*, and village hostesses in inter-village life. In many parts of Samoa the *Aualuma* has fallen entirely to pieces and is only remembered in the greeting words that fall from the lips of a stranger. But if the *Aumaga* should disappear, Samoan village life would have to be entirely reorganised, for upon the ceremonial and actual work of the young and untitled men the whole life of the village depends.

Although the wives of *matais* have no organisation recognised in the *Fa'alupaga* (courtesy titles), their association is firmer and more important than that of the *Aualuma*. The wives of titled men hold their own formal meetings, taking their status from their husbands, sitting at their husbands' posts and drinking their husbands' kava. The wife of the highest chief receives highest honour, the wife of the principal talk-

ing chief makes the most important speeches. The women are completely dependent upon their husbands for their status in this village group. Once a man has been given a title, he can never go back to the *Aumaga*. His title may be taken away from him when he is old, or if he is inefficient, but a lower title will be given him that he may sit and drink his kava with his former associates. But the widow or divorced wife of a *matai* must go back into the *Aualuma*, sit with the young girls outside the house, serve the food and run the errands, entering the women's *fono* only as a servant or an entertainer.

The women's *fonos* are of two sorts: *fonos* which precede or follow communal work, sewing the thatch for a guest house, bringing the coral rubble for its floor or weaving fine mats for the dowry of the *taupo;* and ceremonial *fonos* to welcome visitors from another village. Each of these meetings was designated by its purpose, as a *falelalaga*, a weaving bee, or an *'aiga fiafia tama'ita'i*, ladies' feast. The women are only recognised socially by the women of a visiting village but the *taupo* and her court are the centre of the recognition of both men and women in the *malaga*, the travelling party. And these wives of high chiefs have to treat their own *taupo* with great courtesy and respect, address her as "your highness," accompany her on journeys, use a separate set of nouns and verbs when speaking to her. Here then is a discrepancy in which the young girls who are kept in strict subjection within their households, outrank their aunts and mothers in

the social life between villages. This ceremonial undercutting of the older women's authority might seriously jeopardise the discipline of the household, if it were not for two considerations. The first is the tenuousness of the girls' organisation, the fact that within the village their chief *raison d'être* is to dance attendance upon the older women, who have definite industrial tasks to perform for the village; the second is the emphasis upon the idea of service as the chief duty of the *taupo*. The village princess is also the village servant. It is she who waits upon strangers, spreads their beds and makes their kava, dances when they wish it, and rises from her sleep to serve either the visitors or her own chief. And she is compelled to serve the social needs of the women as well as the men. Do they decide to borrow thatch in another village, they dress their *taupo* in her best and take her along to decorate the *malaga*. Her marriage is a village matter, planned and carried through by the talking chiefs and their wives who are her counsellors and chaperons. So that the rank of the *taupo* is really a further daily inroad upon her freedom as an individual, while the incessant chaperonage to which she is subjected and the way in which she is married without regard to her own wishes are a complete denial of her personality. And similarly, the slighter prestige of her untitled sisters, whose chief group activity is waiting upon their elders, has even less real significance in the daily life of the village.

With the exception of the *taupo*, the assumption of

whose title is the occasion of a great festival and enormous distribution of property by her chief to the talking chiefs who must hereafter support and confirm her rank, a Samoan girl of good family has two ways of making her début. The first, the formal entry into the *Aualuma* is often neglected and is more a formal fee to the community than a recognition of the girl herself. The second way is to go upon a *malaga*, a formal travelling party. She may go as a near relative of the *taupo* in which case she will be caught up in a whirl of entertainment with which the young men of the host village surround their guests; or she may travel as the only girl in a small travelling party in which case she will be treated as a *taupo*. (All social occasions demand the presence of a *taupo*, a *manaia*, and a talking chief; and if individuals actually holding these titles are not present, some one else has to play the rôle.) Thus it is in inter-village life, either as a member of the *Aualuma* who call upon and dance for the *manaia* of the visiting *malaga*, or as a visiting girl in a strange village, that the unmarried Samoan girl is honoured and recognised by her community.

But these are exceptional occasions. A *malaga* may come only once a year, especially in Manu'a which numbers only seven villages in the whole archipelago. And in the daily life of the village, at crises, births, deaths, marriages, the unmarried girls have no ceremonial part to play. They are simply included with the "women of the household" whose duty it is to prepare the layette for the new baby, or carry stones to

strew on the new grave. It is almost as if the community by its excessive recognition of the girl as a *taupo* or member of the *Aualuma*, considered itself exonerated from paying any more attention to her.

This attitude is fostered by the scarcity of taboos. In many parts of Polynesia, all women, and especially menstruating women, are considered contaminating and dangerous. A continuous rigorous social supervision is necessary, for a society can no more afford to ignore its most dangerous members than it can afford to neglect its most valuable. But in Samoa a girl's power of doing harm is very limited. She cannot make *tafolo*, a breadfruit pudding usually made by the young men in any case, nor make the kava while she is menstruating. But she need retire to no special house; she need not eat alone; there is no contamination in her touch or look. In common with the young men and the older women, a girl gives a wide berth to a place where chiefs are engaged in formal work, unless she has special business there. It is not the presence of a woman which is interdicted but the uncalled-for intrusion of any one of either sex. No woman can be officially present at a gathering of chiefs unless she is *taupo* making the kava, but any woman may bring her husband his pipe or come to deliver a message, so long as her presence need not be recognised. The only place where a woman's femininity is in itself a real source of danger is in the matter of fishing canoes and fishing tackle which she is forbidden to touch upon pain of spoiling the fishing. But the enforcement of this prohibition is in the hands of

individual fishermen in whose houses the fishing equipment is kept.

Within the relationship group matters are entirely different. Here women are very specifically recognised. The oldest female progenitor of the line, that is, the sister of the last holder of the title, or his predecessor's sister, has special rights over the distribution of the dowry which comes into the household. She holds the veto in the selling of land and other important family matters. Her curse is the most dreadful a man can incur for she has the power to "cut the line" and make the name extinct. If a man falls ill, it is his sister who must first take the formal oath that she has wished him no harm, as anger in her heart is most potent for evil. When a man dies, it is his paternal aunt or his sister who prepares the body for burial, anointing it with turmeric and rubbing it with oil, and it is she who sits beside the body, fanning away the flies, and keeps the fan in her possession ever after. And in the more ordinary affairs of the household, in the economic arrangements between relatives, in disputes over property or in family feuds, the women play as active a part as the men.

The girl and woman repays the general social negligence which she receives with a corresponding insouciance. She treats the lore of the village, the genealogies of the titles, the origin myths and local tales, the intricacies of the social organisation with supreme indifference. It is an exceptional girl who can give her great-grandfather's name, the exceptional boy who can-

not give his genealogy in traditional form for several generations. While the boy of sixteen or seventeen is eagerly trying to master the esoteric allusiveness of the talking chief whose style he most admires, the girl of the same age learns the minimum of etiquette. Yet this is in no wise due to lack of ability. The *taupo* must have a meticulous knowledge, not only of the social arrangements of her own village, but also of those of neighbouring villages. She must serve visitors in proper form and with no hesitation after the talking chief has chanted their titles and the names of their kava cups. Should she take the wrong post which is the prerogative of another *taupo* who outranks her, her hair will be soundly pulled by her rival's female attendants. She learns the intricacies of the social organisation as well as her brother does. Still more notable is the case of the wife of a talking chief. Whether she is chosen for her docility by a man who has already assumed his title, or whether, as is often the case, she marries some boy of her acquaintance who later is made a talking chief, the *tausi*, wife of a talking chief, is quite equal to the occasion. In the meetings of women she must be a master of etiquette and the native rules of order, she must interlard her speeches with a wealth of unintelligible traditional material and rich allusiveness, she must preserve the same even voice, the same lofty demeanour, as her husband. And ultimately, the wife of an important talking chief must qualify as a teacher as well as a performer, for it is her duty to train the *taupo*. But unless the community thus recognises her existence,

and makes formal demand upon her time and ability, a woman gives to it a bare minimum of her attention.

In like manner, women are not dealt with in the primitive penal code. A man who commits adultery with a chief's wife was beaten and banished, sometimes even drowned by the outraged community, but the woman was only cast out by her husband. The *taupo* who was found not to be a virgin was simply beaten by her female relatives. To-day if evil befalls the village, and it is attributed to some unconfessed sin on the part of a member of the community, the *Fono* and the *Aumaga* are convened and confession is enjoined upon any one who may have evil upon his conscience, but no such demand is made upon the *Aualuma* or the wives of the *matais*. This is in striking contrast to the family confessional where the sister is called upon first.

In matters of work the village makes a few precise demands. It is the women's work to cultivate the sugar cane and sew the thatch for the roof of the guest house, to weave the palm leaf blinds, and bring the coral rubble for the floor. When the girls have a paper mulberry plantation, the *Aumaga* occasionally help them in the work, the girls in turn making a feast for the boys, turning the whole affair into an industrious picnic. But between men's formal work and women's formal work there is a rigid division. Women do not enter into house-building or boat-building activities, nor go out in fishing canoes, nor may men enter the formal weaving house or the house where women are making tapa in a group. If the women's work

makes it necessary for them to cross the village, as is the case when rubble is brought up from the seashore to make the floor of the guest house, the men entirely disappear, either gathering in some remote house, or going away to the bush or to another village. But this avoidance is only for large formal occasions. If her husband is building the family a new cook-house, a woman may make tapa two feet away, while a chief may sit and placidly braid cinet while his wife weaves a fine mat at his elbow.

So, although unlike her husband and brothers a woman spends most of her time within the narrower circle of her household and her relationship group, when she does participate in community affairs she is treated with the punctilio which marks all phases of Samoan social life. The better part of her attention and interest is focused on a smaller group, cast in a more personal mode. For this reason, it is impossible to evaluate accurately the difference in innate social drive between men and women in Samoa. In those social spheres where women have been given an opportunity, they take their place with as much ability as the men. The wives of the talking chiefs in fact exhibit even greater adaptability than their husbands. The talking chiefs are especially chosen for their oratorical and intellectual abilities, whereas the women have a task thrust upon them at their marriage requiring great oratorical skill, a fertile imagination, tact, and a facile memory.