

## THE WESTBROOK PAPERS\*

I never had the intention of settling down in the islands. I expected to return to England to marry a cousin who had been selected for me. But you must realise I was young when I first arrived in the islands—about half your age—and there were many temptations.<sup>1</sup>

GEORGE WESTBROOK

I like him [Westbrook] best when he doesn't talk politics. But when he spins a tale of his early island life, he's good. It is a pity in a way he did not make the trip to London earlier in life, but the odds were against him—he seems fated to live his life near coral reefs.<sup>2</sup>

W. TARR

When George Westbrook returned to Samoa from Auckland in May 1933 as a passenger on the *Mariposa* he did so with mixed feelings. He had arrived in New Zealand in October of the previous year intent upon seeing a long cherished dream materialise. For over five years, his prime personal ambition had been a settlement of the turmoil in Samoa by means of a Round Table Conference or some other 'impartial commission'. He aspired to go down in history as the man who paved the way in terminating 'the present misunderstanding' '... in an amicable manner without loss of prestige to either side'.<sup>3</sup> Instead it was impressed on him shortly after arriving that his hopes and efforts had been wasted. The news came to him as a bitter disappointment and he never ceased to regret this failure. On the other hand, Westbrook felt he had something to look forward to. He had received, whilst in Auckland, what he took to be 'a splendid offer' from the American writer, Julian Dana, which he thought would end his long search for a publisher for his projected books of reminiscences.

Sharing a cabin with Westbrook on the *Mariposa* was E. W. Gurr, returning to Samoa as his five-year term of exile had expired. The two old men were friends and political allies who had lived in Samoa for many years. Gurr, however, had nothing to look forward to as he was stricken with pernicious anaemia. Westbrook, instead of enjoying the company of a friend on the voyage, had constantly to nurse Gurr who was carried off on a stretcher upon arrival at Pago Pago. His death was reported soon afterwards.

It is somehow fitting, therefore, that the Papers of Gurr and Westbrook are now housed together in the Alexander Turnbull Library. But only by a long series of coincidences should this be so. The Gurr Papers would have remained to moulder in an Auckland home had not the late R. P. Gilson tracked them down in 1955. It was lucky, too, that West-

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