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NOTE UPON THE NATIVES OF SAVAGE ISLAND, OR NIUÉ.

BY BASIL THOMSON.

WHEN Cook discovered Savage Island, he found it impossible to establish communication with the natives: "the endeavours we used to bring them to a parley were to no purpose; for they came with the ferocity of wild boars, and threw their darts." The Rev. John Williams, during his memorable voyage in the *Messenger of Peace*, in 1830, recruited two Niué boys, and subsequently sent them back to the island as teachers, but, after a time, influenza having broken out among the natives, and the two youths being accused of bringing it from Tahiti, one was killed together with his father. The other escaped in company with the boy who returned as a Christian teacher in 1848. Dr. Turner, who visited the island in 1848 and in 1859, writes, "Natives of other islands who drifted there in distress, whether from Tonga, Samoa, or elsewhere, were invariably killed. Any of their own people who went away in a ship, and came back, were killed, and all this was occasioned by a dread of disease. For years after they began to venture out to ships they would not immediately use anything obtained, but hung it in the bush in quarantine for weeks."

Dr. Turner had great difficulty in landing the Niué teacher trained in Samoa; armed crowds rushed down to kill him; they wanted to send his canoe and his chest back to the mission ship as soon as they were landed, saying that the foreign wood would cause disease among them. It is possible that an epidemic following the Tongan invasion, or the arrival of castaways from other islands, had engendered this dread of disease that led to so murderous a system of quarantine. The only tradition of a visit from foreigners that seems to have an historical basis, is that recording the invasion of the Tongans. According to the Niué tradition, the natives awaited the Tongan attack behind a chasm, a rent in the limestone roof of a cave near Alofi, which they had cunningly concealed with boughs. The Tongans, ignorant of the pitfall, attacked desperately, and were precipitated into the cave and killed. The cave was shown to me, and some human bones were unearthed in proof of the story, but seeing that until recently caves were the usual places of burial, they were not convincing evidence. A Tongan tradition evidently refers to the same event.

At a date that may be computed by generations as about 1535, Takalaua, the King of Tonga, was assassinated, and his son, Kau-ulu-fonua, pursued the murderers from island to island until he caught and slew them at Futuna. Among

the islands in which the murderers took refuge was Savage Island, and here the pursuers landed upon a rock separated from the mainland by a narrow chasm, across which the enemy had laid boughs. But in this version, as might be expected from a Tongan narrator, they overleapt the chasm, and put the native army to flight—a more probable result of the battle when the relative prowess of the two peoples is compared. There is another Tongan tradition of a canoe belonging to the King of Tonga drifting to Savage Island, but the tradition is too fragmentary to warrant any attempt to fix the date. But the facts that the Savage Islanders use the word “Tonga” to denote all foreign countries, and that “Tui Tonga” was the title of the best known of their kings, point to an intercourse with Tonga in comparatively remote times.

On the other hand, it is quite clear that the Savage Islanders are not a mere offshoot from the Tongan stock, nor even pure Polynesians. The institutions of Tonga are a dominant aristocracy; those of Niué are republican. In Tonga every public ceremony was accompanied by a highly elaborate ritual; in Niué dignity and gentle manners were unknown. The Tongan mode of warfare was frontal attack by desperate charges; the Niuéan, a series of feints intended to frighten the enemy, and entice him into ambush. The physiognomy of the people is not pure Polynesian; there seem to be two types, the one Polynesian, and the other Micronesian, with all the gradations of hybrids between the two races, and I question whether the island was not originally peopled from the Line Islands, and the population modified by successive immigrations from Tonga, Raratonga, Aitutaki and Samoa. The language, it is true, appears to be very much like the Tongan, for I was able to understand the gist of everything that was said, but the immigration of a superior race has often had the effect of impressing its language and laws upon the inferior long before any change takes place in the physical type. In Ongtong Java, for instance, there is a Melanesian race speaking a Polynesian tongue, the result of intercourse with the crew of a single canoe which drifted thither from Tonga, in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The institutions of Niué seem always to have been republican. In ancient times the ruling power was held by the “toa,” or fighting men, and the party that happened for the moment to be in the ascendant elected a king to be their mouth-piece. It was a dignity that cost its holder dearly, for the object of the opposition party was invariably to kill the king, and a violent death had come to be so often the appanage of royalty that for eighty years before the introduction of Christianity, and the consequent cessation of warfare, no one could be found willing to undertake the office. Since the missionaries have controlled the island there have been three kings; they were elected by the chiefs of villages, who had been themselves elected by the people. They governed with the consent of a council of these chiefs which met in the open air once a month, and they carried out their decrees by the force of public opinion. There were no taxes beyond the obligation to provide feasts for these councils, and occasionally to carry food to the king, or to the chiefs of villages.

The following is a list of the kings as far back as their names are recorded :—

Punimata, of Halafualangi, reigned at Fatuaua. (Died.)

Ngalianga, of Pulaki. (Killed.)

Patuavalu, of Puato. (Died.)

Fokimata, of Pulaki. (Died.)

Pakieto, of Utavavau. (Starved to death.)

Interregnum of eighty years.

Tuitonga. (Succeeded 1876.)

Fataaiki. (Succeeded 1888.)

Tongia. (Succeeded 1898 after interregnum of two years.)

Religion.—There were no idols in Niué. The two great deities were, as in New Zealand and in Tonga, Tangaloa and Mau'i. There is no tradition of them as living men. Mau'i pushed up the island by successive efforts, first as high as a reef, awash at low tide, and then as high as Tonga, and then, by a final heave, to its present height. The Niué story of the peopling of the earth is almost identical with the Maori tradition. The earth lay locked in the embraces of her spouse, the heaven, and man, their progeny, lying between them, panted for air. Uniting their strength, men tore their parents apart, and the rain-drops are the tears shed by Heaven at being sundered from his bride.

Every tribe had its tutelary deity, who was probably a deified ancestor. The belief in an after-existence was shadowy. The virtuous passed into Ahonoa (Everlasting Light); evildoers into Po (Darkness). The virtues were kindness, chastity, theft from another tribe, and the slaughter of an enemy; the vices, theft from a member of one's own tribe, breaking an agreement or a tabu, cowardice, and homicide in time of peace.

That the dead reappear is believed even now after many years of mission teaching. When a man is dying his friends take food to him, and say "Be good; if you leave us, go altogether." When they buried the body they threw heavy stones upon the grave to keep the "Aitu" down, and wailed forty nights. Only three years ago a woman burned her daughter's grave, because she said that the spirit was afflicting her with sickness. They spread a piece of white Seapo (bark-cloth) beside the body, and the insect that first crawls upon it is carefully wrapped up, and buried with the body; it is the Mo'ui, the Soul.

The dead cannot be summoned to answer questions, but even now widows go to the graves of their dead husbands, and call upon them to help them when they are oppressed.

The office of priest, Taula'atua, was hereditary. Priests were inspired by a draught of kava (*piper methysticum*) which was not drunk at other times. The offerings made to the gods were the priests' perquisites. There were no temples; the gods visited their priests in sacred mounds or clearings. In late heathen times the gods did not take animal forms, but there is a trace of totemism in the tabu of certain animals to particular tribes. The moko lizard peculiar to the

island was sacred throughout Niué; the Lulu owl was tabu to the people of Alofi.

The priests, both male and female, had much political influence, and the "toa" found it to their advantage to be on good terms with them, although they themselves had the power of invoking the gods without the intermediary of a priest.

There was no festival for initiation, though a feast was always held when a boy assumed the *maro*, the girdle of males. Ceremonial purification was necessary for those who had touched a dead body, or infringed a tabu. These were forbidden for a period to lift food to their mouths; they were fed by others, and drank as animals do. Human sacrifice was unknown.

There is a very curious survival of circumcision, a rite which, the natives say, has never been actually practised since they can remember, though it is almost universal in Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. The child is laid on the ground under an awning of native cloth, and an old man makes the sign of circumcision round the foreskin with his forefinger. A child not so initiated is never regarded as a full-born member of the tribe. Tattooing was not practised in ancient times, but it is now being introduced by men who have been to Samoa or Tonga as labourers.

Witchcraft.—There is a prevailing belief that people can be hag-ridden. Not long ago a woman of Alofi was so affected. She rushed madly about the country, and seemed to be incapable of sleeping. When asked whose spirit had entered into her, she readily gave his name, and though her friends knew no way of exorcising the evil spirit, she eventually recovered. Exorcism by secret invocation is practised to neutralise curses. The ordinary form of witchcraft was to take the soil on which an enemy had set his footprint to a sacred place, and curse it in order that he might be afflicted with lameness. In preparing for war a piece of green kava was bound on either side of the spear to strike the enemy with blindness. Nowadays the commonest form of witchcraft is to put a live lizard in a bottle and bury it under a cocoanut tree; any person who drinks the water of the cocoanuts is destroyed. I asked King Tongia whether the priests had the power of making warriors invulnerable. He replied that they all claimed to have this power, but that, so far as his observation went, it was unwise to trust only to their skill: he had observed that the foolhardy got killed all the same.

Diseases.—Mr. W. H. Head, who has been more than 30 years on the island, stated that yaws (*Tona*) and phthisis were quite unknown before the arrival of the Samoan teachers. The natives, when he first arrived, generally seemed to die of old age. Coughs and colds were then unknown. The diseases of that time were Makulokuli (a difficulty in passing water), lupus and scrofula. Since the intercourse with ships, the policy which earned for the Niué people from Cook the name of "Savage Islanders," has been amply justified. In these days every child has yaws as a matter of course, though the disease might easily be stamped out by isolation. Whooping-cough has never left the island since its introduction. Measles, introduced in 1898 by a returning labourer,

occasioned about 100 deaths, but, though it lasted twelve months, so efficient was the natives' quarantine of infected villages, that the village of Tuapa escaped it altogether. Syphilis, unknown 34 years ago, is said to be very prevalent in the tertiary form, especially among infants: as its native name, "Tona Tahiti," indicates it was brought from Tahiti. There is not much ophthalmia, which is strange, in view of the enormous number of flies that used to infest the island. It is a remarkable fact that the flies completely disappeared early in the present year 1900. Not one was seen during my visit. Deformities are rare. There are a few cases of insanity, and the people are disposed to treat them unkindly. Even in these days serious illness is always regarded as possession by an evil spirit.

Medical Treatment.—Nearly all the old women are medical practitioners, and the number of herbal decoctions that they administer to a sick person is incredible. The best known of these native doctors take heavy fees in kind, but their faith in their own nostrums must be slender, for they themselves have recourse to the dispensaries of the Mission and Mr. Head whenever they are ill. Mr. Head told me that he finds that the natives require smaller doses of drugs than Europeans.

Infanticide used to be common in the cases of illegitimate children, and children born in time of war. In the latter case the child was disposed of by Fakafolau, that is to say, it was put into an ornamented cradle, and, with many tears, set adrift upon the sea. Mothers are very affectionate to their children.

Midwifery.—A professional midwife attends at delivery, and the husband may, or may not, be present. The woman is delivered in a sitting posture. The midwife assists the labour by squeezing the abdomen: if the afterbirth is slow in coming away she becomes frightened, and tries to hasten it by treading on the abdomen. The umbilical cord was formerly severed with the teeth rather near the child: it is now cut long with scissors, and coiled down without tying. Feasts were held at various stages in the infant's growth.

Mal-presentations are very rare, and the women suffer but little in childbirth. Mr. Head has seen women walk four or five miles the day following their delivery. The child was usually suckled about twelve months, during which period there was strict sexual abstention between the parents. It was weaned upon taro, chewed by the mother, who now, unfortunately, is addicted to smoking the rankest tobacco in a pipe.

Abortion was formerly common, because if a couple did not come together with the consent of the girl's relations, they were punished. Drugs and trampling on the abdomen were the usual methods employed. Abortion seems to be less common now since the law against seduction is administered with caprice, and influence can generally be brought to screen those who offend against it. An illegitimate child has no disabilities, and its parents do not suffer in public estimation. The absence of so many of the men, and the consequent predominance of women, are sufficient to account for a large increase in illegitimacy.

The marriage of first cousins is not popular as in Fiji. The offspring of two

sisters are absolutely forbidden to marry, but the children of two brothers, or of a brother and sister, may do so without being held guilty of incest. In the old days a young man took a present to the parents of the girl, and, if it was accepted, a feast fulfilled all the formalities. If he took the girl without the leave of her parents, and could not command the influence of the "toas," he was clubbed. The abduction of married women into the bush has lately become common.

Native families are large. Families of five and six are frequently met with, and there is more than one woman on the island who has given birth to sixteen children. There used to be no barren women, but now, owing perhaps to sexual excesses at an early age, childless women are not uncommon. These generally adopt children, to whom they behave in all respects as if they had borne them.

Funeral customs.—Before a man is dead his shroud is unfolded, and the funeral feast prepared, all these preparations being made before his eyes. Food is presented to him as an inducement not to leave his wraith behind him, and his relations trouble his last moments with questions regarding the disposition of his property. His wishes on this subject are held to be as binding as a will. That curious power of self-abandonment, which enables a sick man to foretell the hour of his death, is as common here as it is in other parts of the Pacific. As soon as life is extinct, the body is oiled and wrapped in its shroud, and the mourners agree upon a time for wailing, which they do with every semblance of frantic grief. The feast is eaten, and on the following day the body is carried to a shallow grave, dug in the coral rock somewhere between the public road and the edge of the cliff. Before Christian times it was simply laid upon the floor of one of the burying caves. Stones are laid upon it to keep the "Aitu" down, and a neat grave of coloured pebbles, or a rounded vault of white concrete, lettered in relief, is built over it. The side of the road which skirts the western coast is full of such graves. The acquisitive character of the people is sometimes shown disagreeably in their determination that the most precious of their possessions should be buried with them, lest their relations should benefit by them. Quite lately, an old woman tried to extort a promise from Mr. Head that he would throw her favourite axe into her grave. On the other hand the relations tend the grave for a long time after death, laying garlands and valuables, such as sewing machines, upon it. The old custom of Fakalilifi, or cutting down the fruit trees of the deceased with the idea of doing him honour in preventing lesser men from using what has been his, is dying out, but most of the personal chattels are still destroyed.

Warfare.—The Savage Islanders were not so impetuous as the Tongans and Samoans. They avoided frontal attacks, and trusted rather to terrifying the enemy by a series of feints. Some of these manœuvres were shown to us at an entertainment given in our honour. The warriors, brandishing either a spear, or a two-handed paddle-club, drew their tangled hair over their eyes, and chewed their beards with the most horrible grimaces. They advanced upon one another with a remarkable pantomime of battle-fury, always on the ace of striking, but always retiring before the fatal blow was struck. The king, Tongia, in relating

the prowess of his forefather, "the greatest warrior in the world," showed Mr. Lawes the spot where he had met his match in the "second greatest warrior." Mr. Lawes, seeing that the space was confined, asked which of them was killed. "Oh, neither of them," the king replied. This historic duel was probably a fair example of Savage Island warfare. Cannibalism was never practised.

Land.—The land belongs to clans represented by their heads. In fighting times the braves (*toa*) ignored all rights and seized upon any land that they were strong enough to hold. At present there is land enough for all, and the junior members of the clan come to the headman whenever they want land to plant upon. Titles can be acquired by cultivation. The planting of yams or plantains by permission confers no title, but the planting of cocoanuts does so. Thus, there being no boundary marks, encroachment by planting these trees is a continual cause of friction. It presses particularly hard upon widows and orphans, who are frequently robbed of the land inherited from their dead husbands and fathers. The excuse given for this injustice is that the child belongs to its mother's clan, and that the mother and child should seek land from its mother's kin, but the majority of natives condemn the practice. The Pacific Islands Company have recently applied for a lease of 200 acres, and though the land for which they have applied is not in occupation, they have failed because there is no one whose individual interest is sufficient to warrant him in granting a lease. The headman receives a sort of rent in the form of service and produce, and the first-fruits, formerly offered to the gods, are sometimes presented to him.

Relationships are traced back four or five generations. The people seem to be in a transition state between patriarchy and matriarchy. A grown son succeeds to his father's house and land, but daughters appear to have greater claims upon their maternal uncle. Though these claims are universally recognised, there is nothing approaching the rights of the Fijian Vasu. The testamentary power of a dying man related to his house, his land, and such of his personal effects as ought not rightfully to be destroyed out of respect to his memory.

Justice.—In ancient times the only tribunal was the Pulangi tau, or Council of War. There was no principle of procedure, and the accused was never present. The code was the *Lex talionis*, except when the personal influence of the accused screened him from the consequences of his crime. Murder—that is, the killing of a member of the tribe, for the slaying of an enemy was a virtue rather than a crime—was punished by death. The sentence was carried out by the Kopenga: a man was told off to *afo* (betray) the doomed person by making friends with him, and then enticing him into the bush on the pretence of taking him to an assignation: there warriors lay in wait and fell upon him unawares. Adultery was punished by fine or by the club according to the importance of the offender, and there were instances of persons being condemned to be the slaves of their accusers. The gratification of private revenge was recognised, and justice was administered capriciously as must always be the case in a society that tolerates might as right. From the whalers that visited the island the natives first heard of the stocks as a

punishment, and in a deep cave near Tuapa, from which all light is excluded, some of these instruments may still be seen.

At present there is a judge in each village. A message is sent to the accused ordering him to appear, and if he refuses the court adjourns until such time as the importunities of his neighbours worry him into surrendering to the charge, for there are no paid police. The main object of the trial is to induce the accused to confess. Sometimes he is allowed to swear his innocence on the Bible, for perjury, so committed, weighs heavily on the conscience, and produces illness and consequent confession. When there is no clue to the perpetrator of a crime it is not unusual to curse him on the Bible, and confessions due to fear of the consequences of such a curse are common. The ordinary punishments are labour on the roads, making limekilns (calculated at two weeks' labour each), and fines; but the difficulty of enforcing the two first have led to a preference for fines for all offences, and, as the fines are usually paid by the relations, crime may be said to go unpunished. The commonest offences at the present time are adultery and encroachment on land, the adultery being generally abduction into the bush. For theft and housebreaking restitution is ordered in addition to any other punishment, and it is owing to this wise rule that there are so few complaints against the native government on the part of Europeans. Justice is powerless to deal with great crimes. In 1887 a man named Koteka murdered his brother. He was condemned to perpetual labour on the roads, but, shortly after, a ship coming in, he boarded her without opposition and escaped to Manahiki to the great relief of the native authorities. There is a primitive but very efficacious way of dealing with sedition: the monthly council sends a message to the suspected village that they intend to meet there, and that they expect a lavish entertainment, knowing that, in order to escape this tax, the majority of the villagers will be in favour of law and order, and will enforce it.

The emigration of the young men as labourers is a purely modern development, and it is difficult to explain. Their early experience of recruiters could not have been favourable. In 1867 the notorious pirate, Bully Hayes, called at the island, and, choosing a moment when his vessel was crowded with natives, he made sail. Having landed his 80 unwilling passengers on an uninhabited island, he returned to Niué with the excuse that they had refused to leave his vessel, and, his native crew having enticed some 70 girls on board during the night, he set his course for Tahiti, picking up the 80 men on the way. At Tahiti he sold his passengers as labourers on the plantations, and very few of them ever returned to their homes.

In their industry and energy the Savage Islands are a great contrast to the other Polynesian races. Whether at home or abroad, they do a full day's labour. In Niué men carry loads of copra of 150 lbs. weight nine miles to sell to a store-keeper. They are now attempting to cut through a limestone bluff to grade the road for wheel-traffic. This work, which could easily have been accomplished by blasting, they were laboriously doing by lighting fires on the rock to convert it into lime, and chipping it off with hammers. They earn 4s. a day from the traders

for shipping copra, and lately they have shown a disposition to strike for 8s., which is the smallest advance they seem capable of understanding. The ordinary wages on plantations abroad are £2 a month, but on the steamers they make as much as £3 10s. Within a few days of his return a labourer has parted with all his acquired property to his friends, and is as poor as when he left home, and in a few weeks he is ready to re-engage with the first recruiting vessel that calls at the island.

While their industry shows no symptom of abatement, there is a marked deterioration in their morality. Mr. Lawes thinks that the absence of so many of the young men leads to the corruption of young boys by the women whose husbands are away, or who can find no husbands. Seduction, which was severely punished in heathen times, is no longer resented, but, strangely enough, married men are very jealous of their wives, and never leave them out of their sight, except when they are absent on night-fishing, and then they confide them to the guardianship of their sisters, who are pledged to sleep by their sides. The outward demeanour of the women, however, is modest.

Dress.—The former dress was, for males the Maro, or perineal bandage assumed at puberty, and for females a petticoat of fibre. The men now wear European clothes, and the women the flowing *saque* worn by the women of Samoa and Tahiti. Both sexes wear hats plaited on the island. Whatever has been gained in decency has been lost in picturesqueness.

The villages are the cleanest and neatest in the Pacific. Every native householder has a hut on his plantation, and a neatly built concrete house in the village. The roof is thatched, the walls whitewashed, the windows closed with a sort of rough venetian of wood smoothed with the adze, and pivoted on the centre of each slat so as to exclude the sun while admitting the air. These houses are sometimes floored with rough planks cut from the log with the adze. But the older natives seem to keep these houses for show, using in preference little native-built hovels behind, which they burn down when too ruinous for occupation.

There is a marked decline in the influence of the mission, which formerly held absolute sway, and a consequent recrudescence of heathen superstition. Mr. Bell, who was seven years on the island, says that incantations are now constantly sung over the sick by professional wizards. The mission still wields some authority, through its power of expelling offenders from the church membership, which entails some social ostracism, but Mr. Lawes thinks that his personal influence is declining, especially with those who have been abroad, and have associated with the lower sort of European. With all their faults, however, it is impossible not to like a people who, if they do not respect their own chiefs, pay heed to the opinion of white men; who, with the keenest trading instinct, are honest in their dealings, and exact honesty from others; who, while so excitable that a mere domestic quarrel will drive them to suicide, are energetic, friendly and good-tempered; and who promise, under English control, to be the most contented and prosperous little community in the Pacific.