

THE  
MARIST MISSIONS IN THE PACIFIC\*

## II.

## TONGA, SAMOA, AND THE FIJIAN GROUP.

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Bishop of Christchurch.

(Concluded.)

When we made our first visit to Fiji, Father Nicholas was the energetic Administrator in charge of Suva. On his appointment as Provincial of the Society for Australia and the South Sea Islands, he was succeeded by Father Dupont. Father Fox, a young and ardent missionary, who was born in London, devotes himself exclusively to the natives, Fijians or Samonese, who are in large numbers in Suva.

Since the advent of their devoted Bishop, Catholicity has made immense progress. The scattered 'pusillus grex' has increased to 12,000 Catholics. There are 18 central stations and 273 villages, where 32 priests offer the Adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, preach, catechise, and administer the Sacraments to about 12,000 converts. There are 9 European and 14 native Brothers, who train the native boys and catechists; 37 European and 18 native nuns for the native girls; 35 catechists, who are kept and trained for three or four years in some of the missions, under the direction of the Bishop, priests, and Brothers. At Cawaci, a few miles out of Levuka, there is a splendid college for the training of catechists and chiefs, with 42 catechists, 80 boys, and 12 girls. At Suva there is a High School for boys, and a boarding school, under the charge of five Marist Brothers; a High School for girls, directed by eight Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. The convent of these excellent Sisters is a large and commodious building, where the children of the best families are educated. The Bishop's residence in Suva is situated on a hill about 100 feet above the level of the sea, and in the midst of charming grounds teeming with a rich and luxuriant growth of cocoanut and other palm and fern trees, the dazzling hibiscus, and trailing creepers, several of the seven-and-twenty species of crotons, mangrove trees, and bananas, with their soft, velvety foliage. Two lofty Norfolk pines, fully 60 feet high, are placed on the summit of the hill, in front of the residence known as Bishopscourt. These trees serve as a landmark to ships entering the majestic harbor of Suva. From the well-kept lawn may be seen, away in the distance, across the coral-bedded expanse of waters, the inner and outer coral reefs; further away still, the historic island of Degg, the home of the fire-walkers, whose wondrous powers of walking over stones heated to a high state of temperature is still a mystery in Fiji. Away to the right, and still across the waters of the bay, one sees the rugged hills, the home and haunts of various mountain tribes, the true aborigines of Fiji. In the valley between these hills flow many a mountain stream, the most important of which is the Navua, second in importance, in all the Fijis, to the lordly Rewa, navigable for fifty miles. On the banks of this river are thousands of acres of rich alluvial flats, and the chief sugar-producing centres in Fiji. On the banks of the same river is a flourishing mission, with a splendid church in coral, and convent and schools for the natives, and two devoted missionaries, well known for their kindness to tourists who 'do' this interesting river.

The Bishop has informed me that the nuns are appointed in charge of a leper station not far from Suva.

Levuka is a very flourishing station of our missions. It has, besides a fine church, a splendid convent, the handsomest and largest building in Levuka, under the direction of the Marist Sisters.

Among the comparatively recent conversions brought about by the zeal of Bishop Vidal and his devoted missionaries, I must mention that of a whole tribe, consisting of about 1100 natives. I had the

advantage of visiting them, with Bishop Vidal and my companion, on the very day of our departure from Fiji. The village is situated about 15 miles from Suva, on the opposite side of the bay. The name of the chief Roko is Matanitobua, whose father, Kuruduadua, was formerly King of Nakosi, whence he wielded immense influence over 20,000 Fijians, dwelling in the mountainous districts through which the upper Navua flows. Kuruduadua has been pronounced by Dr. Seemann, in his official report, as 'an intelligent, straightforward man, prepared to fill any obligations he has undertaken. He abhorred all half-measures and shams, held hypocrisy in abomination, and did not profess to be better, or anything else, than he really was.' Those who know his son, Matanitobua, declare that he possesses the energetic and straightforward character of his father. Strangely enough, Matanitobua was created a warrior, or invested with the 'malo,' by W. T. Pritchard, 8, B.M. Consul in Fiji, in August, 1860. This is how it happened. The Consul and Dr. Seemann went to Navua, some three miles up the river, where Kuruduadua resided. The natives were just about to leave and storm a rebellious town, Savana, intending to club the inhabitants, some 500 in number. Then their bodies were to be piled into a pyramid, and, on the top of all, a living slave would lie on his back. The young chief, Matanitobua, would then mount to the apex of the horrid scaffold, and, standing upright, on the chest of the slave, and holding in his uplifted hands an immense club or gun, the pagan priests would invoke their gods, and a native exclamation of triumph, or joy, and a shout from the assembly would conclude the prayer. Two uncles of the boy were then to ascend the human pile and invest him with the malo, or girdle of snow-white tape, 200 yards long and about 8 or 10 inches in width. Consul Pritchard proposed to the King to invest his son with a European malo; Kuruduadua consented, after a long deliberation with his people. At the appointed hour, the lad (then 14 or 15) stood upright in the midst of the assembly, guiltless of clothing, and holding a club over his head. The Consul and Dr. Seemann approached, and in due form wrapped the young chief in 30 yards of Manchester print, the priest and people chanting songs and invoking their gods. Delivering a short discourse, the Consul urged the lad to nobler efforts for his tribe than his ancestors had known, pointing out the paths to fame that civilisation would open to him. Thus the lives of 500 men were saved.

When Fiji was about to be ceded to England, the old chiefs assembled at Levuka. They said they could not make this cession without the consent of Matanitobua. A special messenger, the Roko ni Dreketi, went himself to bring the young chief to Levuka to sign this cession, which he accordingly did. A few years afterwards, when the Government asked for volunteers to crush the rebellion in the mountains, Matanitobua was the first to respond, and he proved so brave, energetic, and true to his duty that the sword of honor was presented to him by her Majesty Queen Victoria. He was always in the path leading to fame and civilisation. When his tribe was unduly taxed, he, like a true chief, grieved to witness the hardships of his people, and protested against the imposition of these heavy burdens by the Government. The Government's answer was his deposition, while his counsellors were exiled, and strangers appointed to govern in his stead. But Matanitobua was neither cowed nor shaken in his resolve to free his people from the unjust burden imposed upon them. Thousands of signatures were attached to a petition, which was sent direct to the Imperial authorities, with Mr. Humphrey Berkley, a distinguished barrister, who was engaged to present it. The costs were raised mainly by the influence and exertions of Matanitobua. The result was a change in native affairs, and a more just and kindly dealing with the natives. Speaking of these troublesome times, a writer says: 'It can truly be said that Matanitobua is one of the noblest of Fijian chiefs, and is worthy of his father, who was spoken so highly of, even in the days of savagery and lust, by so great an authority as Professor Seemann.' He adds: 'He is known among thousands of Fijians of to-day as the patriot chief, who stood resolutely by

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