

**SAVAGE ISLAND: AN
ACCOUNT
OF A SOJOURN
IN NIUE & TONGA**

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Savage Island: An account of a sojourn in Niué & Tonga by Basil Thomson

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PREFACE

NIUÉ, more commonly known as Savage Island, lies 1,000 miles N.N.E. of New Zealand, and 300 miles S.S.E. of Samoa, in the loneliest spot in that part of the Pacific. Its iron-bound coasts tempt no vessels to call for supplies. At rare intervals great four-masted timber-ships pass in the offing; more rarely still schooners call to replenish the stock of the traders and to carry away their copra.

I went to the Niuéans in the name of the Queen and Empress whom the world is still lamenting, and I do not like to think of what our loss means to the people in these remote outposts of her Empire. The oldest native in the South Seas remembers no sovereign's name but hers. She was a real person to them all; a lady who had made them her especial care, had sent the gospel to them, and had bade them lay aside their clubs, and live in peace, order, and equity. Vika, as they called her

affectionately—Vika, after whom they named their girl-children—was the benign, all-powerful chief, whose house was built upon the coral strand of Lonitoni (London), opposite the landing-place, where her men-o'-war were moored stem and stern in rows before her door. She read their letters with her own eyes, and had her captains to sit before her on the floor-mats while she gave them messages for the brown folk in far islands. And now Vika, the well-beloved, has left them, mourned by the empire of which they were but the tiniest part. It was hers, and she never saw it; but we, who have seen it—who have, in the humblest way, helped in the making of it—think with heavy hearts of how much hangs upon a name, and of how hard it will be to reassure them, when, as they say of their own dead kings, “*kuo hala 'ae langi*”—“the heaven has fallen.”

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SAVAGE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

THE ISLAND AND ITS PEOPLE

“**T**O Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, the first kingdom of all the kingdoms of the world.

“We the chiefs and rulers and governors of Niué-Fekai desire to pray Your Majesty, if it be your pleasure, to stretch out towards us your mighty hand, that Niué may hide herself in it and be safe. We are afraid lest some other powerful nation should come and trouble us, and take possession of our island, as some islands in this quarter of the world have been taken by great nations. On account of this we are troubled, but we leave it with you to do as seems best to you. If you send the flag of Britain, it is well; or if you send a Commissioner to reside among us, that also will be well.

“Our king, Tuitonga, died on the 13th July last, but before he died he wished to write to Your Majesty, and beg you to send the powerful flag of Britain to unfurl in this island of Niué, in order that this weak island of ours might be strong. It was from your country that men first came to this island to make known the name of the Lord, and through them this land of Niué-Fekai became enlightened; then, for the first time, this people knew that there were other lands in the world. Therefore the people of this land rejoice in you and in your kingdom. This land is enlightened by the gospel of Jesus Christ brought by the subjects of Your Majesty, and that is why we make this petition.

“That is all we have to say. May Your Majesty the Queen and your powerful kingdom be blessed, together with the kingdom of Niué, in the kingdom of Heaven.

“I, Fataäiki, write this letter.”

Thus wrote Fataäiki, King of Niué, otherwise known as Savage Island, thirteen years ago.

The first request for a protectorate was made to a missionary as early as 1859, when the

people were in the first heat of conversion to Christianity; this seems to have gone no further. But King Fataāiki's letter reached its destination, and England, "the first kingdom of all the kingdoms of the world," England the earth-hungry and insatiable (as others see her), took thirteen years to think it over, and then, having received a second letter more precisely worded, reluctantly consented. It is an object-lesson of the way in which we blunder into Empire.

It was not until the Germans began to develop their plantations in Samoa that Niué was discovered to have a value. The Polynesian races, as everybody knows, are a picturesque, easy-going, and leisure-loving people, too fond of home to travel, and too indolent to do a steady day's work. A dash of some alien blood, as yet unrecognised, has played strange freaks with the men of Niué. Alone among Polynesian races they opposed the landing of Europeans; alone they love to engage as labourers far from home, and show, both at home and abroad, a liking for hard work; no other island race has the commercial instinct so keenly developed. The number of them working in Samoa has increased so rapidly in recent years