

**TALES  
FROM OLD FIJI**

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Tales from Old Fiji by Lorimer Fison

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**LORIMER FISON**

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*Frontispiece.*

SAMOAN GIRLS DRESSED FOR DANCING.

TALES FROM  
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<sup>Ⓟ</sup>  
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*Lucy Wood fund.*

## PREFACE

**A**PART from their intrinsic interest, the following legends need not be taken as having any considerable scientific value, except as an unpretentious contribution to our records of what has been well called "vanishing knowledge." They were not written for publication, but simply as matter for the reading of my near kinsfolk. Each one of them contains a genuine legend as its skeleton, so to speak. For the flesh with which that skeleton has been covered, the most that can be claimed is that it is of the native pattern. My principal informant, old Taliai-tupou, the Tui Naiau, or King of Lakemba, was a talkative old gentleman with a lively imagination. I once asked a Lakemba chief, named Takelo, who was also one of the Mission agents, about a legend the King had told me. "Yes," he replied, "it is genuine; but there is more of it than I knew of before. A thing is always bigger when it comes out of his mouth than it was when it went in at his ears. It is a common saying with us, 'Let us go to Vatu-wangka, that the King may lie (*i.e.* "yarn") to us!'—Vatu-wangka was the name of Tui Naiau's house.

Another fact in connection with this old chief is that he was a Fijian. Hence there is a strong Fijian flavour in all those sagas of his with which Tonga and Samoa are concerned. This may be especially noted in the "Story of Longapoa," but I refer to it here as well by way of emphasis.



With regard to the methods of electing a chief (*vide* this same "Story of Longapoa"), it must be recollected that it is only the *qualification* for chieftainship that is actually elective in a certain line, which may have a number of men in it. The choice of any particular candidate is determined by selection among the persons who happen to be thus qualified. Tanoa and Veindovi are good specimens of old-style Fijian chiefs. Tanoa was Thakombau's father. He used always to paint his face black to hide his wrinkles, and consequently the "old hands" called him "Old Snuffy." They distinguished his son, Thakombau, by the title of "Young Snuffy."

The Livuka legend was told me by one Inoke (Enoch) Wangka-qele as we were sailing from Nairai to Thithia. The wind was light, and I sat on the lee-side watching the gambols of two queer-looking fish that were playing around us. We were moving slowly through the water, and from under the bows large bubbles came floating past, in every one of which you could see a beautiful little picture—the schooner, with her white sails, floating on a little bit of sea, with a little bit of sky overhead, quite clear and distinct. They were most beautiful; and I felt quite bereft when the light faded away, and our little miniatures grew fainter and fainter, till they were no longer to be seen. Then came Inoke, and squatting down at my feet, he told me the wild, strange legend that I have recorded. I give it, as nearly as I can remember, in his own words.

Ma'afu, another of my informants, was a remarkable man. He was a Tongan chief of the highest rank, who migrated to East Fiji because there was not room enough

in Tonga both for himself and the lord the "Heart-of-Samoa."<sup>1</sup> At that time most of the East Fijian tribes were still heathen, and continually at war with one another. Ma'afu, with his following of Tongans, used to take sides in the fights, and when one of the parties gave in, it was found that he claimed the lordship over both. He protected the vanquished, and led them against the victors when they tried to make aggressions upon them. In this way he made himself practically the overlord of Eastern Fiji, and would probably have mastered the whole group if England had let it alone. Annexation stopped his career.

Another of my informants, Soko-tu-kivei, was a remarkably intelligent man. He was in his day the chief of the Livuka tribe who migrated in the old times from Bau.

The legend entitled "The Beginning of Death" has in it a myth which is spread throughout all the Polynesian islands—Bulotu, the dwelling-place of the gods, and the fishing of Maui. According to the Maori version, Maui's fish-hook was the jaw-bone of his great-great-grandmother, Muri-ranga-whenua. He fished up New Zealand from the bottom of the sea. The Maori name of the North Island is Te-ika-a-Maui = the Fish of Maui, and the southern end of Hawke's Bay is "Maui's Fish-hook," the name of which is Piki-rawea; elsewhere in New Zealand it has other names. This island-raising legend is found, with variations, in Raro-tonga, Mangaia, Hawaii, and Manga-reva; and Maui's exploits furnish themes for legends in other groups. The account of the raising of Tonga in "The Beginning of Death" suggests volcanic action.

<sup>1</sup> "Tui Kanokupolu" (Fijian, "Vu-ni-valu"), literally, the "Heart-of-Upolu" (Samoa), whence the clan is said to have come to Fiji.

Hiku-leo's tail is no invention. It gives him his name—"Hiku" = "tail," and "leo" = "to watch."

A man's father's brother, according to the classificatory system of kinship that prevails in the South Seas, is not his "uncle," but his "father"—great or little according as he is older or younger than the man's real father.

It is rather interesting to find the "roc" in the South Sea Islands. This big bird appears in several of the Fijian myths, and elsewhere also among the other groups.

"What the Tongans say about Napoleon" is of no great value, except as showing how quickly and easily a myth may establish itself. If Vave of Kolonga had got hold of his story in the heathen days from one of the old beach-coamers, and if the schoolmaster had not come to the islands, by the time when he had become a grandfather the myth would have grown into a true saying handed down from the ancestors.

I cannot bring this short preface to a close without acknowledging the debt of gratitude that I owe in the first place to Mr. W. W. Skeat, who has taken great pains in editing my rough MSS. and preparing the Appendix and Index. His kindness has laid me under a great obligation to him.

I have also to acknowledge the very great kindness of my friend Dr. Brown, and that of the Spectator Publishing Company, who have most generously lent me a number of photographs and illustrations, a selection of which are published in this book.

LORIMER FISON,

*Hon. Fellow Anth. Inst.*