A brief introduction

In April 2013 my wife and I were in the little city of Santa Cruz, New Mexico, visiting an old friend. Knowing my love of books, she said they had a pretty good secondhand bookshop there, would I like to check it out? Of course I would, so we went in and had a look. Cunningly named “Bookshop Santa Cruz”, it was wonderful, an Aladdin’s cave. With all the books on view on the shelves, like “proper” secondhand bookshops of old, but with everything computerised so that they could answer your queries if you had any. Serendipity PLUS technology—bliss!

In one of the shelves they steered us toward as being a repository of books on the Pacific, I came across a book called *People of Paradise,* by David Attenborough. As an avid fan of Sir David’s many nature and wildlife TV programs, I had no idea he had been in the Pacific. Indeed, leafing through the book, I found he had spent quite some time in Fiji, back in the 1950s no less, the Fiji of my high-school days. Of course I bought the book.

On reading through the three chapters, I was struck by how different they were from most of the books of “travellers’ reminiscences” one reads, which are full of the sort of urban mythology tourists avidly lap up. Here was a book by a scientist, who brought his enquiring and analytical mind to bear on what he saw. But it was also a book by a young man, excited by the big adventure. It was a great read, and I wanted to share it.

So, I wrote to Sir David, having found an address for his production company online. I asked if he would be willing to let me put the chapters concerned up on my Just Pacific website. He replied promptly with a very friendly letter, nostalgically recallng his visit to Fiji, and graciously agreeing to let me put the material online. I am most grateful to him.

Here, then, are the three chapters concerned. I am confident you will find them as great a read as I did. I should add one note. In the third chapter, Sir David describes sailing on a *drua* twin-hulled canoe, in Lau. He is one of very few Europeans, and very probably the last, to have ever done so. The sole remaining *drua* sits marooned in the Fiji Museum, never to sail again. It is worth reading the book just for that description alone.

Rod Ewins
October 2013

PEOPLE of PARADISE

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

illustrated

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
New York
1960

6

The Firewalkers of Fiji

FROM THE NEW HEBRIDES, WE TRAVELED EASTWARD TO Fiji. The journey for the modern traveler is an easy one; you fly from Vila to Noumea in New Caledonia and there join one of the huge four-engined French airliners which land for an hour on their way from Paris to Tahiti. Their next stop, eastbound from Noumea, is Fiji's international airport of Nandi, on Viti Levu, the largest of the three hundred or so islands in the group.

When we landed there, I noticed the signboards read *Nadi*, whereas the printed labels that had been tied to our baggage in Noumea spelled the word *Nandi*. It seemed unlikely that both should be equally correct, but then I saw that a large pictorial wall map labeled as *Beqa* an island I had previously read of as *Mbengga*, and it was clear that Fijian spelling was not as straightforward as I had imagined.

Its complexities, I discovered, originated in a desire for conciseness and linguistic accuracy on the part of the missionaries who first wrote down the language over a hundred years ago. They noted that there were some common consonants which could only be represented phonetically

by two letters, such as *mb*, *nd*, and *ng*. As these were single sounds, they decided to allocate single letters to them, and in these three cases it was obvious what these letters should be, for the simple consonants *b*, *d*, and *g* were not employed at all in Fijian speech. The missionaries therefore used these single letters to represent the more complex sounds. Thus the name of the airport, though pronounced *Nandi*, is written, in Fijian spelling, *Nadi*. But then the missionaries went further. There were also two other compound consonants, *ngg* and *th*, and to be logical both of these should also be written as single letters. As neither of the letters *q* or *c* had been used so far, the missionaries employed the first to represent *ngg* and the second *th*. As a result, the island whose name is pronounced *Mbengga* was written in Fijian spelling as *Beqa*, and *Nggelethimbi* was set down even less recognizably as *Qelecibi*. Strangers found all this so misleading that eventually, many years later, straightforward phonetic spelling was introduced for use in literature printed for outside consumption. It may not be as neat as the missionaries' version, which is still used widely throughout Fiji, but it is more easily comprehended by newcomers to the islands.

The airport of Nandi has been built on the plains near the northwestern coast of Viti Levu, but the capital, Suva, lies a hundred and thirty miles away on the shores of a magnificent harbor on the southeast coast. To get from one to the other you must either fly in a small plane or set off on a five-hour drive in a taxi, as we did.

To judge from the country around Nandi, you would suppose that Viti Levu was a dry, barren island, for the plains are arid and the gaunt hills behind largely treeless

and covered with dry grass. But this is not typical of the whole of the island, for Fiji lies in the track of the easterly trade winds which bring with them clouds heavy with moisture gathered during their thousand-mile journey over the Pacific. When these meet the high mountain ranges of central Viti Levu, which rise to three thousand feet, they shed their water in torrential rains. As a result the windward, eastern side of the island has an extremely high rainfall during most of the year, while at the same time the leeward side, including Nandi, is often suffering from drought.

This disparity in the climate is reflected to an astonishing degree by the vegetation. Twenty miles along the Suva road from Nandi, you cross the watershed, and the hills, which hitherto had been parched yellow, are suddenly clothed with a lush growth of tree ferns, bamboos, banyans, palms, and Tahitian chestnuts.

Strangely, we passed very few native Fijians—human or animal—as we drove. Nearly all the people were Indians, descendants of immigrants who were brought to the island in large numbers, between 1870 and 1916, to work in the sugar plantations. Today there are 180,000 of them and they outnumber even the Fijians themselves. Most still live close to the sugar-cane fields, which are particularly abundant in the Nandi district, and we drove many miles before we saw our first tall muscular fuzzy-haired Fijian, looking very conspicuous among the slight and lithe Indian sugar workers.

Most of the animals we saw were also of foreign descent. But man, since his arrival in the Pacific islands, has added greatly to their fauna and we saw several of his

guide for us. Furthermore, his time would not be entirely wasted as far as Broadcasting House was concerned, for while he was with us he could make recordings which he could use in his own Fijian language radio programs. From the Public Relations Office came Sitiveni Yanggona, a young Fijian also from a chiefly clan, who had relatives in some of the islands we were hoping to visit and who therefore would be an invaluable ambassador. Sitiveni—his name is the Fijian version of Stephen—later proved to be an accomplished guitarist, a talent which among the musical Fijians was almost as good an ambassadorial qualification as being connected with the aristocracy.

One of the ancient rituals that we were hoping to film was that of firewalking. There are two completely different forms of this strange custom practised in Fiji. One of them, however, is not a Fijian but a Hindu ritual which was brought to the islands by the Indians. In this form of the ceremony, the devotees walk barefoot along a trench filled by glowing charcoal. The other version, however, is truly Fijian and this is very different, for the performers walk, not on charcoal, but on huge boulders that have been heated for many hours in a great fire of logs.

Only one tribe in the whole of Fiji performs this type of firewalk, and they live on the tiny island of Mbengga, some twenty miles southwest of Suva—the island I had looked for on the airport map and had found spelled in such an unlikely fashion. We could see it from our hotel room as a blue-toothed silhouette on the horizon. Arrangements had been made for us to attend a performance of the ceremony; and the four of us, Manu, Sitiveni, Geoff, and myself, sailed across to it in a small launch. The island

measures no more than five miles across in any direction, but it is very mountainous, its highest peak rising to over a thousand feet, and its shores bounded by rocky cliffs of volcanic lava. We sailed through the sapphire sea, skirting its south coast until we came to a small inlet at the head of which lay the firewalkers' village. Most of the houses, or *mbures*, were built in the traditional Fijian manner, each set on its own platform of coral rock and earth, with reed walls and a roof of shaggy thatch. Conspicuous among them glittered a new corrugated iron church. In between the mbures and along the beach grew numerous tall fruit trees —mangoes, breadfruit, bananas, and coconut palms—and the whole settlement was enclosed on three sides by steep, lushly green hills.

We walked straight to the main mbure in the center of the village, for there we knew that the chief and the elders of the community would be awaiting us. By custom, we had to present to them a ceremonial gift, a *sevu-sevu*, of a few dried roots of kava, which here in Fiji is called *yanggona*. We had already drunk kava with Manu in Suva, so we had some idea of the formalities that would accompany the ceremony.

As we entered the shady coolness of the mbure, we took off our shoes. At the other end, grouped in a half circle, sat the chief, his master of ceremonies, and the more senior of the men of the village. We took a few steps inside, the pandanus mats which covered the floor feeling deliciously silky to the soles of our naked feet, and then sat down immediately, for it is impolite to stand in the presence of people who are sitting. Manu now began the presentation of our sevu-sevu.

He placed the kava roots on the floor in front of him, clapped hollow-palmed several times, cleared his throat, and made a short speech explaining how small and unworthy the kava was in comparison to the great nobility of the chief to whom it was being presented. Nonetheless it was a symbol, though a poor one, of our respect. He ended by mentioning briefly who we were and why we had come to the village. Then we all clapped in unison and said together, "*Mana e ndina,*" which means "So be it." Later on, when we were more familiar with this procedure, which was the essential preliminary to every visit, we were able to mutter at several points during both Manu's speech and the one that followed, "*Vinaka, vinaka,*" which means both "Hear, hear" and "Thank you very much," as well as "Good, good," and is therefore a fairly safe remark to pass at any time and fully in accordance with custom. On this, our first presentation of a sevu-sevu, both Geoff and I kept quiet.

The chief, an old man with a wrinkled brown face, made no reply to Manu's speech, for that would not have been in keeping with his dignity. This task fell to his master of ceremonies, who took the kava as Manu passed it over and, with his hand resting upon it, thanked us for our gift on behalf of his chief, explained how unworthy the village was to be visited by such important people as us, apologized in advance for the wretchedness of the hospitality and concluded by assuring us that though the village was poor, the very best of what they had was at our disposal.

The kava was then handed to one of the men sitting behind the chief who pounded it with an iron bar on a wooden block. A large and elegant four-legged wooden

bowl was placed at the head of the circle. The kava pulp was poured into it and the man sitting behind it began to mix the drink, using a bundle of fibres as a strainer. When at last this was completed, the chief's daughter, a very pretty girl with a beautiful white smile and a splendid mop of frizzy black hair carefully combed out in the traditional fashion into a huge globe, came into the ring holding a cup made from the polished shell of a coconut. This was filled by a squeeze from the fibre strainer and then the master of ceremonies called my name. I had been drilled sufficiently by Manu to know that I had then to clap my hands in acknowledgment, thus showing the kava server where I was sitting. The girl, stooping, came across and presented the cup to me and I lifted it to my lips. When I had first drunk kava in Suva it had tasted to me rather like gritty mouthwash and I had not cared for it greatly, but I was beginning to appreciate it more, and now I positively enjoyed the slightly anesthetizing sensation it gave to my mouth and lips. I knew that it was important to take only one drink from the cup, but I also knew that it was not necessary to drain it, for I had seen some kava drinkers leave the gritty dregs at the bottom and throw them out over their shoulders before returning the cup. However, I decided not to risk this last refinement, as I had the feeling that it might be considered a frill which would not come well from someone as new as I to kava drinking: I might be regarded as being bumptious as the young sub-lieutenant in a naval wardroom who says "God bless her" after the loyal toast, a remark which, as everyone knows, can only be properly made by officers of the rank of commander and above. I therefore swallowed the entire cupful,

dregs and all, but to add a little panache to the proceedings, I sent the cup spinning back across the pandanus mat towards the bowl with a flick of my wrist, as I had seen Manu do on a previous occasion. This produced grins and a chorus of "Vinaka, vinaka," from the villagers at the head of the ring and was obviously interpreted as an indication that we were participating fully in the spirit of the ceremony.

One by one, we all drank, each clapping hollow-palmed after we had been served, as a sign of respect to the kava. When everyone had received his cupful, the formal atmosphere melted a little, and people who hitherto had been sitting bolt upright and cross-legged, now relaxed their posture and stretched their legs, some lying on their sides, others resting on their elbows. To me this was an inexpressible relief, for sitting cross-legged becomes extremely painful after a few minutes to someone who is unaccustomed to it. I had remained in this position for the best part of half an hour, not daring to stretch my feet out in case this might offend custom, and by now considerable portions of my lower half seemed to have lost all feeling. Stiffly I stretched out my legs, waiting for the sensation to return to them before I attempted to stand up.

A young Fijian came over and sat by me. He introduced himself, in perfect English, as Henry, the village school teacher, and as the kava circulated again he told me the legend associated with the origin of the firewalk.

"In the old days, our people used to gather each evening in one of the mbures to listen to the storytellers. It was the custom that each man should promise to bring a gift, a *nambu*, to the storyteller the next day. One evening, a

young chief named Tui N'kualita promised that he would bring a nambu of an eel.

"The next morning, to keep his word, he went up the creek that flowed behind the village to look for an eel. Soon he came to a muddy pond, just the sort of place where you might find an eel, so he began to dig. After some time he thought he saw something moving in the bottom of the hole that he had dug, so he thrust his hand inside and caught hold of something slippery. He began to pull. Then a voice rang out from the hole saying 'Help. Let me go.'

" 'No,' said Tui N'Kualita, 'I am going to catch you and take you back to my village as a nambu.'

" 'If you will let me go, I will make you the best navigator in the world.'

"Tui N'Kualita pulled harder and said, 'I *am* the best navigator in the world.'

" 'If you will let me go, I will make you the best javelin thrower in the world,' pleaded the voice.

" 'I *am* already the best javelin thrower in the world. No one can throw it farther than I.'

" 'Let me go, and I will make you the most handsome man in the world.'

" 'I *am* the most handsome man in the world. No woman can resist me.' "

("He must have been a very talented fellow," I said to Henry.

"He was a Mbengga man," Henry replied solemnly.)

" 'Let me go,' said the voice, 'and I will give you the power to walk on fire without being burned.'

" 'Well,' said Tui N'Kualita, 'that is quite a different

matter. Come out of your hole and show me what you mean.'

"And out of the hole came not an eel, but a tiny little man, a sort of elf, whose name was Tui na Moliwai."

("There are a lot of Tui's in this story," I murmured.

"Well, Tui means chief," Henry explained, "and Moliwai was the name of the pool.")

"Then Tui na Moliwai began to make the kind of earth oven that we call a *lovo*. He dug a big pit, filled it with large boulders, piled timbers on top, and then set fire to them. When the fire had burned for some hours and the boulders were extremely hot, the elf took Tui N'Kualita by the hand and led him four times around the lovo, their bare feet treading on the stones. When they came out they were quite unharmed.

" 'Now,' said Tui na Moliwai, 'you and I must be buried together with the stones in the lovo for four days.'

" 'I cannot agree to that,' replied Tui N'Kualita. 'You might play some trick on me, and anyway I must be getting back to my village or they will begin worrying about me.'

" 'All right,' replied Tui na Moliwai. 'Then we must bury some *masawe* instead.' "

("Masawe is a sort of vine," interjected Manu, "which when it is ripe contains a lot of sugar. We often cook it in lovos and make it into puddings.")

" 'Thank you,' said Tui N'Kualita. 'Now I will release you and I will find something else for my nambu.'

" 'Thank you,' replied Tui na Moliwai. 'From henceforth the gift of walking on fire shall be yours and your descendants forever.'

"And ever since then," concluded Henry, "the people of Mbengga have had the power of walking unharmed on fire."

The lovo had been excavated at the back of the village. It was a circular pit some fifteen feet in diameter and four feet deep. Around it lay piles of heavy logs and blackened boulders of stone. That evening, the men of the village began to stack the timbers in the lovo. Many of the logs were so heavy and bulky that two men were needed to shift them. They threw a few boulders into the lower layers, but most of them were heaved on to the top of the finished pile, six feet above the ground.

Henry explained that the fire must be lit exactly eight hours before the ceremony was due to take place and, as it had been decided that the performers should enter the pit around noon the next day, it would be set alight some time before dawn.

We slept that night in the chief's mbure. Henry woke us at three o'clock, and we stumbled through the darkness to the lovo. Three men, holding torches of blazing palm leaf stems, came down to the lovo and thrust the flames down the side of the pit to reach the small sticks that formed the foundation of the pile. Soon these caught alight and then, as the flames licked up around the big timbers, the bonfire began to roar. Jets of scarlet sparks spouted upwards towards the yellow moon, and the stones, as they heated, began to split with cracks as loud as pistol shots, fragments of them coming spinning out of the fire to land at our feet. We watched this impressive blaze for some time and then, as the night sky began to bleach with the dawn, we went back to bed.

Five hours later, in midmorning, we found that the fire was still burning. Most of the timbers had been reduced to ash, and their burden of stones had sunk below the level of the ground, but there were deep red glows between the flakes of white powdery wood ash, and the pit was still so hot that when a few more logs were thrown in they burst into flame almost immediately.

We seated ourselves on the steep grassy bank at the back of the lovo, and just before noon the ceremony began. A column of men, led by the chief and the tribal priest, silently filed toward the pit from the center of the village. They were wearing full traditional costume—long kilts of pandanus leaf strips dyed red, green, and yellow; sashes of black and white bark cloth; garlands of flowers around their necks; and chaplets of shredded pandanus leaves in their hair. Their brown bodies glistened with coconut oil. They walked quietly past the pit, keeping their eyes averted from it, for it is forbidden for any performer to look on the fire before he enters the lovo. They strode past us towards a small leafy hut standing beneath a breadfruit tree.

Those men who were merely assistants in the ceremony continued past the hut, circled, and returned toward the lovo, but the men who were to walk on fire left the column and stooped into the hut. The last of them shut the door behind him.

The tribal priest, an elderly heavily jowled man with bushy greying hair, gave the instructions for the preparation of the pit. First the unburned timbers had to be removed. The men noosed them with loops of vines on the end of poles and then, whooping and cheering, dragged

them far away beyond the trees. Next the jumble of boulders had to be leveled to provide a roughly even surface on which to walk, and this they did by first placing the trunk of a tree fern across the lovo and then using it as a fulcrum against which they could use the poles as levers to shift the huge hot stones. Finally bundles of freshly gathered green leaves were placed in a ring around the margin of the lovo. All this had taken some twenty minutes, but although the stones must have cooled slightly, there was no doubt whatever that they were still searingly hot. The air above them shimmered, the heat rising with such intensity that it struck you in the face like a physical blow if you stood within five feet of the edge of the pit. I was quite certain that under normal circumstances the stones would scorch and burn any flesh that touched them.

The men who had prepared the pit squatted around it by the bundles of leaves. The priest, standing alone, turned toward the hut where the men who were to walk still sat in darkness and called a single word of command, "*Avuthu.*" There was a pause. Then the door of the hut opened and the men, in single file, came running towards the pit at a jog trot. There was absolute silence except for the rhythmic swishing of their pandanus kilts. Without any hesitation, the leader entered the lovo. Slowly, deliberately, his head bent forward and his eyes upon the stones, he walked round the pit. The other men followed behind him. They did not flinch from the stones. They did not tread lightly or quickly. They placed their full weight on every step. It took the leader about twenty paces to complete the circuit of the pit. Suddenly, as he reached the point at which he had entered, the attendants,

crouching in a circle round the lovo, leaped to their feet and threw the bundles of leaves into the center of the pit. The walkers turned toward the middle, stepped on to the bundles, and stood in a tight knot, their arms round one another's necks, and as the steam from the scorching leaves swirled round them, they burst into a droning yet passionate chant. Two of the helpers dragged into the pit the long brown masawe vine that had been lying nearby. Frantically the rest of the attendants began to shovel earth into the pit. The men grouped in the center continued their wild song, treading the soil beneath their feet. Within a few minutes, the stones, the masawe vine, and the leaves were all buried. Slowly the men drifted away, and soon all that was left was a wide patch of freshly turned earth from which wisps of steam still rose. The ceremony would not be complete, however, until four days had passed. Then the masawe vine would be dug up and made into puddings which all the villagers would eat.

As soon as the men left the pit, I examined their feet. They were, of course, covered with thick calloused skin, as are the feet of any people who go barefoot most of their lives, but even calloused skin will scorch, and there was no sign of any burning whatever. Furthermore, they were not insensitive, for the men flinched from the touch of a lighted cigarette on the sole.

One of the men who had walked was the local medical assistant, an educated man who had received his medical training in Suva. I asked him what he had done in the twenty minutes he had spent in the darkness of the hut before the ceremony, expecting to be told that he had prayed or had, in some way, induced in himself a trance.

Without any hesitation, the leader entered the fire pit and walked on the searingly hot stones

But he said that they had done nothing except talk in low voices about the ritual they were about to perform. Nonetheless, he did say that when they ran out into the bright sunlight he had felt as though a new strength had come into his body. A man sitting next to him expressed it slightly differently, saying that he had felt as though a god had entered his belly. A third said that everything had looked strange and misty. All of them agreed that when they walked upon the stones they had experienced little sensation of heat and none of pain.

I asked the medical assistant why he had performed the walk. He did not seem to be very sure. It was not to prove that he was strong and brave, neither was it because he thought the ceremony might have some purging power. Perhaps, he said in a pensive objective way, he had done it because no man was truly a Mbengga man until he had practised the strange ability given him by the gods and proved that the story of Tui na Moliwai was a true one.

I asked him if I too could have walked on the stones without being burned. He replied I could have done so provided that I had entered the pit with him and had observed all the taboos beforehand—that I had not eaten any coconut and had remained in a state of purity for the four days preceding the ceremony.

Many people have witnessed the firewalk. The Mbengga men have performed it in Suva on several occasions and have even gone to New Zealand, where they have trodden on the stones in front of great audiences. Once they did so before a committee of doctors who carried out a scientific examination of the ceremony. Many explanations have

been put forward to account for their strange ability. Because the men insist on taking stones from their own island wherever they perform, some people have suggested that these boulders are of a curious stone which possesses the property of losing heat with great rapidity. But, in fact, the rock proves to be an andesite, a perfectly normal fine-grained igneous rock which retains heat for a very long time. Others have said that the walkers smear their legs with some solution or ointment which protects them from the heat; but no one could produce any ointment that has this odd power, and the doctors who examined the walkers' feet were unable to find any sign of such treatment. Perhaps the most convincing of all the suggested explanations is that the soles of the men's feet produce a coating of sweat and that this, combined with the thin cool skin on the outside of the boulders, was sufficient to protect them from harm. For my part, I do not think this explanation is convincing enough. I am quite certain that under normal conditions those stones would have caused the most terrible burns. But they did not. They did not even mark the surface of the skin.

Science has yet to explain many strange happenings in which it would seem that the mind is able to control the body. Hindu holy men pierce their tongues and cheeks with knives without feeling pain or shedding blood; Christian mystics produce unaccountable open wounds resembling the stigmata on their palms and feet; Turkish dervishes in a state of trance thrust spikes into their scalps; and Balinese dancers try to stab themselves with daggers yet fail even to break the skin. All these are well attested happenings, yet none, so far, has been completely ac-

counted for in scientific terms. Perhaps in time to come, physiologists will identify some principle which will enable us to understand how people are sometimes able to endow their flesh with characteristics it does not normally possess and thus explain these extraordinary phenomena and solve, among other things, the mystery of the Mbengga firewalkers' astonishing performance.

7

The Outer Isles of Fiji

NEARLY TWO HUNDRED MILES EAST OF SUVA, ALMOST midway between Viti Levu and the islands of Tonga, a mountain range rises from the ocean bed, the peaks of which project above the blue waters of the Pacific and form the coral-girt, palm-clad islands of Lau.

Manu and Sitiveni described them to us in rapturous terms. There, they said, the hibiscus and frangipani bloom as nowhere else, and the palms produce the sweetest and largest coconuts of the Pacific; the islands have always been the home of the finest craftsmen of Fiji, and only there do the old skills of canoe-building and kava bowl-making still survive. And of course, they added, it was universally agreed that the girls of Lau were the most beautiful in the whole of Fiji. Both Manu and Sitiveni, we discovered, came from Lau. Suspecting that perhaps they were a little prejudiced, we tried to get corroboration of their claims, but very few people in Suva who were not in fact Lauans had ever been to the islands. Communications were difficult, and the only ships that made the journey with any regularity were small and extremely uncomfortable trading boats that went out there to collect copra.

Nonetheless, it seemed that Manu's and Sitiveni's eulogies were not entirely without foundation, for everyone who had even heard of the islands assured us that it was in Lau that the twentieth century had made the least impact and that the old Fijian customs had lingered the longest. Our minds were finally made up when we learned from Sitiveni's father, himself by birth a noble of Lau, that on the island of Vanua Mbalavu, in the north of the group, a strange ceremony was soon due to take place during which the sacred fish of an inland lake would rise to the surface and give themselves up to the villagers.

By good fortune, a Government launch was scheduled within the next few days to leave Suva with a surveyor and take him to Vanua Mbalavu. He was going to assess the possibilities of building an airstrip for a New Zealander who owned a large coconut plantation in the northern part of the island. If we wished to see the fishing ceremony, we should have to stay at the village of Lomaloma in the south, but the launch could easily leave us there on its way, and fortunately, there was just enough spare room on board for the four of us.

The voyage took some time, for the crew of the launch anchored each night in the lee of some island, as they were unwilling to risk sailing through these heavily reefed waters in the darkness, but on the evening of our fourth day out, we entered Lomaloma Bay. We scrambled ashore hastily, for the launch had to reach the New Zealander's plantation twelve miles to the north before nightfall. Our baggage was bundled out of the hold and dumped on the beach; the launch went hard astern and steamed away. But we had not been left alone, for dozens of men, women,

and children had come down to the shore to meet the boat, and there were many willing helpers to carry our luggage up to the village. Most of the men who walked beside us wore not trousers, but sulus, simple lengths of cloth wrapped around their waists like skirts, some red, some blue, all of them brightly colored. The girls were also gaily dressed in cotton frocks, and many of them had put flowers in their hair—scarlet hibiscus, or the elegant ivory-colored blossoms of frangipani. I noticed that whereas all the people of Mbengga had frizzy hair, there were several people here whose hair was wavy and glossy, an indication of the influence of the Polynesian people of Tonga away to the east.

Lomaloma proved to be a pretty and very well-kept settlement. Many of its trim, thatched mbures were surrounded by flower beds, and between them stretched neatly clipped lawns. There was a school, two Indian-owned stores, a white-painted Methodist church, and a small radio transmitter operated by one of the villagers. It has always been an important place. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the northern Lau islands were conquered by one of the greatest of all the warriors of the Pacific, the Tongan chief, Ma'afu. He made his headquarters at Lomaloma and established a large Tongan community there. Even today, one section of the village is proudly and independently Tongan. Later, after Fiji was ceded to the British crown, Lomaloma became the residence of the District Commissioners who ruled over the whole of Lau, and their office buildings, and the ships' cannon that stood outside them, still remain. Now, however, the administrative center has been moved south to the

island of Lakemba, in the middle of the group. Even so, Lomaloma still retains an air of dignity and importance which distinguishes it from the more ramshackle and untidy Fijian villages of other islands, and it is still the home of the *mbuli*, the government-appointed chief who is responsible for the administration of the whole of Vanua Mbalavu. It was he who welcomed us and who was to be our host throughout our stay. He was a heavily built, somber man, deeply respected by the rest of the community. He seldom smiled, and when he did so, out of politeness to us, the expression seemed a painful one and vanished from his face with almost startling rapidity. He was a "strong" man, we were told, and as an example of how he wielded his authority and backed up his discipline, one of the younger men described an occasion when the mbuli discovered a group of people making "home-brew" —the highly alcoholic and illicit drink that is sometimes secretly made from mandioca, pineapple, sugar and yeast. He took the culprits out one by one, and thrashed them, and none of these full grown men dared offer any resistance.

He allocated to us a large beautifully built mbure that stood in the middle of the village close to his house. Its floor was covered by several layers of pandanus mats, so that it was pleasantly springy underfoot and its magnificently constructed roof, the rafters and cross-stays neatly lashed with sinnet, was supported by four free-standing hard-wood columns nearly two feet in diameter. Normally, this splendid building was used for community meetings, but now some beds were put in it, and we were told to consider it our own house.

Although we were the guests of the mbuli, the work of looking after us fell to his womenfolk. Fortunately, he had a large number of them—his wife, a fat jolly woman; his cousin, Hola, a thin woman with protruding teeth and a recurrent bubbling laugh, who did most of the cooking; and his two daughters, Mere (Mary) and Ofa. Mere was nineteen and the beauty of the village. Her hair was always carefully combed into the big globe now regrettably abandoned by many Fijians. She seemed very shy and seldom lifted her eyes from the ground when there were men present. Occasionally, however, if someone made a joke, or a saucy remark, she would look up and flash a small-toothed brilliant smile which every man in the village found very fetching. Ofa was two years younger and very like Mere, though she lacked her sister's poise and her face often clouded with childish uncertainties. Hola cooked in a special hut by the mbuli's house, and Mere and Ofa would bring us our meals, serving them on a foot-high table, covered by an immaculate white cloth. As we ate, sitting cross-legged on the floor, the two girls would remain at either end of the table to brush away with fans any flies that might try to settle on the food. The dishes Hola prepared for us were delicious—raw fish in coconut milk, boiled chicken and yams, fish grilled on wooden spits, mandioca, sweet potatoes, bananas, pineapples, and ripe juicy mangoes.

Our immediate neighbor was a fat cheerful man who had some congenital defect in his speech and was called affectionately in the village, Dumb William. But he was far from dumb, for although he could not articulate precisely, he produced a wide variety of extremely expressive

noises, and with the aid of swirling, stabbing, waving, gestures, and frequent rollings of his eyes, he could carry on elaborate and perfectly comprehensive conversations. Indeed, for us who could not understand more than a few words of Fijian anyway, he was one of the most easily understood of all the villagers. He came into our mbure almost every evening and regaled us with hysterically funny Rabelaisian stories about our neighbors.

William's proudest possession was a battery radio, which since his disability had also made him partly deaf, he played extremely loudly. But he did not listen very much to the radio programs from Suva. The villages up the eastern coast of Vanua Mbalavu were connected by extremely antiquated telephones that once served Suva and which, when they were outmoded, were sold to the chief of Lau who had them installed in several of his islands. As there was only one line, winding the handle on the side of one telephone caused every other instrument in the island to ring; so to indicate for whom the call was intended, a kind of Morse code of rings was used. Lomaloma's telephone was placed in the mbuli's house, and all day long it emitted an indecipherable jangle of rings. No one paid much attention or seemed to bother whether the call was intended for Lomaloma or not. Except for William. For him, the whole system provided an endless source of amusement, for he had discovered that by tapping the telephone wire and connecting it to the speaker of his radio set, he could enormously amplify the sound and listen to conversations between all the people of the island. He spent hours sitting by it with an absorbed expression on his face and thus became the village's major

source of gossip and scandal. Because he spent so much of his evening in our mbure, and because we could understand his own private language of gurgles and gestures almost as well as any one else could, we rapidly became very well informed about the private life of almost everyone in the village. As a result, we were not only able to share in scurrilous jokes with our neighbors and acquaintances but could even improvise a few ourselves. Within a few days we began to feel that we were no longer total strangers, but that we were become quite intimately integrated into the community.

The ritual fishing of Lake Masomo, the ceremony which had drawn us to Vanua Mbalavu in the first place, was due to take place three days after we arrived. Manu told me the legend of its origin, with continual interruptions and graphic embellishments from William.

"Once upon a time, a man on this island was working in his plantation when he saw two girl-goddesses from Tonga flying overhead. They were on their way to visit a relation who had married a Fijian man and were taking with them a present of some fish, neatly parceled up together with water, in a big leaf of the wild taro plant. The man called up to them that he was thirsty and asked if they could let him have a drink. They ignored him and flew on. This made him very angry, so he cut a branch from a *ngai* tree and hurled it at them. But instead of hurting them, he merely knocked the gift from their hands. The water fell and formed Lake Masomo, and the sacred fish of the gift have lived in it ever since. But they are taboo. No one is allowed to try and catch them except when the priests give permission."

When the day of the ceremony arrived, some thirty of us from Lomaloma climbed aboard the village launch and sailed off northward to join people in the settlements of Mualevu and Mavana whose priests, by tradition, controlled the rites. They too had their launches, and by midmorning we were in the middle of a small northward-bound convoy, traveling between the fringing coral reef and the high limestone cliffs that form the coast of this part of Vanua Mbalavu. After two or three miles the leading boat turned inward to the entrance of a long narrow fiord that snaked deep inland between steep rock precipices. When at last the water shallowed, we went ashore and walked for another half-mile, first through muddy mangroves and then up a steep rise. Beyond, we found Lake Masomo, a black, sinister sheet of water no more than three hundred yards long, cradled in the hollow of the heavily forested hills. Some of the men from Mualevu had been working here for several days, felling trees and shrubs to make a clearing by the shore of the lake and building there half a dozen long shelters, simple frameworks of timber thatched with green leaves. Soon a hundred people had gathered in the clearing. The women and girls began lighting fires for cooking and unpacking the taro and mandioca that they had brought with them wrapped up in leaves. Some of the men went into the bush to cut more branches with which to extend the shelters. Everyone seemed excited and as light-hearted as a bank holiday crowd at the seaside.

The rituals began with a series of kava presentations. First we ourselves, as strangers at the ceremony, gave kava to Tui Kumbutha, the chief of Mavana, who was

the most senior chief present. Then the various clans of the three villages presented kava to one another, and finally we all went up to a small shelter set fifty yards away from the rest of the huts to pay our respects to the head of the priestly clan who governed the whole ceremony. After he had acepted kava, he pronounced that the time was suitable for the rituals to commence.

Immediately, Tui Kumbutha despatched his orator to make the announcement public.

"Permission has been granted for the fishing to begin," he called, standing in the middle of the clearing.

"Vinaka, vinaka," we all replied.

"Everyone here must take part. You must enter the waters of the lake, and, two by two, you must swim. It is forbidden for anyone to wear any clothing whatsoever except for skirts of ngai leaves. Anoint your bodies with oil, for otherwise the waters of the lake will bite you. You must swim until the priest announces that the time has come to take the fish. Only then may you take spears and gather the fish which will rise to the surface of the waters and give themselves up to you."

The people needed no encouragement. While the men had been engaged in the kava ceremonies, the girls had been busy making heavy skirts from the long glossy leaves of the ngai tree, a branch of which the man in the legend had hurled at the flying goddess. The men took the completed skirts and slung them round their waists, and then the girls helped them to anoint their bare chests and legs with coconut oil deliciously perfumed with the essence of crushed blossoms, until their magnificently muscled bodies glistened a golden honey-brown.

Most of the men had already cut for themselves short logs, stripped of bark, which were to be used as floats, and holding them above their heads and whooping with excitement, they ran down to splash into the lake. Manu and Sitiveni, already beskirted, came to tell us that both Geoff and I were expected to help in the ceremony. Unfortunately, Geoff had several ulcers on his leg which were giving a lot of pain, and he decided that it would be unwise to swim, but there was nothing to prevent me from doing so. Hola had made a skirt for me, and when I had put it on, Mere oiled me thoroughly. Manu gave me a log float, and we went down to the lake together.

The waters were shallow and extremely warm, but the pleasure of swimming was somewhat marred by the fact that the bottom was covered with a thick black ooze into which we sank up to our knees. However, we soon learned to avoid it, even where the water was only two or three feet deep, by floating horizontally with our arms resting on our logs and kicking with our feet. Towards the center of the lake the water was deeper, and it was possible to swim more actively without becoming covered in mud. Soon, with shrieks and giggles, the girls, also wearing skirts and their bodies shining with oil, came running down to join us. A few of them brought log floats of their own, but most swam over to the men and shared theirs. Then, in a long line, we all swam across the lake, singing loudly, kicking out with our feet so that the waters behind us swirled black with ooze. Soon the unmistakable smell of hydrogen sulfide was rising from the water and, as I smelled it, I understood the way in which the ceremony worked. The gas had been produced by vegetable matter rotting

at the bottom of the lake, and until we had disturbed the waters, it had lain entrapped in the ooze. As it dissolved in the water, it would form a poison which would force the fish to the surface to "give themselves up" as the priest had so mysteriously predicted. This also explained why the ritual stipulated that people should oil their bodies, for hydrogen sulfide, in solution, forms a weak acid which if it were sufficiently strong, could cause a rash on unprotected skin.

We swam for nearly two hours and then, one by one, we came out and went back to the encampment for an evening meal. But most of us returned as soon as we had eaten. In the cool of the evening, wearing only our skirts of leaves, it was warmer in the lake than out of it. A huge yellow moon rose above the mountains and spilled its light in a rippling avenue over the black water. We swam in parties, sometimes losing one another in the darkness and joining other groups, our shouts, laughs, and songs echoing over the lake.

After an hour or so, when I was beginning to tire of swimming, I heard, mingling with our own songs, the distant sound of ukuleles and guitars. I waded out and found that back at the camp a *taralala* was in progress. This word derives from the English expression "tra-la-la" which the dictionary defines as a phrase expressive of joy and gaiety, and its Fijian meaning is almost the same, for it is the name given to a happy informal dance. Couples, shoulder to shoulder, their arms around each other's waists, were shuffling back and forth with a simple rhythmic step, in the middle of a large ring of seated people. At one end sat the musicians and singers, and at the other, kava was

being mixed and dispensed. The whole scene was lit by the flames of a small bonfire just outside the circle.

"Oi, Tavita," called the mbuli's wife to me, using the Fijian version of my name by which I was known in the village, "come and show us if you can dance." I went across the circle to where Mere was sitting, and to the accompaniment of whistles and cat-calls from Dumb William, we taralala-ed with the rest.

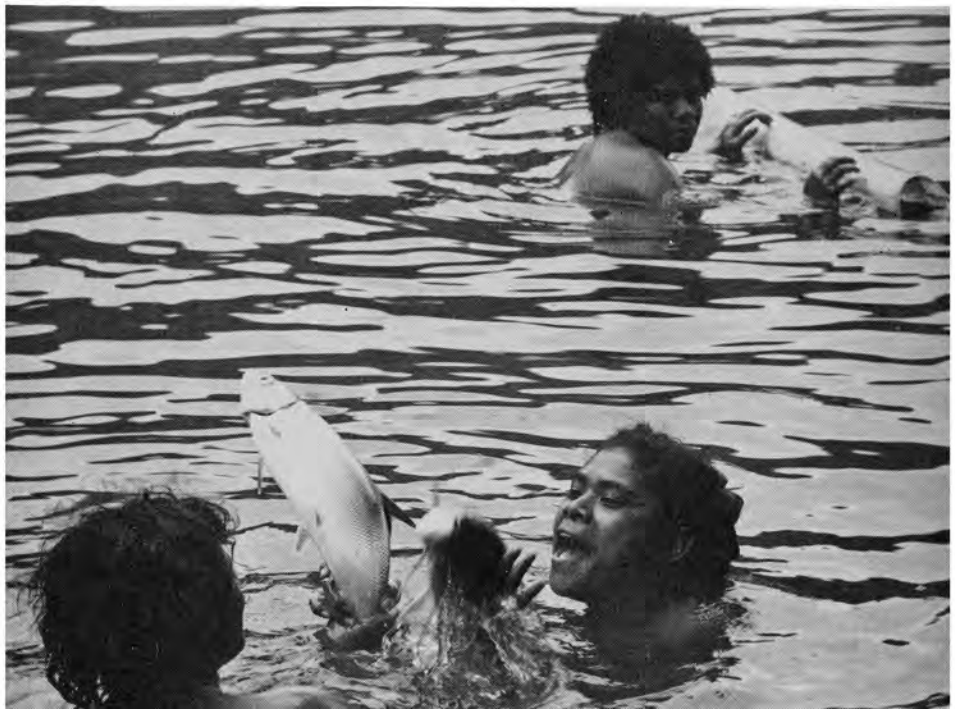
We sang and danced and drank kava late into the night. People came in from the lake to warm themselves by the fire and to join in the party, and then one by one they drifted back into the darkness to swim again. When I went to my shelter, the music was still continuing as loudly as ever. I slept for only a few hours. In the morning, when I returned to the lake, there were still some twenty people in the water.

During the morning, the fish began to rise in great numbers. They were huge silver creatures, and as we swam, they leaped from the surface in front of our noses and flew in a silver arc through the air before they fell back with a splash. Many were swimming half-asphyxiated with their mouths on the surface.

I was floating idly at the end of the lake nearest to the camp, when I suddenly heard a shout behind me and twenty men came rushing down the path brandishing fish spears, long poles with five or six iron spikes radiating from the end. The priest had given the order for the gathering of the fish to begin. The men spread out in a line and began systematically to work their way down the lake. The air was thick with spears. The half poisoned fish, in an attempt to escape, zigzagged wildly across the sur-

The men, with their bodies oiled and carrying floats, splashed into the lake

Some fish were so poisoned that the girls were able to seize them by their tail.



The cave floor in front of him was strewn with human bones

face of the water. Some were already so senseless that the girls were able to seize them by their tails. Ritual dictated even the small details of the handling of the fish. Normally a Fijian fisherman will thread his catch on a string which passes through the mouth and out through the gills, but in this case it was ordained by custom that the fish should be strung with the cord passing through their eyes, and all the men had armed themselves with small wooden skewers in order to do so. Half an hour later, it was all over. I counted one hundred and thirteen large silver fish like oversized mackerel lying on the bank. In the evening, we returned to Lomaloma and that night everyone feasted on *awa*, as the fish were called. I thought they were delicious. Geoff, however, not having taken part in the ceremony was perhaps a little less biased, and he maintained that the fish had the texture of cotton wool and a taste reminiscent of bad eggs.

The practical value of the ritual was quite apparent. The fishing could only be successfully carried out if a large number of people cooperated—and therefore it had to be organized; and its practice had to be carefully restricted, for if it were done too often, the fish might well be exterminated. The most convenient way of arranging all this was by turning it into a ritual administered by a priestly clan.

We had arranged before leaving Suva that a small trading boat which made a regular tour of the Lau Group should collect us from Lomaloma and take us down to the islands in the south, but it was not due to arrive for another week. The days which followed the fishing ceremony were among the happiest and most delightful that we

spent during the whole of our journey in the Pacific. The daily life of the village, which initially had been disturbed and thrown out of balance by our arrival, gradually reverted to normal as our presence came to be taken for granted.

In the mornings, the village woke early. If it was a weekday, the people would spend their time on community work which had been decided upon the previous evening by the *turanga ni koro*, the headman. Perhaps a house had to be built, nets repaired, or baskets woven. If it was a Saturday, families would be working on their own account in their cassava, yam, or taro gardens. If it was a Sunday, no one would do work of any kind.

We became particular friends of Totoyo, a huge hairy-chested man with an incongruously high-pitched voice, who had the reputation of being one of the best spear fishermen in the village. Sometimes we went out with him in his canoe and dived together over the reefs. He was a magnificent swimmer. Wearing tiny goggles that fitted close to his eyes, he would dive to fifteen feet in pursuit of a fish, remaining submerged for minutes at a time.

Once, the turanga ni koro ordered that a communal fish-drive should be held. The men spent the whole of one day making a *rau*, a rope of vines several hundred yards long around which they twisted the fronds of palm leaves. At high tide the next morning, they took it down to the lagoon. Two men held one end of the rau on the beach; the rest of it they piled into the launch. Then as the boat executed a wide circle in the lagoon, they paid the rau out over the stern. Eventually the other end was brought back to the beach some fifty yards away from

where they had started. Everyone from the village went into the water with it, most of them fully clothed, and stood or swam beside the rau, shaking it up and down. Manu explained that the fronds rattled together and made a loud noise under the water so that the fish did not dare pass through it, but instead fled toward the center of the circle. Every few minutes, the people on the shore hauled in a few yards of the rau, so that the ring grew smaller and smaller. The tide began to ebb, and soon shoals of fish could be seen darting back and forth in the shallowing water. We all became very excited, shouting frantically as a shoal swam toward our section of the rau and energetically rattling it up and down in the water. Within an hour, the circle that had been almost a hundred yards across had contracted to no more than five. Then spears were produced and very few of the bigger fish that had been in that patch of the lagoon escaped.

Every evening, as we sat talking after our meal, we received guests. People simply strolled in and seated themselves on the pandanus mats which covered the floor. Sometimes they would bring an object to show us—an old wooden war club, a curious insect, or the flower of a tree we had been asking about; and sometimes a guitar, so that they could exchange songs with Sitiveni. Often they came merely to sit, implying that it was not necessary to either sing or talk in order to derive pleasure from a person's company. Dumb William was a constant visitor, squatting in the open doorways flashing a powerful electric torch, which next to his radio was his most valued possession, to see if he could discover some goings-on that could be embroidered into a little bit of scandal. Often,

Mere or Totoyo would mix kava, and we would all drink.

Outside, the trade winds blew constantly and refreshingly through the rustling palms. The turanga in Kovo walked through the darkened village chanting the list of communal duties that had to be done next day. In the tall mango trees, the huge fruit bats squeaked and quarreled as they guzzled the succulent fruit, and girls wandered beneath the trees with lamps collecting fallen mangoes, for only at night, when the children are in bed, did enough fruit accumulate to be worth gathering. Other young people would go down to the beach to try and catch land-crabs as they emerged from their holes in the soft turf around the bases of the palm trees.

On these occasions, I often heard a soft bird call, which I could not identify. It sounded neither like an owl nor a nightjar. When I asked Ofa what it was, she hung her head and giggled. Eventually, I discovered from Manu that these were no bird calls; they were the signals of the *moa'uli*.

If a boy wishes to make an appointment with a girl, he does not speak to her himself, but instead persuades one of his friends to act on his behalf—to be a moa'uli, which means roughly "he who does the dirty work." The moa'uli goes to the girl and points out to her how talented and handsome his friend is and suggests that the two of them might meet at a particular place and a particular time. If the girl agrees, then the moa'uli does not go and speak directly to his friend, as that might be observed and cause gossip. Instead he whistles a signal outside the mbure where the man is sitting to confirm that the arrangement has been made. In this way, many assignations are kept

tactfully secret. It seemed to me that from the frequent whistles I heard in the bushes outside and the number of people who were always unobtrusively slipping in and out, that our mbure had become the center of communications for the young couples of the entire village.

One evening Totoyo brought a small stone adze blade to show us. It was a beautiful thing, smooth to the touch and most elegantly shaped. He said that he had been given it by a man from a hamlet a few miles down the coast who had told him that he had found it in a cave full of skeletons.

The next day, we walked along the beach to the hamlet. Everyone knew of the cave, and one of the men agreed to take us to it. We borrowed two paraffin pressure lamps from the local turanga ni koro, and together walked up the mountains.

After a mile or so, we came to a sheer limestone cliff. Our guide pointed to a small opening some fifteen feet up. A strangler fig splayed its corded roots over the rock face beneath and provided us with a splendid ladder up which we climbed. We lit the pressure lamps and went inside.

The interior was cold and clammy. Close to the entrance a few ferns and lichens grew in crevices; but beyond, the walls and ceilings were draped with stalactites which glittered frostily in the light of our lamps. We picked our way carefully over the rubble-strewn floor. In one place, part of the roof had collapsed, and we had to squeeze past a huge jagged boulder which almost completely sealed off the farther recesses of the cave. At last our guide stopped, knelt down, and held up his lamp. The

cave floor in front of him was strewn with human bones. There were many skulls, some almost perfect, others badly smashed with great parts of the cranium missing. Thigh bones, ribs, and vertebrae lay everywhere in untidy piles. This was no ordered burial ground, for even in the old pagan days the Fijians treated their cemeteries with the greatest respect. It was much more likely that we were looking at a relic of the tribal wars which raged so fiercely throughout the islands until less than a century ago. Often when the war-canoes of a raiding party were sighted, the women and children of a village would flee to the mountains and take refuge in a cave. If their menfolk repelled the raiders, then all was well, but if the attackers were victorious and caught the survivors trapped in a cave, then they were massacred. Only too often such raids had an even more revolting end, for of all the people of the South Seas, the Fijians, a century ago, were the most notorious cannibals.

We turned the bones over gently to see if we could find any clues which might tell us who these people were and how they had died. Beneath a broken skull, I found two small adze blades, one of a hard green stone like the one Totoyo had shown us and the other of what appeared to be ivory, possibly part of a whale's tooth. But they proved nothing, merely suggesting that the bones dated from the time when metal was either unknown or rare. We took the two implements, two skulls, and some of the other bones to give to a museum, and left the cave.

As we sat drinking kava in our mbure that evening, we told Totoyo of what we had seen and showed him one of the skulls. He was horrified and gestured wildly to us to

take it away. "Don't let it touch me," he said. "Those places are tambu. You should never have disturbed the bones. You will be punished."

That same evening a messenger arrived from an islet called Susui across the bay. He brought exciting news.

"Tomorrow," he said, "the balolo will rise."

The balolo is a marine worm which lives in tubes in certain parts of the coral reefs, often on the ocean side or by a passage where there is a regular circulation of clean water. At certain times of the year, its hinder end becomes swollen with either eggs or sperms and eventually it breaks off to go wriggling up to the surface of the sea, where the sperms and eggs are released. Obviously for this system of reproduction to be successful, it is extremely advantageous that all the worms should perform this action at the same time so that cross fertilization can take place and this, miraculously and inexplicably, is exactly what happens on two days each year. On the first occasion, the rising is comparatively small and often unreliable. The Fijians call it *balolo lei-lei*—the little balolo. A month later, however, comes the day of the great balolo—*balolo levu*. Then the sea, over wide areas, is full of the wriggling segments, and the people go out in their canoes at dawn to scoop it up, for it is considered a great delicacy.

All the travel and natural history books I had read said that the Pacific islanders are able to predict infallibly when the days of the rising will be. But, when we asked in Suva, no one could tell us. Eventually Sitiveni's father decided that a rising would take place during the time we were to spend in Lomaloma. We were delighted. Unfortunately the people in Lomaloma were not so sure. In

fact everyone we asked seemed extremely vague about the date. They would have to wait for certain signs, they said, but in any case the next rising would only be balolo lei-lei, so it was somewhat unpredictable. Part of the reef around Susui was supposed to be the best place for balolo in the neighborhood, and we had sent a message asking that we should be told when the signs appeared. Now the reply had come. A small patch of the worm had been washed up on the beach that morning. Tomorrow there would be a rising.

The next morning we set off very early, at first light, for the Susui reef. When we reached it, we sat rocking in the boat while the sun came over the horizon and rose into the sky. No worms appeared. Eventually, bitterly disappointed, we returned to Lomaloma. Later that day, one of the villagers came into the mbure and handed me a packet wrapped in a banana leaf. I opened it and inside found a mass of what looked like green vermicelli. "Balolo," said the man, grinning. The worms had risen not on Susui, but on another reef some five miles away, and the people, having heard of our interest, had sent us a sample.

"Well, we didn't see the stuff rising," I said to Geoff, "but at least we can find out what it tastes like."

Hola cooked it for us, and we ate it that evening. It was very salty and fishy, but I thought it excellent. Geoff found it revolting and only ate a small amount.

The next day Geoff's eyelids looked very red and began to puff up. "*Fua-fua,*" said the mbuli's wife. "Sickness from the sun," and she anointed his eyelids with a vegetable ointment which he found very soothing. But the following

morning, he was very ill indeed. His whole body was covered in angry red weals, his face was so swollen that he could neither open his eyes nor shut his mouth, and he had a high fever. I could only think that he was suffering from a severe allergic reaction to the balolo, similar to the sickness which some people experience after eating strawberries. If this were so, the only cure was an antihistamine, but we had none of this highly specialized drug in our medical kit.

One by one, our friends came to the mbure to see Geoff as he lay, mute with pain, his face so swollen that he was barely recognizable. Totoyo was one of the first.

"It was the skulls," he said to me gravely. "I told you that you would be punished. They have caused Geoffrey's illness."

"I too touched the skulls," I said, "and I am perfectly well."

"Do not be so sure, Tavita," Totoyo replied. "Your time will come."

That evening, I sent a cable to Suva describing Geoff's symptoms and asking for diagnosis and advice on what treatment to give him. On the next schedule, I had a reply confirming that it sounded as though he were suffering from some allergic reaction but adding that unless we had antihistamine tablets, nothing could be done. He would just have to wait until the effects passed off.

The next day, the copra boat that was to have taken us off the island arrived in Lomaloma Bay. It was out of the question to move Geoff. The boat collected its sacks of copra and sailed away without us. Still Geoff showed little signs of recovery. Some of the livid rash faded only to

reappear on other parts of his body. I was haunted by the fear that perhaps the diagnosis was not right and that he had some infection that would never get better unless we did something positive to cure it.

For the next two days, I sat by Geoff, bathing his forehead and eyelids, which was the only thing we could do which seemed to bring him any relief at all. Hola cooked special meals for him, but he was unable to take any food. One morning we got a cable from our friends in Suva saying that they had discovered that the New Zealander on the plantation in the north of the island had recently received some medical samples which probably included some antihistamine tablets. Dumb William set off immediately in the launch on the twenty-four mile journey to see if he could get them, while I stayed with Geoff. His temperature was still alarmingly high, and he was still in extreme discomfort. To our relief, William returned that night with the tablets, and Geoff took a dose straightaway. The very next morning his temperature was almost normal, and many of the weals in his body had faded.

"Well," said Totoyo severely, "it's all right this time, but let this be a lesson to you."

We now had to make new arrangements to leave the island. It would be a month before another copra boat called, and the only alternative was to charter a schooner to come out from Suva to collect us. This we did by radio. The night before it was due to arrive, we held a big kava ceremony in our mbure. Geoff, fully recovered, sat next to me, and Manu and Sitiveni sat on either side of us. At the other end of the ring sat the mbuli, his wife, Hola,

the turanga ni koro, Dumb William, Totoyo, Mere, Ofa, and all the rest of our friends.

After we had all drunk kava, I walked across the ring and put in front of each member of the mbuli's family a small gift—cloth, perfume, jewelry, and knives—which I had bought at the Indian store. Then, with Manu translating phrase by phrase I made a short speech. I thanked the people for their kindness to us, for their hospitality and for the open-hearted way in which they had received us into their community and said how sorry we were to leave.

When I had finished, the mbuli began to make a speech in reply. He had only spoken a few sentences when unexpectedly, and in defiance of all custom, his wife interrupted him.

"I must speak. Do not be sad, Tavita and Gefferi," she said, with tears running down her cheeks, "for you can never leave Lomaloma. Now you are members of our family, and we are members of yours. No matter where you may go, you will take something of Lomaloma with you. And as for us, we will not forget you. However long it is before you return here, this mbure is yours to live in for as long as you wish, and we shall always be ready to welcome you back to your second home."

I believed her as I listened. I believe her still.

8

Double Canoes and Turtle Callers

THE NEXT DAY, A TINY SPECK APPEARED ON THE HORIZON in the west. Totoyo immediately pronounced it to be the *Maroro,* the ship we had chartered by radio. He could see very little of its shape, but from the direction in which it was traveling, the time at which it had appeared, and the shipping news that he overheard daily on Dumb William's blaring radio, he was sure that it could be no other.

Slowly the dot increased in size until at last, through binoculars, we could see that she was a magnificent white-hulled schooner under full sail. Totoyo was right: it was the *Maroro.* Majestically she swung round between the two patches of ruffled water that marked the passage through the fringing reef into the lagoon. When she was no more than a hundred yards from us, she lowered her mainsail and dropped anchor. We said our last farewells, and within an hour we had left Lomaloma.

The *Maroro*—her name is a Tahitian word meaning Flying Fish—was captained and part-owned by an Englishman, Stanley Brown, who had come out to the Pacific with

the Navy during the war and had been so attracted by the islands that he had settled here for good. He was an ardent and skillful seaman, and when he learned that we were two weeks behind our schedule, he suggested immediately that we should sail throughout the night, confident in the accuracy of his navigation to keep us clear of any reefs. As evening drew on, a stiff breeze came up. He stopped the engines, and we sailed on over the starlit sea, the shrouds straining, and the jib creaking, leaving in our wake a broad trail of luminescence.

We made very good speed. During the night we sailed south, past Lakemba, in the center of the Lau group, and by the afternoon of the next day, we sighted ahead of us our destination, the island of Kambara.

This island is rich in vesi trees, which are only sparsely found elsewhere in Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa and which provide the most prized of all Pacific timbers. Yellow when it is first cut, it darkens with age until it is almost black. It takes a high polish and is so hard that it is virtually indestructible. Even termites avoid it, and it is almost impossible to hammer a nail into it unless you first bore a hole.

From this magnificent wood, the Kambara people produce food platters, combs, log-gongs, and above all kava bowls. Indeed, the vast majority of kava bowls in Fiji—and every family has at least one—come from this single island. They also make canoes of several sorts—simple dugouts with outriggers suitable only for paddling in rivers or the calm waters of lagoons; more elaborate ones the sides of which are built up with wash-strakes; and a large sea-going version that has a mast and a skeletal platform on the stays between the hull and the outrigger. But

the finest of all the creations of the Fijian boatbuilders was the *ndrua,* the great double canoe which was the largest and, in the opinion of many, the finest ocean-going craft ever made by the peoples of the Pacific. Some of the ndrua were over a hundred feet long and were capable of carrying two hundred people for great distances. One was recorded as carrying twelve head of cattle in its holds and Ma'afu, the Tongan warrior chief, converted one of his ndruas into a man o' war by building breastworks of bamboo around the deck and mounting on it a pair of cannon.

The word ndrua means twin, and the basis of these gigantic vessels was two huge dugout canoes each made from several tree trunks skillfully scarf-joined together. These hulls were not in fact identical twins, for one was always smaller than the other. In the center of the deck stood a hut, and by its side rose a mast which supported an enormous triangular sail of mats. A crew of fifty was required to handle them properly, and they were steered by paddles, over thirty feet long. The handling of these paddles, even in calm weather, required great strength, and in high seas men sometimes so overstrained themselves in attempting to control the oars that they were crippled for life or died during the voyage.

The Tongans also had a type of double canoe, the *tongiaki,* but this was an extremely clumsy craft compared to the ndrua, incapable of tacking and beating to windward. The Tongans, therefore, used to come over to the Lau islands, ally themselves to some Fijian chief, fight for him in the tribal wars, and then sail back to Tonga in the ndrua which they took as payment for their services.

Others came over and built ndruas for themselves. This was an extremely lengthy business, often taking several years, and as a result Tongan boatbuilders formed an almost permanent settlement on Kambara. Some never left, and the Kambara people today have strong blood connections with both Tonga and Samoa.

But the labor involved in keeping an ndrua seaworthy was immense. The pandanus mat sails rotted if they got wet. The sinnet—plaited coconut fiber—which was used as lashing throughout the canoes was subjected to great strain when at sea, and was constantly having to be replaced, and this usually involved the virtual dismantling of the entire craft. When European ships began to be seen more commonly in Pacific waters, the Fijians quickly appreciated the advantages of nails and canvas and the new methods of construction. Soon, the building of ndruas was abandoned, and the existing ones were allowed to decay. By 1890, there were less than ten in the whole of Fiji, and soon afterwards there were none whatever left afloat.

I had asked about these wonderful vessels when I was in Suva, but all that I had been able to see were a few models of them and two gigantic steering oars preserved in the museum. In Lomaloma, the mbuli had shown me a massive timber incorporated in a house that, he said, had once been the corner post of the deck house of Ma'afu's greatest ndrua. When the Tongan had died his boat had been hauled up on the beach at Lomaloma, the capital of his conquered kingdom of Lau, and left there to rot; the corner post was all that remained. Now I was hoping that in addition to filming the Kambara people making kava

bowls and small outrigger canoes, we might also find some old man who remembered the last ndruas and who could give us first-hand descriptions of them.

It was not difficult to find carpenters when we went ashore. Every man in the village seemed to be carving something or other. We spent most of the morning watching one of the younger men making a kava bowl. The adzes he used had iron blades but they were shaped like the stone-bladed ones I had seen in the Suva museum. To ensure that the rim was circular he marked it with a pair of compasses improvised from a length of sinnet and a piece of charcoal, and to scrape smooth the handsomely grained wood he used the curved tusk of a pig.

Later in the day, we found the canoe-makers. They were working among the curving boles of palm trees that grew thickly in the sandy ground above the shore at the far end of the village. With Manu as interpreter, I talked to an old man who sat on his haunches patiently shaping the outside of the hull with an adze. Yes, he remembered the ndruas, but the biggest of them were already rotting when he was a boy, and he had never himself sailed in one of the giants. He was rather uncommunicative, answering most of our questions with monosyllables, and Manu had to question him laboriously to extract any detailed information about the old boats. I was a little disappointed that he could not give us a vivid impression of a long voyage in an ndrua, but this had been a lot to hope for, and I consoled myself with the thought that we had obtained film records of the Kambara craftsmen making kava bowls and dugout canoes, which was in itself sufficient reward for our visit.

The canoe makers were working at the far end of the village

The ndrua

The coconut crab was nearly two feet across

That evening we were invited to drink kava with the mbuli. He told us that several of the villagers who owned coconut plantations on the neighboring uninhabited island of Wanngava had been wanting to go over there to collect some bags of copra. The wind, however, had not been favorable. Could we, perhaps, take them over there in the *Maroro*? The people had been so kind to us that we could not refuse.

The next morning some thirty men and girls came out across the lagoon in canoes and climbed on board. It was clear that the collection of copra was now merely a subsidiary purpose: the trip was really a pleasure cruise. The people sat in the stern, several of them playing guitars and ukuleles, and we sang from the moment that we got under way to the time when the anchor rattled overboard as we lay off Wanngava.

Geoff and I went ashore with the men to look at the island. While I was wandering in the plantations, Manu came to me holding in his hand the largest crab I had ever seen. Almost two feet across, it had a huge heart-shaped body, gigantic claws, and a black fleshy pimpled tail curled up beneath it. In color its shell was predominantly red-brown but its underside and the joints of its legs were flushed with blue. It was a robber of coconut crab, and I handled it with the greatest care, for its claws looked quite capable of crushing one of my fingers if I gave them a chance.

Robber crabs are related to the charming little hermit crabs that crawl around in the rock pools of the British coast dragging their wrinkle-shell homes with them, but these Pacific brutes are so large and armed with such

formidable defenses that they do not require the protection of a shell-home. Furthermore they have adapted themselves to life on dry land and only need to return to the sea for breeding.

The men told us that the crabs were a great pest in the plantations, for they climbed the palms, cut down some of the coconuts and then descended to rip off the husks from the fallen nuts and break them open with their great claws to feast on the soft flesh inside. This is a story which is widespread throughout the Pacific, but one which many naturalists dispute.

I placed Manu's crab on a palm to see if it could climb. Its long legs embraced the rough trunk, their sharp points easily finding holds, and slowly it began to clamber up, moving each of its six legs separately. There was no doubt whatever that it could ascend a palm if it wanted to.

I took it down before it climbed too far and put a piece of coconut in front of it to see if it would eat. The men laughed at me for doing so, saying that the crabs only fed at night. Certainly my specimen refused to take any interest in coconuts, whole or broken, old or newly picked. This, of course, proved nothing, but nevertheless, I found it hard to imagine how the creature, powerful though it was, would manage to split an unbroken coconut for itself.

I showed so much interest in the crab that other people began hunting for them in the holes between the boulders above the shore. Soon we had five of the monsters warily promenading on the soft turf beneath the palms. We watched them with amusement. One of the largest advanced slowly on a slightly smaller one. It reached forward with its pincer. The other crab did the same and the two

claws met as if they were shaking hands. For a moment it seemed comic; then it became slightly horrifying. As the aggressor tightened its grip, chips of shell began to fly off the smaller crab's claw with an unpleasant splintering sound. The one that had been attacked brought its free claw forward and with dreadful deliberation fastened it to one of its opponent's walking legs.

We were watching a battle; but it was not one of cut and thrust, of bold dash and cunning parry, but a steady, inexorable tug of war. Only by their desperately waving stalked eyes did the crabs betray any emotion, or give any indication that living sentient beings occupied the huge armored shells. I was reminded of the eyes of a soldier peeping through the steel slit in the front of a tank. The struggle continued for many minutes. I tried to disentagle the crabs, but picking them up seemed only to make them grip more desperately to one another, and they remained locked in soundless relentless combat. Then suddenly, the larger crab's leg that was gripped by the pincer of the smaller one, broke off high up at the joint close to the body. The raw white wound wept colorless blood. The pincers released their grip on one another, and the mutilated crab slowly retreated. The victor walked backward holding the amputated leg aloft in its pincer. Then it dropped the limb like a mechanical crab emptying its load. The battle was over.

As we sailed back to Kambara, Manu and I found ourselves sitting next to the old canoe-maker we had been talking to the previous day.

"Is Tavita really interested in ndrua?" he asked Manu.

Manu confirmed that I was.

"You know, I have got one myself in the village."

Manu became very excited. I refused to be jubilant. Too often in the past such dramatic news has proved to be based on a misunderstanding. Perhaps the old man's tenses had got muddled and he was confusing "have" with "had." Or perhaps he was meaning to say that he had got a model of ndrua. Point by point we tried to eliminate all alternative explanations, but the canoe-maker stuck to what he had originally said. Back at the village, hauled up on the beach, he had an ndrua; and what was more, if we were interested and if he could find the necessary rigging, he would take us out in it.

I could hardly wait for the *Maroro* to return. When at last we got back to Kambara, we followed the old man through the village to a beach on the other side we had not visited before. There, dwarfing the other outriggers lying beside it, I saw the twin hulls of an ndrua. It was very far from being the size of the old giants, for it was barely thirty feet long—but nonetheless, it was built on the same lines as the ancient craft with which I was so familiar from models and drawings.

While we examined it in detail, the old man wandered away towards a group of thatched mbures and disappeared. During the next hour, he slowly assembled on the beach a folded sail of pandanus mats, two fifteen-foot-long steering paddles, a mast, several coils of cordage, two long bamboo poles, and a crowd of rather disinterested onlookers. Under his instructions, we spread out the musty triangular sail and tied the bamboos along its two longer sides. Four of the men rigged the mast, others produced

some logs to serve as rollers and, with everybody helping, we managed to push it down the beach to the sparkling blue waters of the lagoon.

Manu, Sitiveni, Geoff, and I scrambled excitedly on board. Six other men joined us. They hoisted the sail so that its peak, formed by the two bamboo yards, pointed downward and lodged in the bows of the bigger hull. For a moment it flapped. Then the wind filled it, and I felt the huge craft surge forward. The old man stood in the stern, his arm around the handle of the steering paddle.

"Vinaka, vinaka," I shouted to him.

He grinned broadly in reply.

Already the ndrua was moving with exciting speed. Spray from her bows came flying across the deck, and the water swirled white in a trail behind her two sterns. From Manu, I discovered that the old man had often in the past left the island at seven o'clock in the morning and reached Lakemba, fifty miles away, by midday. A fair average speed must therefore be of the order of ten knots, and I could easily believe it, for we were already outdistancing one of the *Maroro*'s boats powered by an outboard engine which had tried to follow us.

The old ndruas were so speedy that under certain conditions they could overtake a European sailing ship, and as they often put out from the Fijian islands manned by a hundred warriors, eager for plunder and slaughter, to give chase to passing merchantmen, they were much feared. European captains, however, discovered one way of escaping them. If they sailed on a course so that the wind blew from directly aft, the ndruas were unable to follow, for their sails were so enormous that if they were

filled by a stiff stern wind, their bows were forced down and they ran under and sank.

As we sailed out into the open sea it was easy to see how this could happen. It was not a rough day, but beyond the protection of the reef, the water was quite choppy. The open deck on which we sat was not, as on a European ship, some distance above the surface of the sea, but only a foot or so from it, and often waves broke over the bows drenching us all.

Two hatches in the deck gave access to the hulls below. We looked down them and saw that they contained water several inches deep. This was scarcely surprising, for the boat had not been to sea for a long time and many of the joints must have been leaking, so as we swept along, the hulls creaking and straining around us, Manu and I stepped into the hatches and began to bail.

Soon we had to turn and beat back toward the shore. Tacking, however, was an extremely tricky and difficult operation. The canoe could not execute a simple turn, for the shorter of the two hulls had always to be kept to the windward, its function being that of an outrigger. If it was to the leeward, the leverage from the tall mast would drive the smaller hull beneath the water and the whole craft would capsize. A tack had therefore to be achieved in a quite different fashion. Two of the men clambered into the bows while we were sailing at full speed. The captain stood by the rope suspending the sail from the mast. At a word of command from him, the two men picked up the peak of the sail and ran the full length of the deck with it, to place its point in a notch at the other end. Thus what had been sterns became the bows. The cap-

tain ran to the other end and picked up the other steering paddle. For a few moments the sail flapped wildly, then at last as she veered, the wind filled it again, and off we went on the other tack. It was easy to imagine that when a sail sixty feet long had to be reversed in this way during a high wind, the strength and skill required must have been enormous.

With exhilarating speed we sailed back toward the island. Our voyage had only lasted an hour, but I had seen and experienced enough of the performance of our small ndrua to appreciate the immense courage and skill of the sailors who a hundred years ago had undertaken voyages of several hundred miles across the Pacific, their huge double canoes loaded with perhaps a hundred people and navigating not by charts and sextants but by cloud formations, the wheeling constellations, the flight lines of migrating birds, and the accumulated knowledge and skill of some of the bravest and most skillful seamen the world has ever known.

After we left Kambara, we sailed north-westward toward Koro, a hundred and fifty miles away, the last island we would be able to visit before we had to return to Suva. When we had first arrived in Fiji, and had made arrangements for our journey through the outer islands, we had planned to spend two weeks in Koro, for the people of the village of Nathamaki, on the north coast of the island, are said to be able to summon at will from the depths of the ocean a sacred turtle and a great white shark. Such a claim is not unique; people in Samoa, the Gilberts and, within Fiji, in the island of Kandavu, are supposed to be

able to do similar things, but nonetheless, the story seemed an extraordinary one. Our delay in Lomaloma meant that now we would only be able to spend twenty-four hours on Koro, but I was very anxious to do so in the hope that we might, even in this short time, witness the turtle-calling.

At dusk on the next night—a Sunday—we dropped anchor off Nathamaki, and we went ashore immediately to make our presentation of kava to the mbuli.

He had been expecting us several weeks before, for we had sent word to him from Suva of our projected visit, but even though we were so late he appeared delighted to see us.

"You will surely stay here for at least a week," he said.

"Unhappily, we cannot," I replied. "We must leave for Suva tomorrow night, for we have passages booked on a ship to take us to Tonga."

"Ola-wa," cried the mbuli. "This is bad. We hoped you would be our guests for many days, so that we might do you honor and show you something of our island. And today is Sunday, so we cannot even welcome you with a big party and a taralala for it is forbidden by the church to dance on Sundays." He looked round the kava ring mournfully and at the girls and the lads who stood clustered around the doorways of the mbure watching us.

"Never mind," he said brightening. "I have an idea. We will drink kava for another four hours and then it will be Monday and all the girls will come in and we will dance until the sun comes up."

With considerable regret, we declined this imaginative suggestion, but we promised to return early the next morn-

ing with our cameras, so that we might film the turtle ceremony.

The next day dawned badly. The sky was filled with low misty clouds which stretched without a break to the horizon, and rain squalls swept across the grey lagoon. We swathed our equipment in waterproofs, and took it ashore in the hope that as the day wore on conditions might improve.

The turanga ni koro, who was going to perform the ritual, was waiting for us in his mbure, resplendent in his ceremonial pandanus kilt and bark cloth sashes.

Even though it was raining, he was anxious to go out and call the turtles. I explained that the weather was too bad to film. He looked extremely disappointed, so I suggested that instead he should take us to the place where the ceremony was held, so that we might decide where to position our cameras should the rain stop later in the day. He agreed, and together we went out into the drizzle. He led us along the beach and up a steep muddy path.

As we walked we chatted, for he had served in the Army and spoke excellent English.

"I think I will call the turtles anyway," he said to me, casually.

"Please do not bother," I replied. "I only want to see the place."

He walked on for a few steps.

"I might as well call them," he said.

"I would rather you didn't. It would be infuriating if they came and we were unable to film them."

He trudged on up the hill.

"Well I might just as well call them."

"Don't do it for our sake," I said. "If they come this morning, they might not bother to return this afternoon."

The turanga ni koro laughed. "They always come," he said.

By now we were walking along the edge of a high cliff. The rain had stopped temporarily and a shaft of watery sunlight was glinting on the sea below. Suddenly the turanga ni koro ran on ahead, stood on the bluff, and began to chant at the top of his voice.

"Tui Naikasi, Tui Naikasi,
God of Nathamaki,
Who lives by the shore of our beautiful island,
Who comes when called by the people of Nathamaki,
Rise to the surface, rise, rise, rise."

We looked down to the sea five hundred feet below us. There was no sound but the rustle of the wind in the trees and the distant lapping of the waves on the shore far below.

"Tui Naikasi, rise, rise, rise."

And then I saw a tiny reddish be-flippered disc break the surface of the sea.

"Look," I called excitedly to Geoff, pointing with my finger. "There it is."

As I spoke the turtle dived and was gone.

"You must never point," said the turanga ni koro reprovingly. "That is tambu. If you do so, the turtle will vanish immediately."

He called again. We waited, searching the sea. Then once more, the turtle rose to the surface. It remained visible for about half a minute, then with a stroke of its fore-flippers, it dived and disappeared. During the next quarter

of an hour we saw eight more surfacings. It seemed to me that there were at least three turtles of varying size in the bay below.

As we returned to the village I pondered on what we had seen. Was it so very remarkable? If the bay was particularly attractive to turtles and there were always some cruising there, we should have seen them anyway, for being reptiles, they are compelled to rise to the surface to breathe. This would explain why the turanga ni koro was so anxious to call them, for after all, it would have detracted from the miracle, to say the least, if the turtles had risen without anyone speaking a word.

Back at the village the mbuli entertained us at a splendid lunch of cold chicken, taro, and yams. As we ate, sitting cross-legged on the matted floor, the turanga ni koro told us the legend of the turtle-calling.

Many years ago, when Fiji was still uninhabited, three brothers and their families came sailing through the islands in their canoe. As they passed the tiny islet of Mbau, the youngest brother said, "I like that place. I will live there." So they set him and his family ashore, and the two remaining brothers continued their journey eastward until they came to Koro. "This is a beautiful island," said Tui Naikasi, the eldest of the brothers. "I shall make this my home," and he went ashore with his family. The remaining brother sailed on until he reached the island of Taveuni, where he settled.

In the fullness of time, Tui Naikasi was blessed with many children and many grandchildren and when he came to die, he called his family around him and said, "Now I must leave you; but if ever you are in trouble, come to the

cliff above the beach where I first landed, call to me, and I will appear from the sea to show that I am still watching over you." Then Tui Naikasi died, and his spirit was embodied in a turtle. His wife died soon afterwards, and her spirit took the form of a big white shark.

Ever since then, before the people of Nathamaki embarked on a great voyage or their warriors set off on a raid, they would assemble on the cliff to feast and dance and finally to summon their ancestors before them, in the shape of a turtle and a shark, to give themselves courage for the trials to come.

I asked an enormous man who was sitting next to me eating great quantities of yam, whether he believed the story. He giggled and shook his head.

"Do you often eat turtle meat?" I said, for it is a highly esteemed delicacy in most parts of Fiji.

"Never," he said. "For us it is tambu."

He then told me of a curious event that had happened only a few months previously. Some of the village women, fishing in the lagoon, had accidentally caught a turtle in their nets. They hauled it into their canoe to try and disentangle it, but before they could do so a huge white shark appeared and charged them. They tried to drive it away with blows from their paddles but it refused to be frightened and dashed again and again at the canoe until the women feared that it might capsize them. "We have caught Tui Naikasi," one of the women said, "and the shark, his wife, will not go away until we release him." As quickly as they could, they freed the turtle from the folds of the net and tipped it back into the water. Immediately it dived and vanished, taking the shark with it.

By the time we had finished our meal, the weather had improved considerably, and we decided to make an attempt to film the ceremony. From what we had seen during the morning, it would be extremely difficult to get convincing film of the turtle from the cliff top so instead, we went round to the bay by boat and landed on a huge rectangular block of stone standing in the water close to the cliff that the turanga ni koro had told us was Tui Naikasi's home. Ten minutes later, the tiny figure of the turanga ni koro appeared at the cliff top. He waved to us, climbed into a big mango tree and began to call.

"Tui Naikasi, Tui Naikasi. Rise to the surface. Rise, rise."

"If the turtle comes," Geoff whispered to me, "don't for goodness sake get excited and point at it. Just let me film it, before it disappears."

"Tui Naikasi. *Vunde, vunde, vunde,*" called the turanga ni koro.

I searched the sea with my binoculars.

"There," said Manu, his arms resolutely crossed. "About twenty yards away and a little to the left."

"Where?" asked Geoff in an anguished whisper. The temptation to point was almost irresistible for I could see it distinctly, its head clear of the water as it gulped in air. Then the purr of the camera told me that Geoff had seen it as well. It lingered for almost a minute drifting lazily. Then there was a swirl and it had gone.

"Okay?" yelled the turanga ni koro.

"Vinaka, vinaka," we yelled back.

"I call again," he shouted.

Five minutes later, the turtle reappeared, so close to us

that I heard it gasp as it surfaced. As I watched it, Manu pulled my sleeve.

"Look down there," he said softly, nodding towards the sea close by us. Only ten feet from the boulder on which we stood swam a huge shark clearly visible in the pellucid water, its triangular dorsal fin cutting the surface. Quickly Geoff swung his camera and filmed it as it cruised round the boulder. Three times it passed us. Then with powerful strokes of its long tail it accelerated and swam away towards the center of the bay where we had last seen the turtle. Although we could no longer see its body we were able to follow its course by its dorsal fin. Then that too sank below the water.

I was very impressed. It might be possible to train both a shark and a turtle to come when called, but to do so one would have to reward the animals with food and this I am sure the people of Nathamaki do not do. Was it then merely a concidence that both the shark and the turtle appeared when the turanga ni koro called? To answer that properly, we should have had to remain in silence on the cliff top every day for perhaps a week carefully noting the frequency with which sharks appeared in the clear blue waters of the bay and turtles came up to breathe. I was very sorry indeed that we were compelled to leave the island that night.

When we got back to the village, we found to our astonishment that the entire population had changed into ceremonial costume. As we arrived a group of girls ran towards us and hung garlands of frangipani blossoms around our necks. Behind them came the mbuli, grinning happily.

"Welcome back," he said. "We have prepared a big show for you, for the people feel you should see all our best dancers before you leave."

This was extremely embarrassing, for it was already late in the afternoon, and I had promised Captain Brown that we would be back aboard the *Maroro* well before sundown so that he would be able to negotiate the inshore reefs and reach the open sea before darkness fell. But we could not be so rude as to refuse to watch the entertainment that had been prepared for us.

The mbuli led us to a mat laid out on the grass in front of his mbure. We sat down, then he shouted an order, and a group of men and women nearby began to sing a rousing chant, accentuating the rhythm with claps in unison. A line of men, their faces blackened, holding spears in their hands, marched on to the grass in front of us and began a perfectly drilled war dance, brandishing their spears and stamping their feet. In the old days the words of the chant were usually a recital of the tribe's battle honors. These are still sung, but the one we listened to was more modern and described the valor of the Fiji regiment which had served with such distinction and glory in Malaya.

As soon as the men had finished, their places were taken by children who performed a spirited club dance, stamping their feet and scowling ferociously in imitation of their elders. Verse followed verse as the children marched up and down, swinging their clubs.

It was now getting quite late, and I began to feel that I should have to ask the mbuli if he would excuse us leaving. Then thirty girls, garlanded and their bodies shining with oil, came from one of the mbures and seated themselves cross-legged in a line in front of us. They began a sitting *meke*, singing a delightful song and echoing its words by meaningful gestures of their hands and heads, their bodies swaying.

At last they ended amid great applause and laughter from everyone. I got to my feet, and with Manu's help, I thanked the people as best I could.

"And now," I ended, "sadly we must go. *Sa mothe.* Good-by."

As I stopped speaking, someone began to sing Isa Lei, the Fijian song of farewell. Within seconds the entire village took up the tune, singing with great fervor and in perfect harmony. The melody is a very sentimental one, and it had never failed to raise a lump in my throat. Now it seemed more moving than ever, for this was, in truth our farewell to Fiji. Everyone clustered round us, adding their garlands to those that already hung round our necks.

We shook hands with the mbuli and the turanga ni koro, and then we half-walked and were half-carried down to the beach. Still singing, the crowd followed us. As we pushed off into the lagoon several of the younger people swam after us.

When at last we reached the *Maroro,* the sun was already sinking into the sea in a glory of scarlet. Captain Brown started the engines. Slowly we moved across the lagoon toward the passage through the reef. We could see the people running along the beach to the headland close by which we had to pass, until several hundred of them had assembled on the green hillside. As we drew abreast of them we could hear yet again the melody of Isa Lei drifting across the water. Captain Brown replied with three hoots on the siren. The *Maroro* swung round, the crew hoisted the mainsail, and we headed for the open sea.