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### THAKOMBAU, A KING OF FIJI.

There are few spots in all the earth where such sudden and marvellous changes have been wrought by the preaching of the gospel as have been witnessed among the Fiji Islands within the last forty years. These islands are over two hundred in number, though some of them are very small. The scenery in various portions of the group is described as being of wonderful beauty, but the people were notoriously brutal and vile. They were cannibals of the worst sort, and every kind of iniquity flourished on every island. What we may be able to tell in a few pages of the life of one man, Thakombau, king of the island of Bau, will well illustrate what the Fijians were before the gospel reached them, and what they have become since they *lotued*, as they say, that is, received the Christian religion.

Thakombau is still living, and Mrs. Gordon Cumming, in her entertaining book of travel *At Home in Fiji*, describes him as a very fine old man, stately and chief-like in his bearings, and with clear, penetrating eyes. She heard him on New Year's morning, in 1876, offer the first prayer in a great assembly of natives gathered for worship, and she speaks of his prayers as striking and very touching. But what of his youth?

#### HIS CRUELITIES.

He was born in 1817, and was the son of Tanoa, the savage and blood-thirsty ruler of Bau. In his childhood he was called Seru, and when six years old was taken on one of the warlike expeditions which in those days were of frequent occurrence. The party to which he belonged was victorious, and after fifty men had been killed, a lad about two years older than himself was captured and held down before Seru, while he beat him to death with a club. This was the young chief's first victim, and the lesson in cruelty which he so early learned was not forgotten. We are loth to repeat some of the stories of his cruelties, and yet how else can it be known what has been accomplished in him and among his people through the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Among the terrible facts narrated by Mr. Waterhouse, an English missionary, who, after years of unavailing effort, was at last permitted to reside at Bau, are the following. While the old king, Tanoa, was living, he encouraged his son to put to death all who might be suspected as enemies. Thakombau was not slow in following out the suggestion. On one occasion, a rebel having been captured, the young chief had the tongue of the offender cut out, which he devoured raw, and while the sufferer was begging for speedy death Thakombau was laughing in high glee. On another occasion, when two men were taken alive in a battle at Viwa, Tha-

kombau's brother tried to prevent their being killed, and offered him a canoe if he would spare their lives. Thakombau replied, "Keep your canoe; I want to eat men." He made the doomed men dig a hole in the earth for an oven, and cut the firewood. He then had their arms and legs cut off, which were cooked and eaten in the presence of the men who were yet living. After this, even, he tortured them in ways which are too horrible to describe.

#### TANOA'S WIVES.

Among the customs prevailing throughout Fiji was one which required that at the death of a chief several of his wives should be strangled, under the notion that his spirit would want company in the unseen world.

promised nothing, yet it was hoped that he would yield to remonstrances and entreaties. But when Tanoa, his father, died in 1854, the missionaries were temporarily absent, and as they hastened back on receiving the tidings of his death, they saw six biers at the door of the house where the dead man lay. On entering they found two of the wives already dead, and Thakombau assisting in the process of strangling others. When the missionaries cried out, "Refrain, Sir! This is plenty. Two are dead," the chief replied, "They are not many—only five! But for your missionaries many more would have been strangled. I am gratified all remonstrances the other day were killed, and the pride of Thakombau was gratified

prevail? Will it prevent our having men to eat? Not it." It seemed for many years as if this chief, whose royal name was now Vuni-valu, or Root-of-War, would succeed in keeping the Christian faith out of his dominions. He slew and ate his enemies without number. The ovens of Bau, used only for cooking human bodies, were said to be seldom cool. Of such atrocious deeds Thakombau made little account, saying on one occasion, "White men make good eating; they are like ripe bananas." There would certainly seem to be but little hope of reaching a heart so hard as his. But the missionaries were not discouraged. Though not welcome in Bau, he yet, in 1853, allowed them to reside in Bau, and begin their labors among his people. The savage king heard much about the religion of love and peace. Other chiefs, and especially the Christian King George, of Tonga, urged him to renounce the false gods and accept the religion of Jesus. A series of misfortunes extending through a long period had humbled in some degree the pride of his heart, and he suddenly declared that the Christian religion should take the place of idolatry in his kingdom. On Sunday, the 30th of April, 1854, he caused the two great wooden drums of Fiji, which had never before sounded any call except to war or a cannibal feast, to be beaten as a summons to a great service in which heathendom was renounced, and Christianity embraced. Bales of cloth were brought out and distributed, for the outward sign of a change from heathendom was the putting on of some clothes. The Christians were called "dresses," to distinguish them from the pagans, who wore only the least strip of cloth. Hundreds of the people at once embraced the Christian faith and commenced family prayer. Thakombau, though favoring the new faith, did not become a Christian in heart until some time after this, but he yielded more and more to the power of the gospel and the cruel practices in which he had indulged were totally forsaken.

#### A NEW MAN WITH A NEW NAME.

In 1857, three years after the missionaries were received, Thakombau having put away his many wives was publicly baptized, taking the name of Ebenezer. He stood up in the presence of "widows whose husbands he had slain; sisters whose relatives had been strangled by his orders, relatives whose friends he had eaten," and made most humble confession, saying, with a broken voice and with tears, "I have been a bad man, I disturbed the country. The missionaries came and invited me to embrace Christianity, but I said to them, 'I will continue to fight.' God has singularly preserved my life. I desire to acknowledge



THAKOMBAU, KING OF BAU.

The missionaries exerted all their influence to put a stop to cannibalism and wife-murder. They would often go into the presence of a savage chief, and beg for the bodies of the dead that they might decently bury them. They were particularly anxious that when the old chief Tanoa should die none of his wives should be put to death, hoping thus to break up the horrible custom. Thakombau at that time was not ignorant of his duty, and he was persistently urged both by the missionaries and captains of English and American vessels to take a stand against the custom. He

at having maintained a Fiji custom against all opposition.

#### THE MISSIONARIES RECEIVED.

When Christianity began to win many converts on several of these islands Thakombau was greatly irritated. The missionaries, on occasionally landing at Bau, would plead with him very faithfully, but he would rebuff them, saying, "I hate your Christianity." "When you have grown *dalo* on yon bare rock then I will become a Christian, and not before." Once, in a scoffing tone, he exclaimed, "Wonderful is your new religion, is it not? But will it

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