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978-1-108-06211-4 - Voyage of H.M.S. Blonde to the Sandwich Islands, in the Years 1824–1825: Captain the Right

Hon. Lord Byron, Commander

Maria Callcott

Excerpt

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PART I.

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**SANDWICH ISLANDS.**

KING TAMEHAMEHA II.—HIS VISIT TO ENGLAND—  
AND DEATH, 1824.

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## SANDWICH ISLANDS.

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THE Sandwich Islands have made such a very rapid progress towards civilization during the few years that have elapsed since their discovery by Captain Cook, that they might claim sufficient interest to make a sketch of their history acceptable from that consideration alone. But the very singular circumstances attending the visit of their late sovereigns to this country, and their death while here, render such a sketch necessary as an introduction to the account of the Voyage of the Blonde, which was despatched by this Government for the express purpose of conveying their bodies to their native Islands, together with the chiefs who had accompanied them, and by that mark of respect drawing still closer those bonds of confidence and good will which have always united the Sandwich Islanders with this country.

The names of seven of the kings antecedent to Teraioapu or Terreeoboo, in whose reign Captain Cook discovered the Islands, have been recorded by various navigators who have

visited the South Seas, but so variously, that it appears impossible they should have meant to commemorate the same individuals, unless, indeed, the change of name, which we know was practised by the last king, was a general custom. He was originally called Iolani, but upon performing the first tabu with his father he adopted the name of Riho Riho, and finally, on his father's death, assumed that of Tamehameha II., and was never willingly afterwards called by any other.

In the reign of Kukanaroa, as one account says; in that of Kahoukapu, according to another, the Islands of Hawaii had been visited. First, by a priest, who settled there with his gods, and whose posterity still remains; and secondly, by a vessel with white men, with whom this priest was able to converse\*. The fifth in descent from this Kahoukapu was Kaiamamao (the Kayenewee—a mummow of Cook), the father of Teraioapu. The end of his reign was marked by one of

\* See the two last chapters of Mr. Ellis's very interesting tour in Hawaii. This missionary, we believe, possesses more knowledge than any other person respecting the Sandwich Islands, and especially their history. It may seem at first sight of little consequence to know the names of barbarous kings; but the state in which these islands were found supposes the existence of some men superior to the common—of inventors and of legislators; and if, among the traditional ballads and legends, the memory of such should be preserved, they will form no uninteresting chapter in the history of the human race.

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those wild romantic incidents that poetry and tradition have taught us are common in all nations, in those early stages of society that precede civilization. Kouipoipoi, a powerful chief of Hawaii, having in vain attempted to seduce the affections of one of Kaiamamao's wives, one day contrived to decoy her from her home, and to carry her up to the mountains. Alapaii, brother to the ravisher, was a just man and a valiant warrior; and on learning this atrocious act he went to Kouipoipoi, and entreated him to restore the woman to her husband, pointing out the danger he was in from the rest of the chiefs, who would certainly assemble to punish such a violation of all the rules of honour. The remonstrances of Alapaii produced their effect, and he was commissioned to restore the wife of Kaiamamao to her husband. The king, however, proud of his high descent, the extent of his lands, and the number of his vassals, forbade her to approach him, under pain of being sacrificed on the spot to his wrath. On this, Alapaii, still desirous of peace, and wishing to reconcile the unfortunate woman to her lord, prepared a feast of coconuts, fish, and other pleasing food, and spread them before the king. But these too he refused, and haughtily commanded his attendants to deposit them on the Whattas\*,

\* The Whatta is a raised platform on which sacrifices used to be laid and suffered to rot.

that the heat of the sun might destroy them. Now this was the greatest insult that one chief could offer to another, and the gentle Alapaii was roused to resentment. He assembled all his followers: the chiefs, his friends, did the same; and the two armies met in the valley of Ono Marino, and fought for three days. Of the warriors on the side of Kaiamamao few besides himself and his son Teraio pu survived. The king, indeed, owed his life to the generosity of Alapaii, who seeing him in danger from the spear of one of his own vassals, rushed forward and saved him at the risk of his life. But the pride of Kaiamamao could not endure defeat, and he slew himself, as it appears, on the field of battle.

Notwithstanding this event, the devotion of the chiefs of Hawaii to the family of their kings was shown by placing Teraio pu at their head; and as it was shortly after, that the most memorable event that has ever occurred in the history of these Islands took place, namely, their being made known to the civilized world by Captain Cook\*, the reign of Teraio pu, or Terreeoboo, may be considered as the beginning of the certain history of the Sandwich Islands, and this a fit place to notice generally their state of civilization at the period of the discovery. The Sandwich Islands, when first visited by Captain Cook, were not, as now, united

\* See Ellis, p. 418.

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under one chief, but the seven inhabited Islands\* had each its different Aree rahee or Eree Eree, literally chief of chiefs, or king, subordinate to whom there were Arees or chiefs of districts; and under these again were minor chiefs, ruling the cultivators, who were generally called Kanakas or men. There was no distinct class of warriors, but every man took part in the quarrel of his chief, and even the women often went out to fight. A pitched battle usually terminated every dispute; and there is no tradition of any kind of treacherous conduct in war, or revenge exercised after an apparent reconciliation, to contradict the character for good faith and placability which has been generally given to these people.

The weapons of the Sandwich Islanders were slings and spears, clubs and daggers, formed of hard wood, and rendered more formidable by their ornaments of bone, or the teeth of dogs or fish. When the chiefs took the field they adorned themselves with the war-helmet and cloak. This helmet is shaped like that of the ancient Greeks; it is framed of wicker-work and covered with the beautiful red feathers of the Hehivi, or Drepanis Vestiarius†, mixed with

\* Hawaii, Maui, Morotoi, Oahu, Onehoa, Tauai, Tahoura.

† *Certhia Vestiarius* of Lathon. The *Nectarina Byronensis* or *Apapanea* also furnishes red feathers.

the scarce yellow plumes of the *Nectarina Niger* or Uho\*. The cloak is a long garment, not unlike the Spanish cloak, curiously woven of feathers like those of the helmet; red, yellow, and black, are the usual colours: a cloak entirely yellow could only be worn by the king. The war-god of each chief was solemnly removed from his family temple and carried before him to the field, where it was placed in the most conspicuous station and surrounded with the *Kaheles* or feather standards of state. The taking prisoner the war-god of a rival party usually terminated the war. Some few of the surviving enemy were always selected as sacrifices to the deities of the conquerors, but their blood was not shed; they were strangled without the doors of the temples, and then brought in and laid on their faces before the idols, sometimes alone, sometimes mingled with the carcasses of those domestic animals which furnished the ordinary offerings. Excepting these devoted persons, it does not appear that any kind of revenge or cruelty was indulged against the vanquished. Even the very chiefs were freely readmitted into social intercourse with their conquerors.

The soil appears to have been regarded as the property of the *Erie-Erie*, for on the death of a chief his estates

\* Also called *Merops Niger* and *Gracula Longirostra*.



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reverted to the king, and his wives and children remained destitute, unless, as most frequently happened, the king bestowed them anew on the family\*.

It does not appear that any thing like money was in use among these people, but they practised barter, and readily understood, and steadily adhered to, equivalents in their exchanges. The ornamental wreaths and chaplets, and the curiously formed bracelets of the women; the war-cloaks and helmets made of feathers procured with difficulty, and whose arrangement, as it required a great expense of time, was one of the employments of the chiefs, and the finer kinds of cloth, as they were articles of luxury, were desired above all things, and were consequently exchangeable for more of the necessaries of life than any other objects; and next to them in value were their weapons, in general highly ornamented. These goods, therefore, constituted the trea-

\* Tamehameha I. felt the inconvenience of this custom, and wishing to render lands hereditary, he usually bestowed on the son the ground the father had occupied. It will be seen in the sequel that the custom of inheritance is gaining ground. It was probably to remedy the evils arising from the reversion of the lands to the king on the death of the occupant that the people of Otaheite had adopted the singular custom mentioned in Cook's first voyage, of considering the son, from his birth, the possessor of the estate, regarding the father, from that hour, as regent only.

May not this unnatural custom of the son's displacing the father have been one of the incitements to child-murder, of which all the South Sea Islanders are accused?

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tures of the chiefs, and were generally laid up in caverns, the secret of which was seldom intrusted to many persons, and which might not be approached by a kaneka on pain of death.

The ancient religion of the Sandwich Islands is as yet but imperfectly known to us. It probably varied but little from that of the South Sea Islands described in Cook's Voyages\*. The belief in a supreme being, the author of all nature, and the peculiar protector and father of the human race, was the foundation of their creed, in common with that of all the tribes of men who have begun to think of more than the supply of their physical wants. They deified the operations of nature, and placed between man and the supreme Creator a race of intermediate and generally benevolent beings to support and comfort him. The progress to a grosser idolatry was necessarily the same as in other nations. Evil was personified, fear produced a deprecating worship of hurtful divinities, and at the period of the discovery of these Islands the worship of the war-gods was the most conspicuous. We shall have occasion to notice frequently the adoration of the volcanic deities peculiar

\* See the 19th Chapter of Cook's First Voyage, also Ellis's Missionary Tour in Hawaii, p. 408. Also the Appendix to the first Missionary Voyage, published 1799, where there is an account of the superstitions of all the other Islands of the Pacific.