

U.S.S.R.

CHINA

# The Islands Called

KOREA

JAPAN

Tokyo

Date Line

Pacific Ocean

20°N

Mariana Islands

Guam

PHILIPPINES

Marshall Islands

Caroline Islands

M

Equator

Gilbert Islands

New Guinea

Solomon Islands

Timor

Darwin

140°E

Route of Bligh's open boat voyage, 1789

Rotuma

New Hebrides

Nandi

FIJI ISLANDS

Tofua

Mapped on page 532

New Caledonia

Minerva Reefs

AUSTRALIA

Brisbane

160°E

To Sydney, Australia

180°

# Fiji

*Men walk on fiery rocks and women sing to turtles in Britain's Pacific colony*

By LUIS MARDEN

National Geographic Foreign Editorial Staff

*With Photographs by the Author*

**A**DRIFT in an open boat on the Great South Sea, Lt. William Bligh, late commander of His Majesty's Armed Vessel *Bounty*, wrote in his journal on May 3, 1789:

"My intention is to Steer to the W.N.W. that I may see a Group of Islands called Fidgee if they lie in that direction."

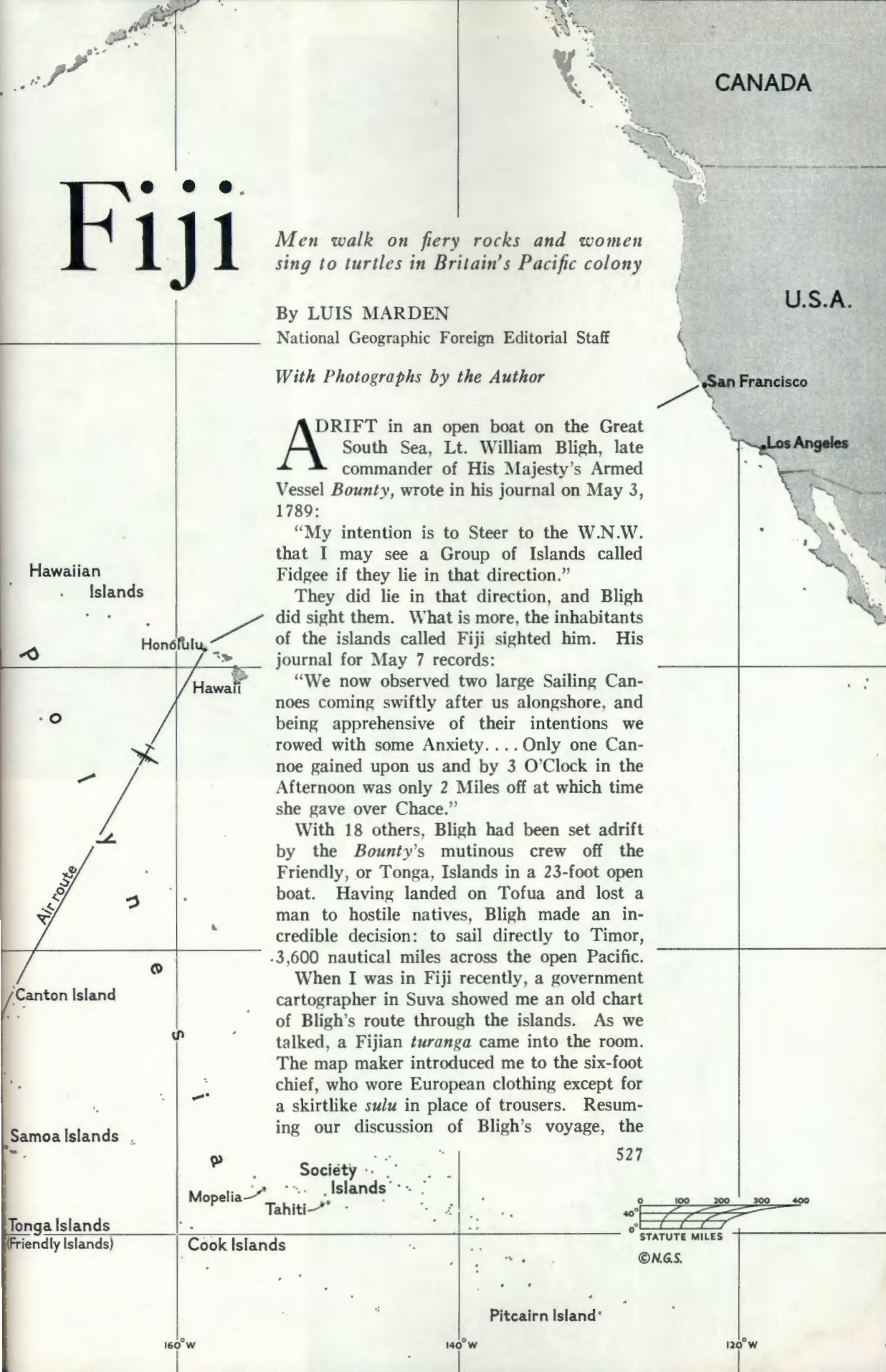
They did lie in that direction, and Bligh did sight them. What is more, the inhabitants of the islands called Fiji sighted him. His journal for May 7 records:

"We now observed two large Sailing Canoes coming swiftly after us alongshore, and being apprehensive of their intentions we rowed with some Anxiety. . . . Only one Canoe gained upon us and by 3 O'Clock in the Afternoon was only 2 Miles off at which time she gave over Chace."

With 18 others, Bligh had been set adrift by the *Bounty's* mutinous crew off the Friendly, or Tonga, Islands in a 23-foot open boat. Having landed on Tofua and lost a man to hostile natives, Bligh made an incredible decision: to sail directly to Timor, 3,600 nautical miles across the open Pacific.

When I was in Fiji recently, a government cartographer in Suva showed me an old chart of Bligh's route through the islands. As we talked, a Fijian *turanga* came into the room. The map maker introduced me to the six-foot chief, who wore European clothing except for a skirtlike *sulu* in place of trousers. Resuming our discussion of Bligh's voyage, the

527



CANADA

U.S.A.

San Francisco

Los Angeles

Hawaiian Islands

Honolulu

Hawaii

Air route

Canton Island

Samoa Islands

Society Islands

Mopelia

Tahiti

Cook Islands

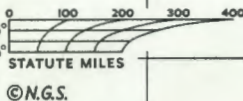
Tonga Islands (Friendly Islands)

Pitcairn Island

160°W

140°W

120°W





### Dancing Fijians Brandish Spears and Palm-leaf Shields

Muscular men of Vanua Levu, second largest of Fiji's 300 islands, perform the same spectacular spear dance that was presented for Queen Elizabeth during her visit in 1953. The group times its movements to the chanting of women and to the beat of the *lali*, a wooden drum.

**Dancers** leave their chief's towering thatched house for the village green.

A **triton shell's** mournful bellow signals to fishermen on Vatulele. The girl produces the sound by blowing across a hole near the shell's extremity. Hibiscus blossoms adorn her upstanding hair, which she grooms with coconut oil.

Kodachromes by Luis Marden,  
National Geographic Staff © N.G.S.



cartographer recalled the incident of the canoe chase. Turning to the chief, he asked:

"What would have happened to Bligh had the canoe caught up with him?"

"Oh," said the turanga, nonchalantly rolling a cigarette, "we should have eaten him all right."

They would have, too. The fierce Fijians practiced cannibalism, and castaway sailors, "people with salt water in their eyes," were legitimate prey.

Bligh and his companions sailed right through the center of the Fijian archipelago, on to Timor and to immortality. Suffering from thirst, hunger, and exposure, and using only a quadrant, compass, and pocket watch, this master navigator recorded the positions of 23 islands with astonishing accuracy.

In a feat of open-boat navigation that has yet to be surpassed, and without loss of a single man after leaving Tofua, Bligh reached Timor in 41 days.

Three years later Bligh sailed over part of his old route, confirming and amplifying his observations. For years afterwards the charts showed Fiji as "Bligh's Islands."

#### Bligh Story Beckoned Author to Fiji

Always fascinated by the *Bounty* story, I welcomed the opportunity to go to the Fijis and see what life on these once-feared islands is like today.\*

The Fijians themselves call their land Viti. Bligh, like Cook, had first heard of these islands from the Tongans, who with their softer consonants called them Fichi.

The more than 300 Fiji Islands are scattered like a handful of emerald dust across 250,000 square miles of the southwest Pacific (map, page 532). A British Crown Colony, they stand astride the 180th meridian halfway between New Zealand and the Equator.

About 100 of the islands are inhabited, and they vary strikingly in size.† The biggest, Viti Levu—Great Fiji—is almost exactly the size of Hawaii, and the next largest, Vanua Levu—Great Land—is half that. No other reaches one-tenth Vanua Levu's size.

Of volcanic origin, the bigger Fijis are steep sided and mountainous, heavily clothed

with green forest on the southeast slopes.

During the rainy season, from November to April, tons of moisture fall on this windward side. Beyond, the lands lying in the rain shadow are sere and brown; the line of demarcation is sometimes as straight and sharp as a ruler's edge.

I flew to Viti Levu from San Francisco via Honolulu and Canton Island. The airport at Nandi is a stopover on the Australia-North America air route. As we came into the big field, I could see yellow-green rectangles of sugar cane growing around it, and at near-by Lautoka ships were loading crude brown sugar, the colony's chief export.

From Nandi I drove to Suva on a motor road that runs all the way round the island. During the 134-mile drive I was almost always within sight and sound of the sea. Offshore, the reefs traced a line of foaming white as the long Pacific swells burst against the coral. Beyond, the open sea was cobalt.

Coconut palms in their thousands leaned out to sea. Inland, the verdure-clothed hills rose, range after receding range, to the fantastic blue peaks of the central mountains.

Under the coco palms, grouped neatly round a close-cropped green, stood the reed-walled, palm-thatched houses of the Fijian villages. On the Singatoka coast grow all the best materials for housebuilding: reed, bamboo, palms, and tree ferns. The big timbers for posts come from the hills a short distance inland. The Fijians build some of the finest native houses in the Pacific, and the elaborate houses of the chiefs, standing on platforms of coral rock, are works of art (page 528).

The Fijians are a handsome race whose superbly muscled men frequently stand six feet or more. They are Melanesians, with dark skins and frizzy upstanding hair, but they show a strong Polynesian strain, as Fiji stands on the dividing line between the black-skinned and brown-skinned Pacific.

\* For a vivid account of life among the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers today on Pitcairn Island, see "I Found the Bones of the *Bounty*," by Luis Marden, author of this article, in the December, 1957, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE.

† See "Copra-ship Voyage to Fiji's Outlying Islands," by Marjory C. Thomas, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, July, 1950.

#### Dressed for the Dance, a Chief Carries a Tufted Ironwood Spear

White cowrie shells above the door mark this as a chief's residence. A similar shell hangs from the man's neck. Croton leaves encircle his arms and waist. *Vesi*, an almost indestructible wood, forms the house timbers. Coconut-fiber cord binds the reed and palm-leaf walls.



# The Fiji Islands

0 50  
STATUTE MILES

Soundings are in feet



©N.G.S. John L. Loughlin

"My intention is to Steer to the W.N.W. that I may see a Group of Islands called Fidgee if they lie in that direction. ..."

"We now observed two large Sailing Cannoes coming swiftly after us alongshore, and being apprehensive of their intentions we rowed with some Anxiety..."

from Bligh's Journal, 1789



The people I saw walking about the villages had the grace of big cats. Most of the women and some of the men still wore the combed-out, upstanding hairdress that has long been a symbol of Fiji (page 529). Masculine "big heads" are disappearing, however, because many men went into military service in the last war and cropped their hair in order to wear metal helmets.

The Fijians are very proud of their hair, and it is extremely bad manners to touch another person's head. To do so once meant almost certain death.

At one village I walked to a thatched house close beside the road. A resinous scent of palms and pandanus mingled with the salt smell of the sea. A woman sat on a pandanus mat before her house and combed her black hair with a long-toothed wooden comb, pushing it straight up from the head. When she finished, she thrust a blood-red hibiscus blossom in her hair and smiled at me.

"*Ni sa mbula,*" she said. "How are you?"

I had been coached. "*Au sa mbula vinaka,*" I replied. "I am well."

Suva, the capital, is built on a peninsula at the southeastern, or rainy, end of Viti Levu. This city of 37,000 extends along the waterfront facing Suva Harbour. Near it once stood a mound which gave the town its name: *suva*, a mound or landmark.

After Honolulu, Suva is the most important city in the Pacific islands. A center of trade and commerce, it straddles the air and sea lanes between Australia and the North American Continent. It is a pleasant place of wide-verandaed public buildings, tree-shaded promenades, and many flowers.

#### War Drum Now Calls Guests to Dinner

In Suva much of Somerset Maugham's Pacific lingers on. Shops and offices close at one o'clock for luncheon and siesta, clubs fill at sundown, and the tight social life of the European community follows a ritual pattern.

From the veranda of the Grand Pacific Hotel, on the waterfront facing Albert Park, I listened to the sounds of Empire—the crack of cricket bats and the mellow Westminster chimes of the clock on Government Buildings (page 537)—mingling with the boom of the *lali*, the hollow log drum or gong of Fiji. The drum that once beat the call to war and cannibal feasts now takes the place of the dinner gong at the hotel.

The Grand Pacific Hotel was built at the

time of World War I and has a spacious air, with big, high-ceilinged rooms facing an inner glassed-over patio and opening onto a wide veranda. I used to sit on the seaward side in the evening and look across the smooth water between shore and reef. Fijian women stood waist deep, fishing with hook and line and catching little fish right around their feet.

It is a pleasant life, but, as everywhere else, there is change. More and more local people and New Zealanders and Australians, rather than Englishmen, hold positions in government; the Suva radio broadcasts commercials, and one no longer need leave two cards when signing the book at Government House.

As I sat on the hotel veranda with Jim Lahore, a Suva bank manager, he motioned with his glass toward the improbably shaped mountains, eroded volcanic plugs of old lava, that rose across the harbor.

"When you can see those mountains, it's going to rain," said Jim, "and when you can't see them, it's raining."

#### Rain Reaches 10 Feet a Year

It does rain in Suva, something like 10 feet a year, and the total has reached 19 feet. On two occasions while I was in Fiji four inches of rain were recorded in 24 hours. There is a trace of rain on two days out of three. But nearly always the sun reappears at the end of the day. Then come spectacular sunsets that paint Suva Harbour with hot orange and gold and wash the towering cumulus over the central mountains with glowing pink.

Downtown Suva is a mixture of races and tongues. Indian tailors and taxi drivers, Chinese shopkeepers and restaurateurs, Gilbertese and Solomon Islanders jostle the owner of the land, the tall and dignified Fijian, who seems to walk with unconcern through the babble of trade. Fijian policemen in dark tunics and magnificent heads of stiff hair direct the left-hand traffic.

More than half the population of Suva is Indian. The first Indians came as indentured labor in 1879. Large-scale immigration ceased in 1917, but by then nearly 63,000 Indians had come to the islands. The government offered to repatriate them, but quite naturally nearly two-thirds elected to remain.

This much of the South Sea legend is true: no one starves, and in the benign climate man needs a minimum of housing and clothing. The result was inevitable: the Indians, who came from an arid land overpopulated for





### Fluttering Empire Banners Greet Fiji's Queen

Suva, capital of the Crown Colony, prepared for weeks to greet Britain's sovereign on her world tour in 1953-54. These Commonwealth flags stretch across Thompson Street.

**Two chiefs** wait to board the *Gothic*, the Queen's tour vessel. One carries a whale's tooth (opposite, above).

534





### Ceremonial Whale's Tooth Welcomes Her Majesty

Since whaling days *tambuas*, stained and polished cachalot teeth, have been used as symbols of welcome in the islands. This fine specimen has been rubbed with coconut oil and smoked. Braided palm strips form the cords.

**Queen Elizabeth**, accompanied by Prince Philip, disembarks at Suva. In his plumed helmet, Sir Ronald Garvey, Governor of Fiji, greets Her Majesty. The Royal Standard flutters from the barge's bow.

As the Queen drove through the streets of Suva on her way to Government House, she met absolute silence from the Fijians, their mark of highest respect. Later, on the green before Government Buildings, she received the greetings of loyal Fijians from all parts of the archipelago.

Kodachromes by Howell Walker and (above) by Luis Marden,  
National Geographic Staff © N.G.S.

535



centuries, thrive in the rich islands of Fiji. Marrying early, producing ten or a dozen or more children, the Indians exceeded the Fijians in numbers shortly after World War II.

Today the Indians are mainly agriculturists, but a Suva banker told me they also transact 90 percent of all banking business in Fiji.

The Indians are used to scrambling for a living, something the Fijian has never needed to learn. It is not that the Fijian is lazy, but he is by heritage a landowner, who does not like to work for someone else. In a land where it has never been very hard to get plenty to eat, his approach to the problem is understandably casual.

A Fijian, speaking to a European, expresses his philosophy this way:

"Why do you work? To make a lot of money so you can stop? Well, I've never started."

His Excellency Sir Ronald Garvey, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., M.B.E., Governor of Fiji, expressed the same idea to me a bit differently. Said the Governor:

"The Fijian believes that the man who made time made plenty of it."

The concept of getting and saving is completely foreign to the rural Fijian. His sense of possession is guided by *kerekere*, a system of share and share alike which demands that if anyone of one's own family or tribal group admires something, it must be given to him at once. While this may be laudable from a philosophical standpoint, it is unhap-



### Last Cannibal Holds the Wooden Fork Used at Long-pig Banquets

Cannibals were the only known users of the fork in the pre-European Pacific. Fijians believed that eating human flesh with the fingers would make them ill. They ate prisoners taken in battle, or ambushed victims especially for a feast. British authorities put an end to the practice by the 1890's.

Sanaila, pictured at 96, told the author he and his sister had been captured as children at the siege of Korowaiwai. Brought up as a minor chief of Mbau, he learned to eat and relish human flesh.



Rob Wright

### Crack of Cricket Bat and Chimes in Suva Clock Tower Bring Sounds of England to Fiji

pily an attitude which ill equips one for survival in a modern world.

The Fijians were and are superlative craftsmen, skilled in canoe building, wood carving, and mat and pottery making. The Fiji Museum in Suva displays an extensive collection of their artifacts, as well as of the flora and fauna of the islands. There I talked to Curator R. A. Derrick, M.B.E., author of a history of Fiji and a brilliantly written geographical handbook on the islands. For years Fiji was known to the European world as the Cannibal Islands, and I asked Mr. Derrick about cannibalism.

"You should meet the Last Cannibal," he said. That afternoon a bent old man, who leaned on a stick and was naked except for a blue-and-white sulu around his waist, came to the museum (opposite). Sanaila, who has died since my visit, claimed to be 96 years old and to have been present at a famous siege

of the fortified village of Korowaiwai, in 1873.

"During the fighting," said Sanaila, "my parents were killed, and my sister and I were taken as prisoners to Mbau. There a minor chief saw us weeping and said, 'Do not kill them. I will rear them as my own.'"

#### Old Chief Recalls Cannibal Feasts

Sanaila grew up a Mbau chieftain and took part in many cannibal feasts. After a fight the bodies, which Fijians called long pig (*vuaka mbalavu*), were cooked, either by boiling or by baking in underground ovens, and portions were sent round to each household.

"Usually we got our *mbokola* [human flesh] after a battle, but sometimes raiding parties went out just for meat. Then, a man cultivating his patch of taro or yams had to keep a sharp lookout for the *mbati-kandi*, the ant warriors, who might ambush him.

"I first tasted *mbokola* when I was a boy at



**Breadfruit in Suva:  
Green Cannon Balls  
Taste Like Bread**

Polynesians love breadfruit, but Fijians prefer yams and taro with their meals of fish and pork.

Lt. William Bligh, whom the Royal Navy sent to Tahiti to load breadfruit trees for transplanting to the West Indies, discovered most of the major Fiji Islands on his famous open-boat voyage in 1789 after a mutinous crew seized his ship, the *Bounty*, and set him and 18 others adrift. On his return to England, contemporaries dubbed him "Breadfruit Bligh."



**Fijian parrot's** showy plumage stands out against the dark green of deeply indented breadfruit leaves. Several species of parrots and parakeets inhabit the islands. This one is common on Kandavu.

© National Geographic Society

Korowaiwai, but I thought it was pig. Later, at Mbau, I knew better. I learned to tell by the aroma when warriors were being cooked, because they always rubbed themselves with scented coconut oil before battle.

"What part did I like best? Oh, I don't know; when we took a town we clubbed everyone and they all went into the ovens together. We always used a special wooden fork to eat long pig, because we thought that otherwise it would be bitter or poisonous.

"We had special vegetables to cook with mbokola, too. One, *mboro ndina*, is a kind of small hot pepper. We wrapped *malawathi* leaves round the body before putting it in the oven.\*

### Britain Stamped Out Cannibalism

"I remember we had heaps of human bones on Mbau. Things are different now."

They are. The British Government, with strong help from missionaries, finally put down cannibalism in Fiji by the 1890's.

Wherever cannibalism was practiced, it was generally for one of two reasons: to acquire, by eating him, the prowess of a vanquished enemy; or, as was the case in Fiji, to subject an enemy, by eating him, to the ultimate defeat and humiliation. Even today the worst insult to a Fijian is to be called *kaisi mbokola*—low-class long pig.

The Fijians also ate long pig because they had little other meat. Before the coming of the Europeans, the largest mammal in the islands was the pig; there was no beef. As one Fijian chief said to a protesting missionary:

"It is all very well for you to remonstrate who have plenty of tinned corned beef, but we have no beef but men."

### Missionary's Boots Too Tough

Modern Fijians do not, on the whole, like to be reminded of the old days. A taunt that infuriates a Fijian even today is *kana nai vāvā Misi Baker*—"eat the boots of Mr. Baker." In 1867 a missionary, the Reverend Thomas Baker, was killed and eaten. The wild hill people had never seen boots, and boiled Mr. Baker's for hours trying to make them tender.

I suspect it is the imputation of ignorance of the use of boots, rather than the accusation of cannibalism, that makes the hill people's descendants angry today. The coast people have always been more worldly and sophisticated than the "big heads" from the hills. Lowland Fijians use *kai tholo*, hillman, as a

term of scorn roughly equivalent to "hayseed."

Across the peninsula from Suva proper, at Lauthala Bay, the Royal New Zealand Air Force maintains a flying boat base. I flew one day on patrol with the RNZAF in one of their big white Sunderlands. The four-engined aircraft headed northeast, across the delta of the Rewa, Fiji's largest river. Sugar cane fields checkered both banks of the broad stream, and around knolls I could see the circular outlines of moats that once defended long-vanished villages from attack.

We flew past the precipitous island of Ovalau where the town of Levuka, the old capital, clutches at the feet of mountains that run down into the sea (page 548). Our course lay northeast across the group of small islands known as Lomaiviti—Central Fiji—past Wakaya, where Count Felix von Luckner was captured in World War I; Makongai, site of a famous leprosarium, and Koro. All these islands have coral reefs that surround them with white breakers (page 546). Beyond lies Taveuni, a slipper-shaped island close to Vanua Levu.

Taveuni from the air looks like one big coconut plantation. Here are the biggest copra estates in Fiji, owned by European families.

### Little Work to Growing Copra

Copra, the source of an oil used in cooking, cosmetics, and explosives, brings a good price at the moment, about \$200 a ton in London, compared with as little as \$12 in the 1930's.

I am a city boy, and copra growing is the only form of agriculture I have ever seen that appeals to me; it is so easy. First, you plant the coconut; or better still, you inherit a stand of trees. They begin to bear in five to seven years, reach their peak at 30, and still produce at 90 or 100. When ripe nuts fall to the ground, men crack them open and spread the pieces of meat to dry in the sun. When the stuff is dry, it's copra.

A few days later I took to the air again, this time in a Fiji Airways plane. We flew across the humped back of Viti Levu, from Suva northwest to Lautoka. The eastern slopes rose in stiff dark-green folds to meet the highlands which culminate in Tomaniivi (Mount Victoria), 4,341 feet.

These highlands were the domain of the *kai tholos*, the "big heads" of the hills. Old trails,

\* Scientific names of these two plants, *Solanum anthropophagorum* and *Trophis anthropophagorum*, reflect their onetime grisly use; "anthropophagorum" means "of the eaters of human flesh."



### Chanting Waders Carry Their Governor Ashore

When Sir Ronald Garvey made a viceregal visit to the island of Mbenga, he and his aide-de-camp left ship in the manner of old-time Fiji's highest chiefs. As the embowered platform proceeded landward, the bearers shouted defiance to possible enemies.

*Viti II*, the Governor's yacht, lies offshore.

### Kava Makers Begin a Fijian Welcome

Men knead the ground root of a pepper plant in water. Called *yanggona* by Fijians, the brown, opaque liquid has an insipid taste. The drink numbs tongue and lips but does not intoxicate.

Advancing stiff-legged to rhythmic clapping of cupped hands, an islander presents the first shellful of *yanggona*.

© National Geographic Society





*Ndalo*, a Fijian staple food, lies stacked in Suva market. Called taro elsewhere, ndalo is a starchy tuber. Here a bearded Sikh policeman checks the permits of vendors. Turbaned Indians add color to Suva's polyglot population.





still visible from the air, ran from village to village along the crest of the ridges, so that travelers met face to face, with no opportunity for ambush.

In highland forests grow hardwoods used in shipbuilding, house construction, and cabinetmaking. At Vatukoula, near the north coast, rooftops and an open pit mark the site of gold workings discovered in 1932. The township, with some 5,000 inhabitants, is now the third largest in the colony.

From Lautoka I took passage to the Yasawa Group, a chain of volcanic islands that stretches to the northwest of Viti Levu. I sailed with a New Zealander named Trevor Withers, who makes weekly trips to these outlying islands.

The volcanic Yasawas thrust straight up out of the sea. From the northern end of the island of Yasawa came the two canoes that pursued Captain Bligh (map, page 532). One of the most bizarre masses of sheer rock rises above Yalombi village on Waya, where we anchored the first night. There we were welcomed next day with an old form of the kava ceremony.

#### Yanggona Acts Like Novocain

Fijians, like most Pacific islanders, love to drink kava. The drink, called *yanggona* in Fiji, is a mixture of the ground root of a pepper plant, *Piper methysticum*, and cold water. Yanggona contains no alcohol, but the flat-tasting brownish liquid partially anesthetizes the drinker's tongue and mouth, which feel as if they had been injected with Novocain. Copious drinking of yanggona seems to paralyze the legs. Yet in a hot climate it is refreshing, and in many offices and warehouses in Suva groups gather round the yanggona bowl frequently throughout the day. The ceremonial preparation of yanggona is the nucleus of Fijian social life.

When Withers and I went ashore, one of our Fijian crew went with us to act as our *mata-ni-vanua*—the "Eye of the Land," or official spokesman. As we approached the largest and finest *mbure*, the chief's house, our herald called out in a low voice. A muffled chorus answered from within.

Removing our shoes at the door, we walked between two lines of seated, silent men. At the far end we sat cross-legged on the floor, facing our hosts and a carved wooden bowl, nearly a yard across and standing on six legs. From the bowl a cord of plaited brown coconut fiber

with a bunch of white cowrie shells at its end was unrolled toward us. In cannibal times it was certain death to cross between the cowries and the guest of honor.

The yanggona maker squatted behind the bowl, facing us. An assistant placed some ground root in the bowl, then added water from a section of bamboo. The maker kneaded the thin paste until the liquid became the color of milk and coffee. His assistant handed him a bundle of fibers made of hibiscus bark. With circular motions the maker swirled the fibers through the liquid, straining the milky fluid; then, squeezing the bundle dry, he tossed it over his shoulder to the assistant who shook out the strained particles.

The other men chanted in a deep bass, except for one blind old man who sang in falsetto. As they sang, they clapped cupped hands in hollow rhythm. The maker doubled the fiber hank, passed it slowly through the fluid, then twisted it dry and flung it away. The yanggona was ready.

The cupbearer, a man with a blackened face who wore a kirtle of grass and hibiscus, advanced to receive the yanggona in a *mbilo*, the polished half of a coconut shell. Holding the breast-shaped cup in both hands, he advanced to the chanting and handclapping of the company, crouching and extending first one leg and then the other, but never spilling a drop from the cup (page 541).

#### Handclap a Sign of Respect

With a handclap like a pistol shot, the chanting ended and the cupbearer, kneeling, handed the cup to Withers. Then he stepped back and clapped his cupped hands thrice in the Fijian sign of respect. While the assemblage watched closely, Withers tilted back his head and drained the cup. As he tossed down the shell, thirty voices cried out:

"A-a-a matha-a-a!"—"It is dry; it is finished!"

The next cup went to me, then another to our master of ceremonies; the one after that, to the local chief. When the chief had drunk, he tossed the cup down with a twisting motion, so that it spun on its pointed nipple.

The cupbearer then handed drinks to everyone, in order of rank. Each time he held out the cup in both hands. This is basic etiquette; whenever a Fijian handed me anything, he offered it in both hands, or at least touched a finger of the other hand to the article.

(Continued on page 551)



All Kodachromes by Luis Marden, National Geographic Staff © N.G.S.

### Mbengga Islanders Level Searing Rocks for a Fire-walking Ceremony

Logs (below) have burned all night, heating the boulders. Now men with long poles rake the smoldering embers from the pit and smooth the stones. In a moment the fire walkers will emerge in single file and slowly circle the fiery pavement (next page).

**Fiji's Governor** and his aide inspect the pit and hear a chief explain the ceremony.

543





**Barefoot Believers in Their Own Magic  
Cross Steaming Stones Unharmmed**

"Talking with a small devil," the brawny fire walkers remain secluded all night in a hut. Then, at a signal, they come out and walk across the pit of red-hot stones. Immediately their assistants throw damp



© National Geographic Society

leaves on the rocks. Hissing clouds of steam and the chants of performers heighten the eerie effect. Foreigners can detect no evidence of trickery; they can only guess at reasons why the Fijians never wince

with pain or suffer blisters on their feet. One physician who examined the men before and after the ceremony attributed the phenomenon to self-hypnosis induced by deep faith.



### **Coral Reefs Trace Stony Arcs on the Wind-lashed Pacific**

Rings of limestone, built up over the centuries by tiny coral polyps, form the distinguishing features of many islands in the Pacific. Some formations create barrier reefs fringing mountains of volcanic origin (opposite). Others enclose shallow lagoons with atolls of coral.

North Minerva Reef (above) is a true atoll, with only a single narrow passage to the sea breaking its nearly perfect circle (left).

**Whitecaps dot** Minerva's blue water off its outer edge, here all but awash. The lagoon's bright sands dip into quiet waters.

**Barrier reef** flings an uninterrupted curve around the windward side of Mbengga, home of the fire walkers.

© National Geographic Society



**Green Hills Plunge into the Sea  
at Levuka, Fiji's Old Capital**

A succession of chiefs, warring among themselves, originally controlled Fiji. Europeans picked Thakombau, the most powerful leader, as king. Other

548



chiefs did not agree, and Thakombau repeatedly asked Queen Victoria to take his islands under her protection. In 1874 he ceded Fiji to Britain. Be-

cause the crowding hills prevented expansion of Levuka, Europeans built a new capital at Suva. Levuka retains the sleepy charm of an earlier era.

© National Geographic Society







From the Yasawas I returned to Suva to board a cutter leaving on a coasting voyage to the island of Kandavu, to load bananas.

We sailed past Ngaloa Harbour, where Australia-bound steamers stopped in the '70's to transship passengers and goods for New Zealand, round the western end of the island, and along the north coast to pass through the foaming reef at Tavuki Bay.

I went there to see the curious ceremony of turtle calling. Women of Namuana village mass on a headland at Tavuki Bay and, by chanting, call great turtles up out of the sea. We witnessed this strange rite in the company of the *roko*, or provincial chief. As we hove to off the headland, the women were clambering in single file up the steep path to the crest.

We went ashore and followed them, slipping in the wet clay of the trail. When we got to the top we sat on the hillside behind the 50-odd women who were seated astride two smooth boulders, looking out to sea (following page).

#### Chant Begs Turtles to Rise

Under a lowering sky the empty Pacific shone like steel. The women began an ancient chant of half-forgotten meaning:

We, the women of Nambukelevu,  
Adorn ourselves with black ceremonial skirts,  
We assume an attitude of reverence,  
We paint ourselves with intricate markings,  
We disguise ourselves thus, Rauninalithe,  
That we may look upon you, O great one.

Rauninalithe was the turtle to whom the women sang. The sea glistened dully; not a mark appeared on the smooth surface. On and on the women droned.

Suddenly one of the women pointed downward, and all chanted with renewed vigor. I leaned over the precipice. Far below I could see a yellow-brown smudge under the surface; it grew larger, and then the mottled brown back of a big sea turtle emerged. The chant rose triumphantly as the turtle rocked on the sea, flippers outspread and head turned upward as if to listen. For half a minute the turtle floated quietly, then tilted downward and swam smoothly into the depths.

The women rested a moment and then began their chant again, using the same words, but calling this time on Tinandi Thambonga, the Mother of Turtles. Almost immediately a shieldlike shape broke the surface, and an enormous turtle, half again as big as Rauninalithe, floated on the water. The Mother of Turtles rested there nearly a minute, turning her head slowly from side to side, then slipped down into the sea. The women finished their chant with a drawn-out cry.

I was astounded at the seemingly magic power of these women, and asked the *roko* if these turtles were protected from fishermen.

"No," he said, "turtle fishermen regularly hunt them around here, and we never feed them. On the contrary, they feed us."

He said that the ceremony is performed infrequently, and pointed out that the village is some distance away, so that turtles cannot be accustomed to seeing people on the point. Yet the same two always seem to show themselves when called by name.

"Except," added the *roko*, "when the people of a certain village are here. They are professional turtle hunters. When they see one lying on the bottom, they wait until he is ready to come to the surface for a breath, then throw stones at him, so that he must dive immediately. They do this till the turtle is exhausted, then they swim to him and overpower him. No; Rauninalithe and Tinandi Thambonga do not show themselves to those people."

This seeming power of communication with animals occurs in several places in the Pacific. In Fiji certain islanders seem to possess the power to call up red prawns, eels, turtles, and even sharks. I offer no rational explanation for it; I can only describe what I saw in the case of the turtles.

#### The Red Duck Flies by Night

That evening we lay at anchor in Tavuki Bay. A long line of flying foxes, silhouetted against the afterglow, flapped like pterodactyls toward some nocturnal feast of fruit.

At midnight we weighed anchor and stood up Kandavu Passage for the main island and Suva. In the blaze of southern stars overhead the five bright stars of the Southern Cross wheeled through the diamond dust of the

#### Motionless as a Statue, a Spear Fisherman Stands on Living Coral

Rising from a reef off the island of Kambara, the coral heads house live polyps. These sea creatures withstand the sun's glare during the short intervals of unusually low tides. Fijian spearmen are astonishingly accurate even at long range.





### Singing Women Call Turtles from Pacific Depths

Sitting high above the sea, residents of the village of Namuana, on Kandavu, entreat turtles to emerge from the depths. The author saw two answer the summons.

Only certain Fijians possess this mysterious rapport with sea creatures. Their secret is their own; white men cannot fathom it.

**Mother of Turtles**, called Tinandi Thambonga, rocks gently on the surface, as if listening to the women's chants.

**Boys balance** precariously on their bamboo raft in a stream on Viti Levu. Inlanders float goods from mountains to coast with rafts.



Milky Way. To the Fijians these stars do not form a cross; they are *Ngā Ndamu*—the Red Duck.

On the steamer *Ai Sokula*, I left Suva some time later to go to Ovalau. Ovalau lies close to the east coast of Viti Levu, and vessels sailing from Suva at midnight reach the port of Levuka in the early morning (page 548).

In the 1860's there was a cotton boom in Fiji, and many new settlers came to join the traders who lived in Levuka. Because European laws were inoperative in Fiji, Levuka became a haven for fleeing debtors and escaped convicts, and by 1870, the peak of the cotton boom, it was a roaring, wide-open town.

Today white range markers on a hillside show the passage through the reef, but in the old days navigators said they could find their way into the passage by the bobbing line of gin and rum bottles floating out.

The law-abiding white element in Fiji wanted a strong government, and supported Thakombau, paramount chief of Mbau, who in 1871 was proclaimed King of Fiji.

#### Fijis Once Offered to United States

The new kingdom had a short life. Rival chiefs would not acknowledge Thakombau as sovereign. Thakombau, seeing his realm about to fall apart, asked Britain to annex Fiji—repeating an offer he had first made as far back as 1858. He had also offered Fiji to the United States, but received no reply.

Queen Victoria's Government accepted, and on October 10, 1874, Fiji was formally ceded to Great Britain at Nasova, near Levuka.

Shady citizens fled, and gradually tranquility descended on the little port. As the population grew, it became evident that mountain-hemmed Levuka would not do as a capital; so government moved to Suva in 1882. Levuka remains a copra port.

In the Ovalau Club one night I saw a memento of World War I: a framed letter of Count Felix von Luckner, the German sea raider who sank \$25,000,000 worth of shipping without taking a single life.

In the summer of 1917 Luckner took his sailing ship *Seeadler* to Mopelia atoll in the Society Islands, to replenish stores and refresh his crew. A tidal wave ran the ship ashore and wrecked her. Luckner rigged and provisioned one of the *Seeadler's* boats and with five other men sailed to the Cook Islands, and thence to Katakanga in the Fijis.

Katakanga belonged to a Mr. T. O. U.

Stockwell, who was absent. Luckner and his men remained ashore five days, eating bananas and other fruits to cure their scurvy, then sailed for the main islands of the Fijis, leaving for Stockwell a note signed with a pseudonym:

"Dear Sir!

We are very sorry that we have not met you here although we had a good time on your island. I and my man slept in your house. We had a good rest and are now quite fit to proceed on our sporting trip. The wonderful stroll around your little island we shall never forget. Perhaps we shall call at your island again and hope to meet you the next time. All the things we took is paid for. A turkey 10 sh[illings]. Bananas 2 sh[illings]. I and my man are thankful to you and your good Maciu [Matthew].

With best regards

Yours truly,

M. PEMBERTON"

Luckner landed at Wakaya, near Ovalau, where he was spotted and captured.

Pearls and pearl shell have always been associated with the South Pacific. I had never seen a pearl oyster alive until I dived one day along the Ovalau reef. The seaward face of the reef that drops sharply into deep water is embayed with fissures and canyons.

I swam along the edge of the reef with some Fijian girls, who wore diving goggles made of glass set in cups carved of cow's horn. Clouds of blue and silver fish flitted up and down the face of the reef. Wary green parrot fish nibbled at rose and lettuce-green coral, and troops of flat-bodied jacks patrolled the luminous blue depths.

#### A Pearl Oyster—but No Pearl

Clinging to the base of a coral tree I saw a thin disk-shaped shell. I dived for it, swam over the reef, and opened it with my knife. The halves fell open and revealed the bright-orange oyster on its bed of mother-of-pearl.

The dark-skinned girls grinned and said:

"*Thiva, thiva.*" A pearl oyster.

But there was no pearl. Indeed, thousands of shells must be opened to find one pearl. Compared with the value of the shell, which is used chiefly to make buttons, the pearls are negligible in commerce—unless, of course, an especially fine one turns up, such as the smoky-gray domed pearl, big as a sixpence, that was presented to Queen Elizabeth when she visited the islands in 1953.



© National Geographic Society

### No One May Harm Vatulele's Long-whiskered Prawns—Taboo!

Possibly because of their bright color, these salt-water crustaceans are held sacred. A paramount chief raised the taboo long enough for pictures to be taken. The goggled diver caught four prawns (below) in the pool, then freed them.

555



Most people call pearl oysters inedible, but in Fiji they are sometimes eaten. One day a lady on Ovalau, whose cook made a pearl oyster curry, bit something hard and found a round black pearl, more than a quarter of an inch in diameter. Unfortunately, the cooking had left it dull and lusterless.

Collectors of sea shells find a rich hunting ground in Fiji. The exposed flats and the submerged reefs hold many species of cowries, cone shells, sea snails, and tridacna, giant clams. Though it is the commonest, the spotted cowrie, dotted with rich brown, was the most beautiful to my unsophisticated eye.

The white cowrie, not a true cowrie but a related species, looks like a pure white porcelain egg. It is a symbol of chieftdom; two or more are always fastened to the lintel of a chiefly house (page 531).

Fiji's most celebrated sea shell is the very rare golden cowrie, one of the world's most sought-after shells.

During many weeks I saw a lot of the Fiji Islands, journeying by airplane, road, cutter, and canoe. On Natewa Bay, the gulf of the sea that bites deeply into Vanua Levu, I saw the most spectacular of the Fiji dances—a spear *meke* at Korotasere (page 528). The chief was named Inoke Thaundremalua—Lightning Comes Slowly—and he lived in the most splendid beehive-shaped house I had seen.

Korotasere is an unspoiled Fijian village, far from any road, with beautifully made houses round four sides of a broad green. In its school I heard a little boy recite in English. In a singsong voice he gave a good picture of community life.

"Get up and have tea; then some go out and weed; some go for firewood; some go to plant; then we have lunch and rest. Then go for swim; women go fish. . . ."

At that point a booming lali signaled the end of the class, and the child ran off.

Another time, in a plunging motor launch bucking the southeast trade winds that blow from April to November, we bore away to the Lau Group, the Eastern Islands of Fiji that lie out in the Pacific halfway to Tonga.

At Kambara I watched craftsmen carve wooden kava bowls from hard yellow-red *vesi* wood, using only an ax and an adz. Deep in the island forest six men hollowed a 40-foot *vesi* trunk to make an outrigger canoe.

So prized was the timber of Lau that, long before the coming of the Europeans, Tongans made the long westward journey from their islands to Lau to build their canoes. It



Fiji Canoes, Fastest Sailers in the Pacific,

was easy sailing on the trades from Tonga to Fiji, but it might be months before the wind blew fair for the return. The big canoes took as long as seven years to build. So the colony of Tongans grew in Lau, and their influence was reflected in the shape of the houses and the language.

#### Mbengga Men Walk on Fiery Stones

Of all the ceremonies I witnessed in Fiji, the most curious was fire walking, as performed on Mbengga, a steep volcanic island that lies just off the coast of Viti Levu (page 547). I accompanied the Governor of Fiji, Sir Ronald Garvey, on a visit to Mbengga.

The Governor's yacht, the *Viti II*, anchored off Rukua village inside the reef. Solid sheets of rain nearly obscured the hillside that rose behind the clustering houses. A billow of blue-gray smoke hung over the fire pit prepared for the ceremony.

A canoe put off from the shore almost as soon as our hook was down. Sir Ronald waited in white full-dress uniform, seated in a chair on the afterdeck. Beside him squatted his Eye of the Land. Crouching respectfully,



Rob Wright

### Can Do 15 Knots. Bows Become Sterns When Boatmen Reverse Sails to Change Direction

the silent delegation came aboard and sat crosslegged before His Excellency.

The brown skin of the men glistened with scented coconut oil. They wore skirts made of dyed grass and strips of hibiscus fiber, and garlands of flowers round their necks.

Kneeling before the Governor, the spokesman produced a *tambua*, a ceremonial object of respect made of the polished tooth of the cachalot, or sperm whale, attached to a plaited cord. The spokesman held up the tooth and made a speech of presentation, expressing the welcome and loyalty of the people of Mbengga.

Sir Ronald took the tooth in both hands, then passed it to his master of ceremonies, who clapped his cupped hands and made an eloquent speech wishing prosperity to the people of Mbengga. He finished by crying, in unison with the other Fijian crewmen:

*"Mana, e-e-e ndina!"*: "So be it indeed!"

The old *vaka-Viti*—true Fiji—ceremony had been complied with; His Excellency was now officially welcome and might go ashore. The custom dates from the old times when a visiting chief anchored off a strange island or village, but did not lower his sail or attempt

to go ashore until assured of his welcome.

The whale's tooth has been used ceremonially in Fiji for more than 150 years, since the first whaling ships touched at these islands. Only the teeth of the sperm whale will do for the making of a *tambua*. In preparation, the tooth is stained with turmeric or smoked to a deep yellow color, then polished with coconut oil (page 535).

#### Soldiers Cause Whale-tooth Shortage

*Tambuas* have no official monetary value, but Chinese merchants take them in pawn for about five Fijian pounds (\$13).

During World War II, so many soldiers who passed through Fiji took away *tambuas* as souvenirs that there was a critical shortage of these teeth, especially for the elaborate ceremonies attendant on the visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1953. How to replenish the depleted whale's-tooth treasury? A Fiji Government official inquired in New Zealand about the availability of whale's teeth. He got very few, because most New Zealand whales are toothless. But the publicity went round the world.





**Stamping Men and Women of Mbengga  
Surround a Milling School of Fish**

This drive began with two lines of people stretching from the shallows to the reef in background. Advancing toward each other, the two parties splashed



© National Geographic Society

the water, shouted frightening cries, and pounded the bottom with long poles. When the lines met, the islanders closed ranks and converged on a submerged

purse net, chasing the darting fish before them. Spearmen waiting on canoes impaled most of those that escaped between the legs of the fishermen.

A Norwegian shipping firm donated several cases of cachalot teeth. A Scottish whaling firm sold the Fijians 1,200 pounds of them. Many of these new teeth were placed in circulation, but the Fijian administration still maintains a sizable whale's-tooth bank.

To save the cachalot Fort Knox from depletion, a law prohibits the export of tambuas from the colony without special permission of the Governor. Visitors leaving Fiji are a bit surprised when the customs inspectors ask: "Have you any whale's teeth?"

### Tribesmen Bear Governor to Shore

As suddenly as the rains had come to Mbengga, they stopped, and the hot sun shone out of a blue sky. The Governor embarked in his launch with his aide-de-camp and started for shore.

From the beach a green bower detached itself and started slowly out to sea. The embowered platform, carried on the shoulders of men, came out as far as depth would permit. When His Excellency and his aide had seated themselves on it, the men raised their voices in a shout and started toward shore (page 540).

As the platform was borne landward, the brightly dressed warriors shouted a chant of defiance to their Great Chief's enemies, whoever they might be.

*Rai tu mai, rai tu mai!*

*Koi au na viriviri kemu mbai.*

*Tombo, tombo kandi, i, a, e!*

*Tombo, kana kandi ni vanua tani!*

Which is to say: Look at me, I am the defending bulwark round your person! I shall vanquish and eat the warriors of enemy lands!

Ashore, His Excellency was received by the district chief, and the party moved to a thatched shelter at one edge of the village green. Here the full welcoming ceremonies took place.

The fire pit at the village's edge had burned for hours. The great logs were reduced to glowing embers, and the air above them shimmered with heat. The pit, about 15 feet across and 5 feet deep, was filled with stones the size of a man's head. Hardwood logs had been piled on top and left to burn for 24 hours. Now the pit was ready (page 543).

The rain had started again, and the heavy drops hissed as they splashed on the embers. From time to time stones burst with reports like cannon shots. The men of the *mata-nggali*, or family group who are the sole per-

formers of this old rite, cleared away the smoldering wood by raking it off the stones with stout long lianas.

At last the grayish-white stones stood bare. The deep-toned chants ended abruptly and utter silence fell, broken only by the hiss of the steadily falling rain.

The men who would walk on the fiercely hot stones waited in a small hut, concealed from all eyes, conferring, the roko said, with "a small devil," who was invisible but apparently articulate.

Four is a magic number to the Fijians, as seven is to European peoples. No fire walker may consort with women for four days before the ceremony; he may not participate at all if his wife is pregnant, or if there is a dispute in his family group. If any of the prohibitions are ignored, the walker will inevitably be burned, said the roko.

"In 1950, one man's feet were badly burned. Afterward, his wife was found to be pregnant."

Suddenly the fire walkers appeared, 12 men walking silently and quickly in single file. Neither slowing their pace nor hurrying, they walked out upon the hot stones. They made a complete circuit of the pit, then walked out on the sodden ground again. Assistants tossed bundles of green leaves on the hot stones, then everyone massed in the fire pit, at first standing, then sitting and chanting amid the rising steam (page 544). The Mbengga fire-walking ceremony was over.

Many observers through the years have witnessed this unusual custom with critical eyes. All have come away convinced that there is no trickery involved, and that, like the turtle and shark calling, fire walking is another Fijian mystery that cannot be explained by European science.

### Physicians Failed to Agree

In 1935 the rite was performed before two members of the British Medical Association. The eminent doctors examined the men carefully before and after the ceremony. They found that the soles of the men's feet, though toughened from walking barefoot all their life, were not abnormally thickened, nor were they smeared with any unguent or protective coating. The men responded normally to pain stimuli when pricked on the soles with pins or touched with lighted cigarettes. Yet they walked unharmed on stones hot enough to ignite paper and sticks instantly.

One physician thought that by repeated

practice, the men had become inured to the heat, and could therefore endure temperatures that would be intolerable to untrained persons. The other was of the opinion that the men could perform this rite by reason of autosuggestion, or suggestion of their chief or leader—a kind of hypnosis that would seal them off from any feeling of pain. The men of Mbengga, not knowing of these learned disputations, unconcernedly carry on the strange custom of their ancestors.

Half a mile off the coast of Viti Levu lies a small islet. Mbau is only a little more than 20 acres in extent, and one can reach it from the main island by wading at low tide. Yet this was once the home of the most feared fighters in a nation of fighting men.

Mbau was the stronghold of Ratu Thakombau, the Vunivalu, or Root of War, who by 1860 had extended his power over most of Fiji and made himself the most powerful chief in the islands.

Victorious war parties were constantly coming and going, and Mbau saw more cannibal feasts than any other part of Fiji. More than 200 victims were served up at one banquet. Some accounts say the long-pig ovens never were cold on Mbau. In 1840 one chronicler found it worthy of record in October that he “did not know of a single person eaten in the Mbau district since the previous March.”

Today nearly all of Thakombau's people have become Methodists, and the lali calls to church meetings and not to war. The stone against which war prisoners' brains were dashed out has become the baptismal font in the big white church.

When Thakombau ceded his country to Great Britain in 1874, he sent Queen Victoria his favorite war club and an eloquent pledge of fealty:

“The King gives Her Majesty his old and favourite war-club, the former, and, until lately, the only known law of Fiji. In abandoning club law, and adopting the forms and principles of civilized societies, he laid by his old weapon and covered it with the emblems of peace.

#### Ancient Law of Fiji: the War Club

Once wielded in battle by King Thakombau of Fiji, the heavy silver-ornamented club now serves as the mace of the colony's Legislative Council. This policeman stands beneath Fiji's coat of arms, which bears the motto *Rerevaka na Kalou ka doka na Tui*—Fear God and Honor the King.

“... With this emblem of the past he sends his love to Her Majesty, saying that he fully confides in her and her children, who, succeeding her, shall become Kings of Fiji, to exercise a watchful control over the welfare of his children and people, who, having survived the barbaric law and age, are now submitting themselves, under Her Majesty's rule, to civilization.”

