

ON Cikobia there are many fruitful dawa trees, while on the neighbouring island of Munia flourishes the mamakara tree. It was not so in the beginning of time, for the dawa grew on Munia and the mamakara on Cikobia.

Rasikilau was the god of Cikobia. Oh, a powerful god – the ground shook as he walked and his head was far above the tree tops. He was lonely, until one day a canoe came from some far-off land towards the north. On board was a goddess of great beauty, who responded to his love.

Two boys were born to them. They inherited the good looks of their mother and the strength of their father. While they were still young they pulled up mamakara trees by the roots, and fashioned them into clubs. When they played the ball game they stood at the opposite ends of the island, throw in pebbles to each other and catching them in their hands. Children of islands use the soft fruits of the dawa tree as balls, but as no dawa then grew on Cikobia, these two boys used pebbles that they found on the beach.

The boys were good friends, until one day they found a fish washed up on the beach, and quarrelled over who should have it. It was only big enough for a meal or one of them, and both were hungry. Neither would give way to the other, and in desperation one of them picked up a large rock and threw it at his brother.

Their father had been watching them from a distance. He saw the rocks flying through the air, thrown not in play but in anger. Occasionally one of the boys would be struck on the head, but the rocks bounced off harmlessly, or were smashed to pieces against their hard skulls.

Rasikilau was appalled by the sight, for he realised that if his sons had such strength while they were still boys, when they reached manhood they might injure him, or send him away from his home. He rushed up to them, caught them by the hair, and dashed their heads together with such force that they were both killed outright.

Then he remembered that their mother would be waiting for them to return, and he was afraid. He dared not tell her what had happened.

“Sobo!” said he, “I have sad news. From afar off I saw our

sons at play. After a while they quarrelled, and began to hurl rocks at each other. Now they are both dead, each killed by the other."

The goddess was overcome with grief. Day after day she stayed in her house, the tears running down her cheeks, and refused to be comforted. Rasikilau remained outside. His spirit was heavy, for the memory of his deed lay between him and his wife.

News of his distress came to Koroibo, the god of Munia Island. He was an old friend, and he thought that if he brought gifts with him he would be able to cheer up the god of Cikobia. Rasikilau greeted him and accepted the gifts, after which the gods sat together under the trees. Koroibo looked at the shady mamakara tree enviously, and wished that they grew on his own island. He listened as Rasikilau told him that his sons had met their death by throwing rocks at each other, and a crafty scheme came into his mind.

After the evening meal he said to his host, "My soul grieves at the death of your sons. If only you had had dawa trees growing here they could have played with the soft fruit, as my children do, and no harm could have come to them."

"That is true," Rasikilau replied, "but now it is too late. My sons are dead."

"Ah, but you may well have more. Your wife is still young and vigorous, and you need sons to comfort you. You should be prepared for that day. Listen, Rasikilau, I will give you all my dawa trees and there will be plenty of fruit on your island. All I ask in return is that you give me your mamakara trees."

"It is well," said Rasikilau.

They sat down and drank yaqona to signify that the exchange was acceptable. Then Rasikilau pulled up all his mamakara trees and loaded them into Koroibo's canoe, which was sent back again full of dawa trees.

So the mamakara trees grew in Munia in place of the dawa trees, and on Cikobia the dawa trees flourished where once the mamakara trees had grown. Koroibo was well satisfied, but Rasikilau had the worst of the bargain, because his wife still refused to be comforted. Presently her sorrowful spirit departed from her body, and could be heard sighing where her husband sat in lonely solitude under his dawa trees.

THE ancient ceremony of the calling of the turtles had been held for many years in the village of Nacamaki on the island of Koro. The people put flowers in her hair and leis of fragrant blooms around their necks, and on a certain day the whole village went down to the beach. For a long time they chanted songs and clapped their hands until, one after the other, the turtles swam up from the depths of the sea and crawled ashore. It was an amazing sight. The white sand suddenly became black with crawling turtles of all sizes, from tiny babies to the enormous veterans of many adventures.

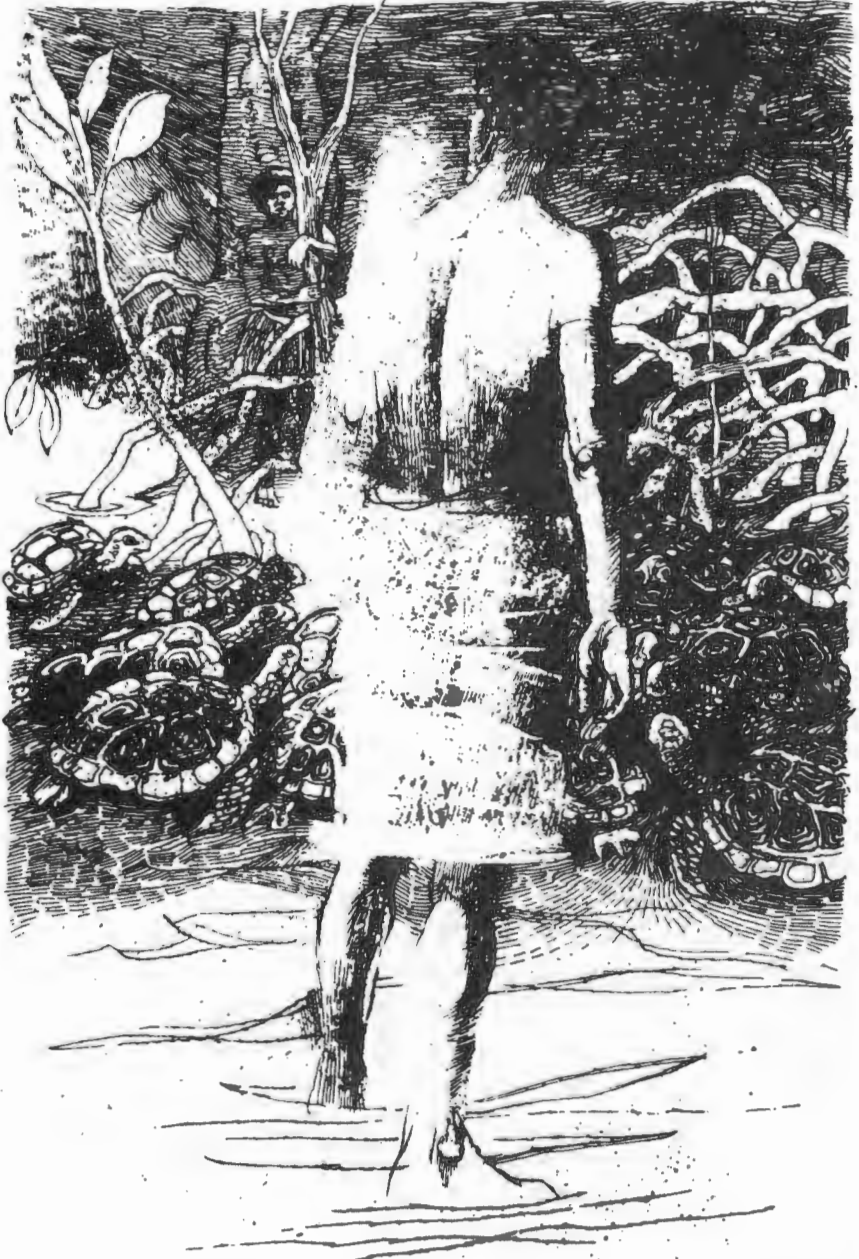
As soon as the turtle invasion began it was the custom for the villagers to go back to their homes without a single backward glance, and to stay there for a night and a day, leaving the beach to the turtles. There was much speculation as to what happened there, but the ceremony was one that had been imposed upon their ancestors by the gods, and no one dared to break the tabu, until one inquisitive and sceptical man defied the ancient edict in order to satisfy his curiosity.

"This year I will find out what happens," he thought, "for if this law was made by the gods, it was so long ago that even they must have forgotten by now why they imposed it on us."

Then he was struck by a disquieting thought. "Why do the turtles all come ashore on the same day, and only after we have clapped our hands and sung our songs?"

He thought about this for a while, then shrugged his shoulders and consoled himself with the reflection that nothing was likely to happen to him, and that this curiosity could never be satisfied until he had learned the secret of the visit of the turtles.

When the day for the next ceremony arrived he made himself as inconspicuous as possible, and while the others were chanting with their eyes fixed on the sea, he stole away and hid in the mangrove trees close by the water's edge. It was a good position, for he was well concealed yet had a good view of the beach. Presently the first turtles appeared, followed by thousands of others who seemed to be coming in from every direction. He watched his friends turn around and obediently make their way back to the village. The turtles all came ashore and stood in



"Foolish mortal. Why are you hiding there?"

long rows on the sand with their heads towards the sea, as though they were watching for someone to come.

The inquisitive man turned his head and saw something that looked like a cloud coming rapidly in from the sea. It came close, and through it he could dimly see a huge figure; but whether it was a man, a turtle, some mysterious denizen of the deep sea, or a god, he could not tell. To his surprise the apparition did not set foot on the beach. Gliding along the surface of the water, it turned aside and threaded its way between the mangrove trees until it was standing in front of him.

"Foolish mortal," a voice spoke out of the cloud. "Why are you hiding there? You know that the gods have forbidden men and women to look at the turtle tribe on the one day of the year when they assemble on the island of Koro. The others have returned to their homes. What are you doing here?"

The man tried to speak, but he was so frightened that his teeth chattered, and no words came out of his mouth.

"Never mind," the voice from the cloud said. "I can read your rebellious thoughts. Now you are afraid; but I know that when fear leaves you, sorrow will not take its place. The gods tell me that I must make an example of you, so that you will not live to see another turtle day, nor even to repent of the evil that you have done. The thing that will happen to you will be a reminder of your folly and a warning to your people that the will of the gods must be obeyed."

Two rigid arms flashed out of the mist and the frightened man was surrounded by a ribbon of light, which gleamed for a moment and was gone. Gone too was the man, and on the spot where he had stood, a tree grew.

When their friend failed to return, the villagers wondered. They remained in their homes the next day, but on the third day they searched for him. He was never found; but the vonu tree, with the hard nuts that are like the shell of a turtle, was discovered, and again men wondered.

While vonu nuts grow on Koro Island no man will ever dare to try to find out what the turtles do when they come ashore near Nacamaki village.

MYTHS & LEGENDS

of

Fiji

& Rotuma

STUDENTS EDITION

A. W. REED AND INEZ HAMES

Illustrated by ROGER HART

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