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A Voyage To The Pacific Ocean

Undertaken, By The Command Of His Majesty, For Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. To Determine The Position and Extent of the West Side of North America; its Distance from Asia; and the Practicability of a Northern Passage to Europe. Performed Under The Direction Of Captians Cook, ...

King, James

Cook, James

London, 1784

Chap. VIII. General Account of the Sandwich Islands continued. -
Government. -

People divided into three Classes. - Power of Eree-taboo. - Genealogy of the Kings of Owhyhee and Mowee. - Power of the ...

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C H A P. VIII.

General Account of the Sandwich Islands continued.—Government.—People divided into three Classes.—Power of Eree-taboo.—Genealogy of the Kings of Owhyhee and Mowee.—Power of the Chiefs.—State of the inferior Class.—Punishment of Crimes.—Religion.—Society of Priests.—The Orono.—Their Idols.—Songs chanted by the Chiefs, before they drink Ava.—Human Sacrifices.—Custom of knocking out the Fore-teeth.—Notions with regard to a future State.—Marriages.—Remarkable Instance of Jealousy.—Funeral Rites.

THE people of these islands are manifestly divided into three classes. The first are the *Erees*, or Chiefs, of each district; one of whom is superior to the rest, and is called at Owhyhee *Eree-taboo*, and *Eree Moe*. By the first of these words they express his absolute authority; and by the latter, that all are obliged to prostrate themselves (or put themselves to sleep, as the word signifies) in his presence. The second class are those who appear to enjoy a right of property, without authority. The third are the *towtows*, or servants, who have neither rank nor property.

It is not possible to give any thing like a systematical account of the subordination of these classes to each other, without departing from that strict veracity, which, in works of this nature, is more satisfactory than conjectures, however ingenious. I will, therefore, content myself with relating such facts, as we were witnesses to ourselves, and such



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accounts as we thought could be depended upon; and shall leave the reader to form, from them, his own ideas of the nature of their government.

The great power and high rank of Terreeoboo, the *Ereetafoo* of Owhyhee, was very evident, from the manner in which he was received at Karakakooa, on his first arrival. All the natives were seen prostrated at the entrance of their houses; and the canoes, for two days before, were *tabboed*, or forbidden to go out, till he took off the restraint. He was, at this time, just returned from Mowee, for the possession of which he was contending in favour of his son Teewarro, who had married the daughter and only child of the late king of that island, against Taheeteree, his surviving brother. He was attended, in this expedition, by many of his warriors; but whether their service was voluntary, or the condition on which they hold their rank and property, we could not learn.

That he collects tribute from the subordinate Chiefs, we had a very striking proof in the instance of Kaoo, which has been already related in our transactions of the 2d and 3d of February.

I have before mentioned, that the two most powerful Chiefs of these islands are Terreeoboo of Owhyhee, and Perreeorannee of Woahoo; the rest of the smaller isles being subject to one or other of these; Mowee, and its dependencies, being, at this time, claimed, as we have just observed, by Terreeoboo for Teewarro his son and intended successor; Atooi and Onecheow being governed by the grandsons of Perreeorannee.

The following genealogy of the Owhyhee and Mowee kings, which I collected from the priests, during our residence at the *Morai* in Karakakooa Bay, contains all the information



formation I could procure relative to the political history of these islands.

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This account reaches to four Chiefs, predecessors of the present; all of whom they represent to have lived to an old age. Their names and successions are as follow:

First, Poorahoo Awhykaia was king of Owhyhee, and had an only son, called Neerooagooa. At this time Mowee was governed by Mokoakea; who had also an only son, named Papikaneou.

Secondly, Neerooagooa had three sons, the eldest named Kahavee; and Papikaneou, of the Mowee race, had an only son, named Kaowreeka.

Thirdly, Kahavee had an only son, Kayenewee a mummow; and Kaowreeka, the Mowee king, had two sons, Maiha maiha, and Taheeteree; the latter of whom is now, by one party, acknowledged Chief of Mowee.

Fourthly, Kayenewee a mummow had two sons, Terree-oooboo and Kaihooa; and Maiha maiha, king of Mowee, had no son, but left a daughter, called Roaho.

Fifthly, Terreeoboo, the present king of Owhyhee, had a son named Teewarro, by Rora-rora, the widow of Maiha maiha, late king of Mowee; and this son has married Roaho, his half sister, in whose right he claims Mowee and its appendages.

Taheeteree, the brother of the late king, supported by a considerable party, who were not willing that the possessions should go into another family, took up arms, and opposed the rights of his niece.

When we were first off Mowee, Terreeoboo was there with his warriors to support the claims of his wife, his son, and daughter-



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daughter-in-law, and had fought a battle with the opposite party, in which Taheeterree was worsted. We afterward understood, that matters had been compromised, and that Taheeterree is to have the possession of the three neighbouring islands during his life; that Teewarro is acknowledged the Chief of Mowee, and will also succeed to the kingdom of Owhyhee on the death of Terreeboo; and also to the sovereignty of the three islands, contiguous to Mowee, on the death of Taheeterree. Teewarro has been lately married to his half sister; and should he die without issue, the government of these islands descends to Maiha maiha, whom we have often had occasion to mention, he being the son of Kaihooa, the deceased brother of Terreeboo. Should he also die without issue, they could not tell who would succeed; for the two youngest sons of Terreeboo, one of whom he appears to be exceedingly fond of, being born of a woman of no rank, would, from this circumstance, be debarred all right of succession. We had not an opportunity of seeing queen Rora-rora, whom Terreeboo had left behind at Mowee; but we have already had occasion to take notice, that he was accompanied by Kanee Kaberaia, the mother of the two youths, to whom he was very much attached.

From this account of the genealogy of the Owhyhee and Mowee monarchs, it is pretty clear that the government is hereditary; which also makes it very probable, that the inferior titles, and property itself, descend in the same course. With regard to Perreorannee, we could only learn, that he is an *Eree Taboo*; that he was invading the possession of Taheeterree, but on what pretence we were not informed; and that his grandsons governed the islands to leeward.

The power of the *Erees* over the inferior classes of people appears to be very absolute. Many instances of this occurred



curred daily during our stay amongst them, and have been already related. The people, on the other hand, pay them the most implicit obedience; and this state of servility has manifestly had a great effect in debasing both their minds and bodies. It is, however, remarkable, that the Chiefs were never guilty, as far at least as came within my knowledge, of any acts of cruelty or injustice, or even of insolent behaviour toward them; though, at the same time, they exercised their power over one another in the most haughty and oppressive manner. Of this I shall give two instances. A Chief of the lower order had behaved with great civility to the master of the ship, when he went to examine Karakooa bay, the day before the ship first arrived there; and, in return, I afterward carried him on board, and introduced him to Captain Cook, who invited him to dine with us. While we were at table, Pareea entered, whose face but too plainly manifested his indignation, at seeing our guest in so honourable a situation. He immediately seized him by the hair of the head, and was proceeding to drag him out of the cabin, when the Captain interfered; and, after a great deal of altercation, all the indulgence we could obtain, without coming to a quarrel with Pareea, was, that our guest should be suffered to remain, being seated upon the floor, whilst Pareea filled his place at the table. At another time, when Terreeboo first came on board the Resolution, Maiha-maiha, who attended him, finding Pareea on deck, turned him out of the ship in the most ignominious manner; and yet Pareea, we certainly knew, to be a man of the first consequence.

How far the property of the lower class is secured against the rapacity and despotism of the great Chiefs, I cannot say, but it should seem, that it is sufficiently protected against

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private theft, or mutual depredation. For not only their plantations, which are spread over the whole country, but also their houses, their hogs, and their cloth, were left unguarded, without the smallest apprehensions. I have already remarked, that they not only separate their possessions by walls in the plain country, but that, in the woods likewise, wherever the horse-plantains grow, they make use of small white flags, in the same manner, and for the same purpose of discriminating property, as they do bunches of leaves at Otaheite. All which circumstances, if they do not amount to proofs, are strong indications that the power of the Chiefs, where property is concerned, is not arbitrary; but, at least, so far circumscribed and ascertained, as to make it worth the while for the inferior orders to cultivate the soil, and to occupy their possessions distinct from each other.

With respect to the administration of justice, all the information we could collect was very imperfect and confined. Whenever any of the lowest class of people had a quarrel amongst themselves, the matter in dispute was referred to the decision of some Chief, probably the Chief of the district, or the person to whom they appertained. If an inferior Chief had given cause of offence to one of a higher rank, the feelings of the latter at the moment seemed the only measure of his punishment. If he had the good fortune to escape the first transports of his superior's rage, he generally found means, through the mediation of some third person, to compound for his crime by a part or the whole of his property and effects. These were the only facts that came to our knowledge on this head.

The religion of these people resembles, in most of its principal features, that of the Society and Friendly Islands.
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Their *Morais*, their *Whattas*, their idols, their sacrifices, and their sacred songs, all of which they have in common with each other, are convincing proofs, that their religious notions are derived from the same source. In the length and number of their ceremonies, this branch indeed far exceeds the rest; and, though in all these countries, there is a certain class of men, to whose care the performance of their religious rites is committed; yet we had never met with a regular society of priests, till we discovered the cloisters of Kakooa in Karakakooa Bay. The head of this order was called *Orono*; a title which we imagined to imply something highly sacred, and which, in the person of Omeeah, was honoured almost to adoration. It is probable, that the privilege of entering into this order (at least as to the principal offices in it), is limited to certain families. Omeeah, the *Orono*, was the son of Kaoo, and the uncle of Kairee-keea; which last presided, during the absence of his grandfather, in all religious ceremonies at the *Morai*. It was also remarked, that the child of Omeeah, an only son, about five years old, was never suffered to appear without a number of attendants, and such other marks of care and solicitude, as we saw no other like instance of. This seemed to indicate, that his life was an object of the greatest moment, and that he was destined to succeed to the high rank of his father.

It has been mentioned, that the title of *Orono*, with all its honours, was given to Captain Cook; and it is also certain, that they regarded us, generally, as a race of people superior to themselves; and used often to say, that great *Eatooa* dwelled in our country. The little image, which we have before described, as the favourite idol on the *Morai* in Karakakooa Bay, they call *Koonoorackaiée*, and said it was

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was Terreeboo's God; and that he also resided amongst us.

There are found an infinite variety of these images, both on the *Morais*, and within and without their houses, to which they give different names; but it soon became obvious to us in how little estimation they were held, from their frequent expressions of contempt of them, and from their even offering them to sale for trifles. At the same time, there seldom failed to be some one particular figure in favour, to which, whilst this preference lasted, all their adoration was addressed. This consisted in arraying it in red cloth; beating their drums, and singing hymns before it; laying bunches of red feathers, and different sorts of vegetables, at its feet; and exposing a pig, or a dog, to rot on the *whatta* that stood near it.

In a bay to the Southward of Karakakooa, a party of our gentlemen were conducted to a large house, in which they found the black figure of a man, resting on his fingers and toes, with his head inclined backward; the limbs well formed and exactly proportioned, and the whole beautifully polished. This figure the natives called *Mace*; and round it were placed thirteen others of rude and distorted shapes, which they said were the *Eatoos* of several deceased Chiefs, whose names they recounted. The place was full of *whattas*, on which lay the remains of their offerings. They likewise give a place in their houses to many ludicrous and some obscene idols, like the Priapus of the ancients.

It hath been remarked, by former voyagers, that both among the Society and Friendly Islanders, an adoration is paid to particular birds; and I am led to believe, that the same custom prevails here; and that, probably, the raven is
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the objects of it, from seeing two of these birds tame at the village of Kakooa, which they told me were *Eatooas*; and, refusing every thing I offered for them, cautioned me, at the same time, not to hurt or offend them.

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Amongst their religious ceremonies, may be reckoned the prayers and offerings made by the priests before their meals. Whilst the *ava* is chewing, of which they always drink before they begin their repast, the person of the highest rank takes the lead in a sort of hymn, in which he is presently joined by one, two, or more of the company; the rest moving their bodies, and striking their hands gently together, in concert with the singers. When the *ava* is ready, cups of it are handed about to those who do not join in the song, which they keep in their hands till it is ended; when, uniting in one loud response, they drink off their cup. The performers of the hymn are then served with *ava*, who drink it after a repetition of the same ceremony; and, if there be present one of a very superior rank, a cup is, last of all, presented to him, which, after chanting some time alone, and being answered by the rest, and pouring a little out on the ground, he drinks off. A piece of the flesh that is dressed, is next cut off, without any selection of the part of the animal; which, together with some of the vegetables, being deposited at the foot of the image of the *Eatooa*, and a hymn chanted, their meal commences. A ceremony of much the same kind is also performed by the Chiefs, whenever they drink *ava*, between their meals.

Human sacrifices are more frequent here, according to the account of the natives themselves, than in any other islands we visited. These horrid rites are not only had recourse to upon the commencement of war, and preceding



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great battles, and other signal enterprizes; but the death of any considerable Chief calls for a sacrifice of one or more *Towtows*, according to his rank; and we were told, that ten men were destined to suffer on the death of *Terreeoboo*. What may (if any thing possibly can) lessen, in some small degree, the horror of this practice, is, that the unhappy victims have not the most distant intimation of their fate. Those who are fixed upon to fall, are set upon with clubs wherever they happen to be; and, after being dispatched, are brought dead to the place, where the remainder of the rites are completed. The reader will here call to his remembrance the skulls of the captives, that had been sacrificed at the death of some great Chief, and which were fixed on the rails round the top of the *Morai* at *Kakooa*. We got a farther piece of intelligence upon this subject at the village of *Kowrowa*; where, on our inquiring into the use of a small piece of ground, inclosed with a stone fence, we were told that it was an *Here-eere*, or burying-ground of a Chief; and there, added our informer, pointing to one of the corners, lie the *tangata* and *wabeene taboo*, or the man and woman who were sacrificed at his funeral.

To this class of their customs may also be referred that of knocking out their fore-teeth. Scarce any of the lower people, and very few of the Chiefs, were seen, who had not lost one or more of them; and we always understood, that this voluntary punishment, like the cutting off the joints of the finger at the Friendly Islands, was not inflicted on themselves from the violence of grief, on the death of their friends, but was designed as a propitiatory sacrifice to the *Eatooa*, to avert any danger or mischief to which they might be exposed.

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We were able to learn but little of their notions with regard to a future state. Whenever we asked them, whither the dead were gone? we were always answered, that the breath, which they appeared to consider as the soul, or immortal part, was gone to the *Eatooa*; and, on pushing our inquiries farther, they seemed to describe some particular place, where they imagined the abode of the deceased to be; but we could not perceive, that they thought, in this state, either rewards or punishments awaited them.

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Having promised the Reader, in the first Chapter, an explanation of what was meant by the word *taboo*, I shall, in this place, lay before him the particular instances that fell under our observation, of its application and effects. On our inquiring into the reasons of the interdiction of all intercourse between us and the natives, the day preceding the arrival of *Terreeoboo*, we were told, that the Bay was *taboed*. The same restriction took place, at our request, the day we interred the bones of Captain Cook. In these two instances the natives paid the most implicit and scrupulous obedience; but whether on any religious principle, or merely in deference to the civil authority of their Chiefs, I cannot determine. When the ground near our observatories, and the place where our masts lay, were *taboed*, by sticking small wands round them, this operated in a manner not less efficacious. But though this mode of consecration was performed by the priests only, yet still, as the men ventured to come within the space, when invited by us, it should seem, that they were under no religious apprehensions; and that their obedience was limited to our refusal only. The women could, by no means, be induced to come near us; but this was probably on account of the *Morai* adjoining; which they are prohibited, at all times, and in all the



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islands of those seas, from approaching. Mention hath been already made, that women are always *tabooed*, or forbidden, to eat certain kind of meats. We also frequently saw several at their meals, who had the meat put into their mouths by others; and on our asking the reason of this singularity, were told, that they were *tabooed*, or forbidden, to feed themselves. This prohibition, we understood, was always laid on them, after they had assisted at any funeral, or touched a dead body, and also on other occasions. It is necessary to observe, that, on these occasions, they apply the word *taboo* indifferently both to persons and things. Thus they say, the natives were *tabooed*, or the bay was *tabooed*, and so of the rest. This word is also used to express any thing sacred, or eminent, or devoted. Thus the king of Owhyhee was called *Eree-taboo*; a human victim, *tangata taboo*; and, in the same manner, among the Friendly Islanders, Tonga, the island where the king resides, is named *Tonga-taboo*.

Concerning their marriages, I can afford the reader little farther satisfaction, than informing him, that such a relation or compact exists amongst them. I have already had occasion to mention, that at the time Terreeoboo had left his queen Rora Rora at Mowee, he was attended by another woman, by whom he had children, and to whom he was very much attached; but how far polygamy, properly speaking, is allowed, or how far it is mixed with concubinage, either with respect to the king, the Chiefs, or among the inferior orders, too few facts came to our knowledge to justify any conclusions. It hath also been observed, that, except Kainee Kabareea, and the wife of the Orono, with three women whom I shall have occasion hereafter to mention, we never saw any female of high rank. From what I had an opportunity



runity of observing of the domestic concerns of the lowest class, the house seemed to be under the direction of one man and woman, and the children in the like state of subordination as in civilized countries.

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It will not be improper, in this place, to take notice, that we were eye-witnesses of a fact, which, as it was the only instance we saw of any thing like jealousy among them, shews, at the same time, that not only fidelity, but a degree of reserve, is required from the married women of consequence. At one of the entertainments of boxing, Omeah was observed to rise from his place two or three times, and to go up to his wife with strong marks of displeasure, ordering her, as it appeared to us from his manner, to withdraw. Whether it was, that being very handsome, he thought she drew too much of our attention, or without being able to determine what other reason he might have for his conduct, it is but justice to say, that there existed no real cause of jealousy. However, she kept her place; and when the entertainment was over, joined our party, and soliciting some trifling presents, was given to understand, that we had none about us; but that if she would accompany us toward our tent, she should return with such as she liked best. She was accordingly walking along with us; which Omeah observing, followed in a violent rage, and seizing her by the hair, began to inflict, with his fists, a severe corporal punishment. This sight, especially as we had innocently been the cause of it, gave us much concern; and yet we were told, that it would be highly improper to interfere between man and wife of such high rank. We were, however, not left without the consolation of seeing the natives at last interpose; and had the farther satisfaction of meeting them together the next day, in perfect good-humour with each other; and

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what is still more singular, the lady would not suffer us to remonstrate with her husband on his treatment of her, which we were much inclined to do, and plainly told us, that he had done no more than he ought.

Whilst I was ashore at the observatory at Karakakooa Bay, I had twice an opportunity of seeing a considerable part of their funeral rites. Intelligence was brought me of the death of an old Chief in a house near our observatories, soon after the event happened. On going to the place, I found a number of people assembled, and seated round a square *area*, fronting the house in which the deceased lay, whilst a man, in a red feathered cap, advanced from an interior part of the house to the door, and putting out his head, at almost every moment uttered a most lamentable howl, accompanied with the most singular grimaces, and violent distortions of his face, that can be conceived. After this had passed a short time, a large mat was spread upon the *area*, and two men and thirteen women came out of the house and seated themselves down upon it, in three equal rows; the two men, and three of the women, being in front. The necks and hands of the women were decorated with feathered ruffs; and broad green leaves, curiously scolloped, were spread over their shoulders. At one corner of this *area*, near a small hut, were half a dozen boys waving small white banners, and the tufted wands, or *taboo* sticks, which have been often mentioned in the former chapters, who would not permit us to approach them. This led me to imagine, that the dead body might be deposited in this little hut; but I afterward understood, that it was in the house where the man in the red cap opened the rites, by playing his tricks at the door. The company just mentioned, being seated on the mat, began to sing a melancholy
tune,



tune, accompanied with a slow and gentle motion of the body and arms. When this had continued some time, they raised themselves on their knees, and, in a posture between kneeling and sitting, began by degrees to move their arms and their bodies with great rapidity, the tune always keeping pace with their motions. As these last exertions were too violent to continue long, they resumed, at intervals, their slower movements; and, after this performance had lasted an hour, more mats were brought and spread upon the *area*, and four or five elderly women, amongst whom, I was told, was the dead Chief's wife, advanced slowly out of the house, and seating themselves in the front of the first company, began to cry and wail most bitterly; the women in the three rows behind joining them, whilst the two men inclined their heads over them in a very melancholy and pensive attitude. At this period of the rites, I was obliged to leave them to attend at the observatory; but returning within half an hour, found them in the same situation. I continued with them till late in the evening, and left them proceeding with little variation, as just described; resolving, however, to attend early in the morning, to see the remainder of the ceremony. On my arrival at the house, as soon as it was day, I found to my mortification, the crowd dispersed, and every thing quiet; and was given to understand, that the corpse was removed; nor could I learn in what manner it was disposed of. I was interrupted in making farther inquiries for this purpose, by the approach of three women of rank, who, whilst their attendants stood near them with their fly-flaps, sat down by us, and, entering into conversation, soon made me comprehend, that our presence was a hindrance to the performance of some necessary rites.

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I had hardly got out of sight, before I heard their cries and lamentations; and meeting them a few hours afterward, I found they had painted the lower part of their faces perfect black.

The other opportunity I had of observing these ceremonies, was in the case of an ordinary person; when, on hearing some mournful female cries issue from a miserable looking hut, I ventured into it, and found an old woman with her daughter, weeping over the body of an elderly man, who had but just expired, being still warm. The first step they took, was to cover the body with cloth, after which, lying down by it, they drew the cloth over themselves, and then began a mournful kind of song, frequently repeating, *Arweb medoaah! Arweb tanee!* Oh my father! Oh my husband! A younger daughter was also at the same time lying prostrate, in a corner of the house, covered over with black cloth, repeating the same words. On leaving this melancholy scene, I found at the door a number of their neighbours collected together, and listening to their cries with profound silence. I was resolved not to miss this opportunity of seeing in what manner they dispose of the body; and therefore, after satisfying myself, before I went to bed, that it was not then removed, I gave orders, that the sentries should walk backward and forward before the house, and, in case they suspected any measures were taking for the removal of the body, to give me immediate notice. However, the sentries had not kept a good look-out, for in the morning I found the body was gone. On inquiring, what they had done with it? They pointed toward the sea; indicating, most probably, thereby, that it had been committed to the deep, or perhaps that it had been carried beyond the bay, to some burying-ground in
another



another part of the country. The Chiefs are interred in the *Morais*, or *Heree-erees*, with the men sacrificed on the occasion, by the side of them; and we observed, that the *Morai*, where the Chief had been buried, who, as I have already mentioned, was killed in the cave, after so stout a resistance, was hung round with red cloth.

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