

[31]

CAPTAIN WILKES COMMENTS ON THE CAUSE OF THE WAR, 1840.

[ Wilkes, Charles. U. S. N. Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1842. 5 Volumes. Philadelphia. 1844. Volume 3. p. 17. ]

One can readily enter into the feelings of the heathen, who are inhabitants of the sacred Tonga, and have always been looked up to by the inhabitants of the rest of the group, who were obliged to carry thither offerings, &c., to the gods, as superior to themselves, when they see an attempt made to subjugate them, by those whom they have always looked upon with contempt, and to force upon them a new religion, and a change in every thing they have hitherto looked upon as sacred. Such feelings are enough to make them war against any innovation in their social polity and laws; and after having been acknowledged from time immemorial as pre-eminent throughout the whole group, including Wallis, Hoorn, Traitor's and Keppel's Islands, it is not surprising that they should be found the active enemies of religious encroachments. Their vexation is augmented by the disappointment they experienced in the last election of the King of Tonga (Tui Kanakabolo); Tubou although the brother of his predecessor, was chosen by them in preference to Mumui, the son, because they believed him to be favourable to their side, and opposed to the Christian party. Mumui on the other hand, was brought up by the missionaries, speaks English tolerably well, and is the missionaries principal school-teacher. Mr Tucker informed me that Mumui is now considered as the son of Tubou, and will be entitled to the succession, for which both Faatu and Taufaaahau, are likewise candidates, on the death of Tubou.

[32]

MISSIONARY COMMENTS ON THE CAUSE AND COURSE OF THE WAR

[Journal. Vol. 1. Stephen Rabone. Mitchell Library, Sydney. MSS 47]

1840 War.

Tuesday, December 31st, 1839. pp. 185-186.

In reference to the present state of Tonga since I last wrote in my journal we have had several misunderstandings among the heathen and several fortresses have reported preparations for war. We grieve most about Hihifo at that place there has been little but digging fortresses and war like proceedings for many weeks past. The Heathen and the Christians cannot agree - we do what we can to keep the Christians right but it is very difficult inasmuch as their quarrels are principally of a family character. However they are not worse than they have been for some time past - I confess I do not anticipate

that they will even agree for any length of time. They are very near each other - this circumstance with the differences of their pursuits, designs, and wishes all unite to make me fear they will not agree - while in many particulars they are too connected that it would be an impossibility almost to separate them."

P.191. January 20th.

O what confusion and uproar every where prevails - fences building - houses being lifted into the fortress. Messages sending messages being received and altogether one scene of confusion and unpleasantness. O for peace and quiet. Lord undertake their own cause and save all the people.

Tuesday 21st.

This morning we found the Canoe had left for Haabai and Vava'u. The wind has been fair and the day fine so we hope they are at Lifuka this evening - and that they will proceed on to Vava'u tomorrow K.G. being there just now. The Heathen will now be fearing and expecting every day. of their own King they have no fear nor do they respect him - We hear curious reports from the Heathen many of which we do not believe - some we fear are too much like truth to be disputed. O these un-Friendly Islands - what treachery, deceit and bloodshed and murder would their history develop could it be secured - to hear of some things is almost too much for common feelings.

P.192. Thursday 23rd January 1840.

This afternoon after our Females Leaders Meeting - Bro. T. and I went into the King's house during our conversation with him 4 or 5 of our people arrived from Foui all blackened and prepared for war. they came to bring the news that a certain party belonging to Foui had gone out of their fortress and had killed 2 more of the Heathen party - we left as soon as we heard their message and I felt exceedingly grieved - especially as the King shd. given explicit orders to the Foui people to keep in their fortress till George had arrive from Haabai but it is one of the most difficult things imaginable to restrain these semi savages from war when once commenced. In fact it would appear that many of them actually delight in these scenes of war and bloodshed - we talk - we write - we promise - we threaten - but the old disposition of the people breaks thro' all. The King has ordered 100 of our people to take back the men who brought the painful intelligence - lest they should be way laid by the Heathen. O God remember the Heathen for good - and save the people from evil.

Friday 24th.

We hear nothing of importance today - the people returned that went to Hihifo and again we are grieved to hear that instead of doing simply what the King ordered them to do (viz to see the men safe at Foui and return) they went and surrounded the fortress of the Heathen called them to come out - fired upon them and they in return fired upon our people - and one was very near being shot - so near that the bullet tore off his dress. but they escaped without further mischief. Everything is now lawful that men like to do - but we pray for that time when such a state of things shall be no more. May the Lord hasten it. We are anxiously awaiting the arrival of G. from Haabai but can hardly expect him as the wind is very strong and not very fair.

Tuesday 4th February 1840. p.195.

Another and I suppose the last message was sent this morning to Hihifo and this afternoon he returned with 3 old men called Matabules or chiefs from the fortress - they came to say they were willing to make peace etc but not willing to embrace the lotu - Kings Josiah and George spake freely to them and they appeared humbled and confessed their disobedience to Tupou etc. K.G. told them he should do down to Hihifo in the morning - the old men went before with the professed object of preparing for his reception. O may the Lord go with his servants and save them from the hands of all them that hate them.

Thursday

King George and his people with a part of the people from this place left here in the course of last night and arrived at Hihifo before day light while at the Foui and consulting with the chiefs there in reference to their all going to make peace with the heathen a man arrived who had ran from the Heathen fortress - and immediately informed K. George of what he heard in the Heathen fortress - it appears that on the return of the 3 old chiefs who came here to talk with the Kings - the whole of the Heathen Chiefs held a consultation and on hearing that G. intended to visit them on the morrow they formed and agreed upon the diabolical plan of murdering K. G. as soon as he should enter their fortress - they were of one heart and the men who possessed guns were directed accordingly - accidentally this young Backslider from God heard of the affair and could find no rest till he made his escape from the fortress and made known the affair to G. and his people. A man was immediately dispatched to enquire the truth of this report and after various attempts to deny it - Ata himself confessed to the truth of the affair.

K.G. and his people did not therefore go to the fortress, but returned here this evening in order to consult with Tupou and the Chiefs here as to what must be done. One thing they have determined upon - viz to depose the present 'Ata and Vaha'i - which we expect will take place in the morning. But O God we give the praise and glory of the preservation of the King to Thyself - it is not the first affair of this very character in Tonga - the late war furnished a similar affair at Hule - and in the end they were all swept away - We pray it may not be so in this instance - we believe it will not. We now guess why they wished G. to go in a small vaka or if not to go with a few people etc - their feet are swift to shed blood - but they never knew the way of peace.

Friday 7th.

This morning I was at the great Kava party when another 'Ata and Vaha'i' were installed. There was considerable ceremony - after the said persons were called to their proper seats in the Kava ring - Kava was made and then it was called to take the first dish of Kava to Ata - from which time Ata is his name - so of Vahai - the latter is one of our Local Preachers - and proves that Truth "They that honour me I will honour etc " We hope this will tell upon the pride and obstinacy of the Heathen. They perhaps would not anticipate that such a thing would be done.

[33]

WHEN WILL THE WAR CEASE ? 1840

[ Journal of Rev. Peter Turner. Mitchell Library, Sydney. B. 306.]  
June 1st 1840.

I was in hopes something would have been done more effectively to terminate the war. But one reason is the people have been visited with an influenza so that not more than one half of the Xtians has been able to do anything. The influenza was brought by an American vessel..... I have received a note from King Geo. in which he expresses his affection towards us and thanks me for my letter of advice to him. He hopes that I shall continue to give him my advice.

Munday 22 ( June 1840 )

' ..... O when will the war cease. Our people are going astray. The Schools and the society are torn to pieces.....'

AN ATTEMPT AT MEDIATION.      CAPTAIN WILKES 1840

[Wilkes, Charles, U.S.N. Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842. Vol.3. pp.7 - 12]

"Nuku'alofa is a station of the Wesleyan Mission, the heads of which, Messrs. Tucker and Rabone, paid me a visit, and from them I learnt that the Christian and Devil's parties were on the point of hostilities; that Taufa'ahau or King George, of Vavao, had arrived with eight hundred warriors, for the purpose of carrying on the war, and putting an end to it.

Believing that I might exert an influence to reconcile the parties, and through my instrumentality restore the blessings of peace, I proffered my services to that effect, which were warmly accepted by the Reverend Mr. Tucker. I therefore sent a message to the chiefs of the Christian party, to meet me in fono in the morning, and late at night received a notice that they would be prepared to receive me. On the morning of the 24th, I landed, with all the officers that could be spared from other duties.

We were led through all this confusion to the small hut of Tubou or King Josiah: here we were presented to his majesty, with whom I shook hands. He was sitting on a mat winding a ball of sennit, which he had been making, and at which occupation he continued for the most part of the time. He has the appearance of being about sixty years old; his figure is tall, though much bent with age; he has a fine dignified countenance, but is represented as a very imbecile old man, fit for any thing but to rule; as domestic and affectionate in his family, caring little about the affairs of government, provided he can have his children and grand-children around him to play with, in which amusement he passes the most of his time. Seats were provided for us from the missionaries' houses, and were placed in the hut, whose sides being open, gave us a full view of all that was passing without. King Josiah, with his nearest relatives and the highest chiefs, about ten in number occupied the hut, together with the missionaries and ourselves. The warriors were grouped about in little squads, in their various grotesque accoutrements.

When all was apparently ready, we waited some few minutes for King George. When he made his appearance, I could not but admire him: he is upwards of six feet in height, extremely well proportioned, and athletic; his limbs are rounded and full; his features regular and manly, with a fine open countenance and sensible face; all which were seen to the greatest advantage. The only covering he wore was a large white tapa or gnato, girded in loose folds around his waist, and hanging to the ground, leaving his arms and chest quite bare.

He at once attracted all eyes; for, on approaching, every movement showed he was in the habit of commanding those about him. With unassuming dignity, he quietly took his seat without the hut, and as if rather prepared to be a listener than one who was to meet us in council. This was afterwards explained to me by Mr. Tucker, who stated that King George is not yet considered a native chief of Tonga, and, notwithstanding his actual power here and at Vavao, is obliged to take his seat among the common people. On observing his situation, and knowing him to be the ruling chief de facto, I immediately requested that he might be admitted to the hut; and he was accordingly requested to enter, which he did, and seated himself at a respectful distance from the king, to whom he showed great and marked respect.

I proposed myself as a mediator between the parties, and that each party should appoint ten chiefs, to meet under my direction and protection, in order to arrange all the difficulties between them; that these should meet on neutral ground, on the island of Pangai-Moutu, about halfway between the heathen fortress of M<sup>o</sup>a and Nukualofa.

Anxious to know the actual cause of the war, I made every inquiry that was in my power, and satisfied myself that it was in a great measure a religious contest, growing out of the zeal the missionaries have to prepagate the gospel, and convert the heathen. With this is combined the desire of King George, or Taufa'ahau, who is already master of Hapai and Vavao, to possess himself of all the islands of the group. About three years prior to our visit, a war had broken out in Tonga of a similar character, and the Christian party being hard pressed, sent to ask the aid of King George, who came, relieved them, and defeated their enemies.

.....

Indeed his (King George's) whole conduct did not leave us any doubt what his intentions were, and that the missionaries and he were serving each others cause. I mentioned my suspicions, relative to King George's ambition, to the missionaries, and how likely it would be to prevent any reconciliation or peace with the heathen, and was much surprised and struck with the indifference with which Mr. Rabone spoke of the war. He was evidently more inclined to have it continue than desirous that it should be put a stop to; viewing it, in fact, as a means of propagating the gospel. I regretted to hear such sentiments, and had little hope, after becoming aware of them, of being instrumental in bringing about a peace, when such unchristian views existed where it was least to be expected."

AN ATTEMPT AT MEDIATION - ANOTHER VIEW

[Stephen Rabone. Journal. Vol. 2.  
Friday April 24th 1840 - Mitchell Library Sydney. MSS.47]

This afternoon arrived here the ----- Commadore Wilkes of the U.S. Ex.Ex. Several gentlemen immediately came on shore and invited Bro. Tucker and myself on board - we went and have had a long conversation - principally in reference to the heathen and the present state of Tonga - he expressed an earnest desire to make peace between the contending parties And for the arrangement of this affair had requested a meeting of the Chiefs tomorrow morning. May the blessings of peace making be his portion. Altho I thus wish and desire - I confess I am not half as sanguine in my expectations as Com. Wilkes - but may I be disappointed.

About 10 o'clock Saturday morning arrived on shore Com. Wilkes with a considerable number of his officers. We all met at Josiaia's house with Josiah and George and all the chiefs concerned in the government. The Com. expressed a determination to make peace if possible. He brought with him a written document which he submitted to Josiah and George and which they approved in which he requested an audience with the Heathen and Xtian chiefs at any place they might choose to meet, in order to reconcile their differences and make friends No one who heard him (except it may be his officers) believed for a moment that the heathen chiefs would thus meet Josiah and George, he himself was sanguine and "had no doubt" but he should accomplish the object. The writing was translated and sent first to "Fatu" - then to "Lavaka" and then to "Vaea". The Com. waited - had a tent erected on shore in part for their accomodation and meeting provisions were taken on shore and on Sunday night or Monday morning arrived from the Heathen Maafu an old blind chief who has little or nothing to do in the government. However he was the only representative from the heathen - accompanied by a man calling himself "English named George" but who is two fold more a Heathen than the heathen themselves. He remained a few hours but during last night he and His party made their escape - taking with them all their biscuits, beef, etc. and thus effectively convinced the Com. that they are heathen and can lie - steal and anything else for the sake of a little food - and that to make peace with the heathen is not such an easy matter as it was evidently imagined to be by Com. Wilkes. We highly valued the object in view and the motives by which Com. W. was actuated - but are not at all disappointed in the way the heathen have treated him.

KING GEORGE'S TACTICS

[Wilkes, Charles. USN. op. cit. pp.28-29]

On the evening of the day on which King George visited the ship he held a council, in which he addressed his chiefs and warriors on the necessity of carrying on the war with vigour; and measures were taken to prosecute it accordingly. The meeting took place in the malai opposite his house while he sat in the doorway with his two children, with the church-people forming a circle around him. At this meeting was seen the noted chief and Feejee warrior who has already been spoken of, fully armed, in the background. After the council had debated and talked over the subject fully, King George gave some commands, which several messengers were sent to execute and the council was dismissed in a truly primitive style and language: "Let every man go and cook his yams."

After the assemblage was dismissed, the king and chiefs remained some time in consultation. In this council, an attack upon the heathen towns was arranged. The next morning, smoke was seen ascending from some of the heathen villages, and word was brought to me afterwards, that King George, having sallied forth with eight hundred warriors at midnight, had burned two of the heathen towns. Although he had ordered seven hundred more warriors to follow him at daylight, he did not pursue the heathen, who fled before him. On his return in the evening he held an ava feast in honour of his success; at this meeting, Lavaka and Ata, or the chiefs who held these littles, were formally degraded from their offices by the king, - a stroke of policy that is thought will have much influence in alienation of this people, as it has usually had that effect; I, however, very much question its success in the present instance when the parties have such a deadly animosity towards each other; for the very authority by which the act of degradation is performed has abandoned the religion by which the act was sanctioned.



AN APPEAL FOR BRITISH HELP BY THE MISSIONARIES 1840

[Thomas West, Ten years in south Central Polynesia .... etc etc.  
London 1865. pp.284-286]

Soon after the departure of the American commodore, (Wilkes), further aggressive acts on the part of the heathen followed. The Missionaries were kept in a state of constant alarm and danger, from the 12th of May until June 21st. Various fatal encounters, between the rebels and the loyalists, took place on a small scale during that interval of time, all of which tended to embitter the animosity of the combatants. On the latter date, H.M.S. "Favourite," commanded by Captain Croker, arrived. He had received a letter from the Rev. Mr. Thomas, while at Vavau, requesting his amicable interposition, to arrest, if possible, the further progress of the war. Upon landing, therefore, at Nukualofa, he immediately intimated to the allied kings his readiness to do anything he possibly could to terminate the war. Such, however, was the state of affairs, that the two Missionaries addressed the following letter to the captain, which, in itself, will best explain the exposed and dangerous position in which they and their families were placed.

"NUKUALOFA, TONGATABU, June 22nd, 1840.  
To Captain Croker, of H.M.S. 'Favourite.'

Sir,

We, the undersigned, being Missionaries labouring under the auspices of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in this island, gratefully hail your visit here at this critical juncture as a gracious interposition of Divine Providence, and earnestly implore, as British subjects and Christian Missionaries, your protection and assistance in behalf of ourselves and families.

"In consequence of the civil war which is now raging on this island, our lives and property are in great danger day and night. Our premises stand outside of the fort, and are, consequently, comparatively unprotected; and we have no means at our command of removing to a place of safety; the fort being far too small to contain all the Christians who have run thither from the different villages and out-stations to save their lives.

"The heathen have tried to fix on a plan to take Nukualofa by storm; but have been mercifully prevented. They have repeatedly made incursions, both by day and night, to within a short distance of this place. On Thursday last, they killed four aged men from here, within about two miles of our premises, and mangled their bodies by cutting off their heads and carrying them away as trophies to their fort.

We heard the alarm, and also that they were chasing others of the Christian party towards this place. Knowing our defenceless condition at the time, - King George, with nearly all the people, being twelve miles off in another direction, - we knew not where to run for safety; but thought it not prudent to risk our lives, and those of our families, by remaining in our houses where we were. We, consequently, had to abandon the premises, with all our property, and the property of the Mission; but, providentially, the rebels retired, after coming within a short distance of our town.

"The Kings Josiah and George, with their people, are alarmed about our safety; and Josiah himself, with a few old men, kept watch at our gates on Wednesday night last, while King George and the people were away.

"There are three fortresses in rebellion against the king and government of this island, counting about 1,400 men. The Christian party number 800 men; and whenever King George and the people go out against one fortress, we and the few left here are exposed to the rage and murderous intentions of the other two. It has been at such times that the rebels have latterly committed depredations, coming on several occasions very near our premises. We cannot depend upon the natives keeping regular watch and often fear, when lying down at night, lest our dwellings should be burnt, and ourselves murdered, before morning. We have no means at our command of removing our families and property either to Haabai or Vavau or any other place for the time being. In these painful circumstances we cast ourselves under the shield of British protection, earnestly begging you, as the representative of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, whose subjects we are, to assist us in the removal of our families to some place of safety.

(Signed) CHARLES TUCKER,  
STEPHEN RABONE."

After receiving this letter, and promising the protection claimed, Captain Croker, by the request of the allied kings, undertook to act as mediator between them and the rebels, the conditions of peace being drawn up by him, and approved of by the two kings.

CAPTAIN CROKER'S FATAL ATTEMPTS TO FORCE A SETTLEMENT 1840

[Journal. Vol. 1. Stephen Rabone. p.224-225.  
June 1840. Mitchell Library Sydney. MSS. 47.]

Sunday June 21st 1840.

We were informed that the "Man of War" was near the anchorage. It came to anchor at about 7 o'clock and Captain Croker her commander came on shore - he had called at considerable expense of time and provisions to see if he could render any assistance towards establishing a peace among the two parties of this island we view it as an interposition of our Heavenly Father and do hope his visit will be made a blessing - he has spoken with the Kings and they are to present to him their request in writing tomorrow morning. O may this affair be of the Lord. I preached at George's place this afternoon and thus close the labours of this day.

Mon. 22.

"Captain Crocker" has read and received the petitions of the Kings for help and has determined on helping them. But in what way we do not yet know. We hope that God may direct him in all he does.

Tues. 23.

Captain Croker has determined to take a force guns and ammunition to the Bea and so in case of them objecting to his terms of peace - to drive them out of their fortress. We fear they may be fool hardy and suffer for it, but we are at a loss what to say or think. We hope the coming of the vessel is of the Lord - and that the interference of Captain Croker may be owned of God and sanctioned by his Government. Tomorrow is the time fixed upon for the expedition.

Wed. 24.

O What a day ! Captain Croker and his people to the number of 100 or more left here with King George and his people this morning for the Bea. They arrived about 10 o'clock and soon a message was brought here that Captain C was admitted into the fortress and that the heathen were willing to make peace. Scarcely had we given thanks to God in our minds for this joyful news - but we heard the reports of guns - now our joy was turning to sorrow and we supposed what we after know was the case that the heathen had at first professed a willingness to accede to terms of peace but that their object was something very different from that. But what a tale did we soon hear that Captain Croker had determined on attacking the fortress and himself led the way without first battering at it with his large guns. The heathen waited for them and Captain Croker was dead - shot dead by the heathen. O what have we felt this day! Captain Croker dead - 2 of the men likely to die tonight. 17 or 18 more wounded, among these 1 Lieuts and 3rd all discomfitted and Guns etc. left in the hands of the Heathen. O my God! We stand confused and confounded! What shall we say or do? That ever Captain Croker should come here - a worthy, kind good Gentleman - but no more! O his poor wife and 5 or 6 children! Lord, Lord, pardon our sins and deliver us not over into the hands of our enemies. Great is the rejoicing of Satan and his host. A Servant of God and England fallen and many others wounded. Our hearts were broken when today they brought the Dear Captain wrapped up in cocoanut leaves. We hope well concerning his soul - but. . . ."

[39]

LOCAL PREACHERS DISCIPLINED FOR WAR-LIKE ACTIVITIES 1842-1852.

[ Local Preachers Minute Book. 1841 - 1861. Tongatapu Circuit. Archives of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Nuku'alofa. ]

1842 September Quarterly Meeting.

Objections.

N...M... Preached frequently without telling where his text was.

S...M... was reprov'd for acting in an improper way towards a man in the road at night. Also for neglecting the means of Grace. I hope he will reform.

M...M... was reprov'd for being out with S...M... in a warlike attitude.

1848 March Quarterly Meeting.

Suspended

M...M... for acting heathenish at the burial of his child - he had 140 roots of Kava prepared with about 30 umus.

T...K... implicated in war -- vete -- loi --etc.

J...N... went armed with Fiji weapons to Fua'amotu.

.....

N.B. The Local Preachers were cautioned against the war Spirit and entreated to act as peacemakers in every instance and not to join with those who wish to promote discord and confusion.

1852, March Quarterly Meeting.

1. What Preachers are present?

Ans. W.Webb, T.West, G.Daniel, R. Amos -- the King and upwards of 140

Local Preachers.

2. Are there any objections to any whose names are on the Plan?

Ans. A...M... was suspended from his work for one Quarter in consequence of his improper behaviour in reference to a young woman his niece -- sleeping on the same mat.

T...S... was suspended for three months for acting improperly in reference to the war -- going wandering with other men towards Houma on the Sabbath.

A...M... dropped for tempting a female to sin.

A THREATENING SITUATION 1849

[Thomas West, Ten years in South Central Polynesia etc etc. London 1865. pp.210-211.  
An extract from his journal of the 20th March 1849]

March 20th, 1849. - A fleet of canoes arrived a few days ago, escorting King George hither. We hear by the natives that there is considerable danger of war breaking out in Tongatabu, between the two heathen fortresses of Houma and Bea. I do not understand the precise origin of the quarrel; but it appears to be a mere struggle for ascendancy between Maafu and Vaea, the ruling chiefs of those two towns and fortresses. Haapai is at peace, and so is Vavau; but how long this may continue I do not know. But for the presence of Missionaries, and the salutary influence of religion, I am afraid there would soon be sad disturbances even here. The present formal, and formidable, visit of the king, is connected with another reported plot for his assassination, and for the purpose also of instituting an inquiry into certain seditious speeches, which some of the chiefs are reported to have made among the people, during the last few months. As on the former occasion, so now, all the accused parties have denied the truth of the reports, and have publicly signified their continued allegiance to the king's person and government. The population at large rejoice, beyond doubt, under the wise, kind, politic, and Christian rule of King George. This is also true of the great majority of the chiefs; but there are a few designing men who, to serve their own ambitious purposes, would gladly advance the claims of the children of the late Ulukalala. This they dare not do openly. They well know that the nomination by Zephaniah Ulukalala of King George, as his successor, even to the exclusion of his own son; and the subsequent ratification of this nomination by the chiefs of the land, were legitimate acts; and in perfect accordance with Tonguese law and custom. Nor must it be forgotten, that these events only restored the kingdom to the lawful representative of those from whose hands it had been wrested, by rebellion, in former years. It is now hoped, that the active measures adopted by the king, and the wisdom which marks all his movements, will put a final stop to these fruitless machinations of his enemies."

In the face of all these disturbing and evil influences the cause of religion and civilization continued steadily to advance in Vavau; and the very occurrences we have named, only tended to elicit, and to display more clearly, the real power which Christianity was attaining in the restraint and guidance of the native population.

THE WAR REPORTED TO THE MISSIONARY COMMITTEE 1851

[Friendly Islands District Minute Book, Tonga Circuit Report.  
1851-52. Archives of the Free Wesleyan Church, Nuku'alofa.]

"There is however another topic and one upon which we enter with deep feelings of sorrow. A dark cloud at present hangs over us; our work is in a fearful state of confusion, the land has again become the scene of war and bloodshed. For sometime past the heathens have been assuming a hostile appearance and refusing submission to the just laws of their Christian King, they have now proceeded to open acts of rebellion and have thus involved the land in war. For further information upon this matter we refer to the account of the war accompanying the minutes."

[42]

THE OFFICIAL WESLEYAN ACCOUNT OF THE WAR. 1852

[Friendly Islands District Minute Book. A special report appended to the Minutes for 1851-52, dated 6/4/1852, Signed Peter Turner, Chairman.]

"The War in Tonga"

"The Brethren now assembled in Annual District Meeting beg to lay before the General Committee the following statement respecting the war at present in progress in the island of Tonga. Full particulars will be given in the letters and journals of the brethren on the spot but we deem it right to lay before you in this form our united deliberations upon this important subject.

The present war is entirely of a political character although it involves in it a collision of our Christian Societies with the heathen and Roman Catholic portion of the population. For several years past the heathen population at the fortresses of Bea and Houma have been assuming an hostile attitude and have as far as possible opposed and thwarted the Authority and government of the King whilst at the same time they have failed repeatedly to acknowledge by word of mouth his right to the supreme control and Sovereignty. Since however the month of June 1851 when the King removed from Haabai to reside permanently at Tonga the rebellion of the heathen chiefs has assumed a more open and determined aspect, until, having accomplished the completion of their respective fortresses they threw off all further restraint and declared their desire for war. Meantime the King exercised the utmost Christian forbearance - sent message after message at different times to solemnly declare his wish for peace and his fixed determination to prevent war and that any party whether Christian or heathen violating his orders in that respect should be punished. All his messages were treated with contempt,

and for self-defence all the loyal portion of the people were called in from all the out villages and towns and concentrated at the respective fortresses of Nuku'alofa, Mua, and Hihifo with the smaller forts of Maofanga, Nukunuku, Folaha and Teekiu. The heathen having declared their determination for war and every overture for peace having been spurned no alternative was left for King George but to take measures to repress the rebellion and maintain his lawful Authority. Such being the position of affairs a skirmish soon took place and many have now fallen on both sides.

With regard to the Roman Catholic part of the people and their share in the rebellion we beg to make the following statement - In the fortress of Bea there are a number of Romanists and two Roman Catholic priests and a few foreigners. Before the war commenced the King wrote to the priests stating distinctly that the war was not a war of religious party - that he had no desire to persecute nor intimidate their religion, but that as he was determined to subdue rebellion, they, the Romish Priests and foreigners must prepare to leave the fort and reside at some place of safety until the conclusion of the war. A correspondence ensued between the priests and the King which ended in their refusal to leave the fort, and this is the precise position of all parties at the present moment.

The Roman Catholics and heathen in Bea and Houma have joined their forces against the King and the Priests refuse the offers made of a safe conduct from the King to any part of the Island where they might wish to reside until the war be terminated.

We as in duty bound have endeavoured in every way to retard and prevent the war but at the same time while we utterly disclaim any desire for war we are unanimous in our opinion that the King has made every concession consistent with his position as a true Christian man and lawful Sovereign."

[43]

CONDUCT OF KING GEORGE DURING THE WAR 1852.

(i) [ Journal of Peter Turner. Mitchell Library, Sydney. B.310.]

21st April 1852.

There is something worthy in the conduct of the king. Many of the chiefs and the people are wishful to take the two fortresses by storm and so put an end to the war, but he seems only wishful to starve them into surrender. For as he says if I give permission to do so -- many would be killed on both sides -- and neither I nor any other could prevent the people from killing



all they came in contact when thus excited. Most of those who had been cut off belonging to the lotu party have been guilty of some imprudence by the neglect of some orders.

26th August 1852.

Sir Everard Home ( "Calliote" ) honoured us with a visit and he looks quite well and has not aged since the last interview we had with him. He expresses himself as highly pleased with all he saw at Tonga and eulagizes very highly the conduct of the King in the late war and declares " he has never met with his equal among the natives of these seas". To these we carefully subscribe with all our hearts.

[44]

THE WAR ENDS 1853.

[ Friendly Islands District Minute Book, Tonga Circuit Report 1853 ]

The past has been a year of severe trial. At its commencement Tonga had become a scene of war and bloodshed; our villages had all been abandoned, and our people collected in a few places temporarily fortified for the occasion. Much confusion prevailed throughout the land. With deep sorrow we have seen many unstable souls carried away by the demoralizing influence of war., they have yielded to temptation and fallen into the snare of the devil: while on the other hand we have met with abundant encouragement in witnessing the Christian spirit manifested by the great majority of our church members during the war ..... We recognize with gratitude the Hand Divine in bringing to a happy termination the late painful affairs in Tonga. We have no longer to be escorted by an armed force to the scene of our labours . The dark cloud has dispersed. The footsteps of divine providence are not now in the thick darkness in reference to this island ..... Our villages have become re-peopled and the deserted house of God is again the place of joy and singing.

New villages have also sprung up, and in every place a house is dedicated to the worship of the Lord of Hosts. Heathenism has received its death blow. All the people from the large fortresses of Houma, Vaini, Folaha have abandoned their devilish superstitions, and have become, at least nominally, worshippers of the one living and true God.

The inhabitants likewise of Bea - who for the most part have embraced popery, as well as the remnant who were still heathens- have generally joined our congregations .... Our work is most encouraging throughout the island.

- (ii) [Thomas West. Ten years in South-central Polynesia: being reminiscences of a Personal Mission to the Friendly Islands and their Dependencies. London 1865.; pp.337-340.]

The priest who went away during the war to seek French aid, returned in a small trading vessel from Samoa; and when he found the war ended, declared that he would have ample reparation in due time. He subsequently departed for Tahiti, where he lodged certain charges and claims, against the Tonguese, before the French Governor.

Accordingly, on the 12th of November, 1852, a French ship of war, "La Moselle," commanded by Captain Belland, anchored off Nukualofa. The same priest who had gone to Tahiti was on board. We were told, by one of the respectable officers of the ship that this priest had been careful, during the voyage, to impress the commander with the conviction that stubborn resistance might be expected from the Tonguese. On approaching the land, he also drew the attention of the officers to a number of people, scattered along the reef skirting the shore, assuring them that he had no doubt these were armed men waiting to resist any attempt at landing. This led the captain to beat the men to quarters, and to shoot all his guns. When, however, they had approached sufficiently near, they discovered that the people lining the reef were only some old women quietly seeking for shell-fish! The captain was both angry and mortified that he should have lent himself to such idle tales; and the priest, poor man, hardly knew where to hide himself from the bantering of the midshipmen and others, who, but for his clerical garb, would have criticized his conduct rather more freely than he would have relished.

On Tuesday, the 16th, a formal investigation of all the circumstances attending the origin, conduct, and close of the war took place. Captain Belland had been specially commissioned by the Governor of Tahiti to conduct the inquiry, and to take such steps as he might deem proper in reference to the claims advanced by the French priests for pecuniary damages, &c. Mr Adams, not having been in Tonga when the war began, desired me to be present on behalf of the Missionaries, and by the request of the king. The whole conference occupied nearly five hours. Every particular in relation to the war was rigidly examined, especially in regard to the course the king had pursued toward the French priests. On every point Captain Belland seemed satisfied. The king was armed with abundant documentary evidence, and proved himself a capital diplomatist. A noted man in the South Seas, called Charlie France, interpreted. He did his duty fairly, upon the whole; but

in two or three instances an attempt was made to misconstrue the words both of Captain Belland and those of the king. Of course I took exception to his interpretations, when a frown and caution from the commandant, who seemed to know his man, and who was determined not to be trifled with, had a salutary effect. At the conclusion of the inquiry, Captain Belland desired me to say to the king that he was perfectly satisfied with his entire conduct. "Tell him," said he, "that I have seen and conversed with many chiefs, in the South Sea Islands, but I have never met his equal. The French have acknowledged his authority by directing me to him as supreme ruler in Tonga. He must, however, employ his authority in protecting all foreigners from insult, and must allow his subjects to choose what religion they please; but all must submit to the law of the land. Tell him also that, should any Frenchman be guilty, in future, of such intermeddling with his government as has been proved orally in this case, he has only to procure proper documentary evidence of the fact, and the French Government will not fail promptly to punish the offender, by his removal from the country, or otherwise, whether he be a priest or merely a layman." As an evidence that Captain Belland was in earnest, and of the estimate he had formed of the conduct of the priests, he refused to permit M. Calignon to return to Bea, or even to reside on any part of Tongatabu. Accordingly, he carried this priest back with him to Tahiti. So fully convinced was the Commissioner of the blamelessness of King George that, although he held in his possession a documentary claim for heavy pecuniary compensation, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Missionaries, for damages to their property, he never submitted this claim to the king, nor did he ask for a single farthing on their behalf.