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The mythology of the Efakese

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THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE EFATESE. *or Mai*

By Rev. Dr. MACDONALD, Efate, New Hebrides.

(Read before the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science,
Friday, January 7, 1898.)

IN a paper read before the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, at Hobart, 8th January, 1892, on "Efate, New Hebrides," I made a few concluding remarks on "Mythology," which I purpose now to expand. It will be of interest to Polynesian scholars to compare the Efatese mythology with that of other parts of Oceania, with a view to the solution of problems familiar to all such scholars. My object in this paper is simply to set forth what the mythology of the Efatese really is, and that without professing to deal exhaustively with the subject.

I. MAUI-TIKITIKI AND TAMAKAIA.

The Efatese say that these were the first men, the former being the grandfather (*tobuna*), the latter his grandchild (*sulina*). There seems to be a general notion that the story about them is best known among the Efatese of the islets to the north of Efate, called the Shipherd group, and a rock is shown to this day on one of these, Mai or Three Hills, to which the rope was attached by which they drew up the islands from the sea, and which bears the marks of the rope and of their feet. However, another version of the story has it that the rock to which that rope was attached is not on Mai, but on the top of a certain hill on the north side of Efate. Not only is the site of the rock various, but the story as told by different persons varies in particulars. Generally, however, it is to the effect that Maui-tikitiki and Tamakaia disputed as to which of them was the greater, and that Tamakaia proved his superiority. I shall, therefore, give the story, not as told to me by any individual, but as gathered from several separate accounts. It may be observed by way of preliminary that these names Maui-tikitiki and Tamakaia were obtained from the Efatese by the first missionaries who visited the island. Thus Mr. Gill, in his "Gems from the Coral Islands," says:—"It was found that these ignorant and degraded people needed not a Divine revelation to teach them the existence of a God. In common with all the Polynesian tribes yet visited they believe in the existence and dominion of a God, which they call Maui-tikitiki." And my friend, the late Mr. Murray, in his "Missions in Western

Polynesia," says, "They worship two gods whom they call Maui-tikitiki and Tamakaia, and to whom they trace the origin of all things." If Maui-tikitiki and Tamakaia are to be called "gods," they are no otherwise gods than other *Natamate* (literally, spirits of the dead), and it is quite erroneous to regard Maui-tikitiki as the chief god, or object of worship of the Efatese. I have only found one man who knew anything about Maui-tikitiki being worshipped; he said that Maui-tikitiki's grave is on Mai, and that he had heard of fowls being sacrificed at his grave. The *Natamate* were the deities of the Efatese, and their religion a form of ancestor-worship. A general name "Supu" ("the ancients or the ancient, the ancestors or ancestor"), may be used either to denote ancestors or ancients, considered as men in this world (that is before they died), or as *natamate* dwelling in Hades (after they died). And hence such mythological persons as Maui-tikitiki are sometimes either individually or collectively spoken of under this name. As this word occurs in some of the following stories, what has just been said may suffice as to its meaning. We now come to the story itself:—

Efate (or Mai, as the case may be) was at the beginning the only land in existence, and Maui-tikitiki, his wife, and grandson, were the only human beings in existence. Maui-tikitiki used to give Tamakaia food, but concealed from him where he got it. He determined to watch carefully and find out for himself. At last he discovered that Maui-tikitiki had in a carefully enclosed place, shut in above as well as around, one banana plant and one yam plant. There were no other plants in existence, and, of course, no weeds. When the banana bunch was plucked off this plant, another bunch always replaced it, and so with the yam. A yam taken away was immediately replaced by another. Maui-tikitiki and Tamakaia *bilulu ki nafunua*—that is, strove for mastery in the world. Tamakaia said *Namanau ba wora*, "grass (or vegetation), spring up," and it did so. When Maui-tikitiki saw these plants growing where none had been before, he began to pluck them up, but as he went on clearing they immediately sprang up behind him again. Tamakaia charged him with being lazy, and said he did not want on this account to have any plants in the land except the one banana, and the one yam. Maui-tikitiki replied, "You will be the master of the world, if you can cover the face of the earth with vegetation (*nafurafura*)." Tamakaia did so. There was then a contest between them as to which of them should be the master of birds and fishes. Tamakaia called a bird, and in response to his call it came to his hand. Maui-tikitiki called it in vain. Tamakaia in like manner called to the fishes in the sea, and they came to his hand. Maui-tikitiki tried this also in vain. The next point of contest was as to the drawing up of the land out of the sea. Tamakaia made a

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tremendous swing of a long rope fixed to the sky. He sat in this swing, and Maui-tikitiki swung him so that he went far out of sight; then from the swing he cast his hook, and, as the swing swept backwards, hauled up a land from the sea. Maui-tikitiki then took his place in the swing, and in like manner cast his hook, but in vain. Tamakaia hauled up all lands when hauling up *Natonga* (distant or foreign lands, as Australia, England, &c.) his hook broke. It should have been noted that just as Maui-tikitiki had concealed his garden from Tamakaia, so the wife of Maui-tikitiki, in conjunction with her husband, had concealed the sea from him at first. It was shut in, in an enclosure, and he only discovered it by watching her when she went to bathe in it. He opened the door of the enclosure, and the sea, let loose, rushed out and spread all over the world as we now see it.

In another version of this story, of which the above contains the essential points, no mention is made of the swing. Tamakaia went out to sea, and, looking down, saw the various lands beneath the waters. Coming back to Maui-tikitiki he said, "Do you see anything by which you can show your superiority over me?" He replied, "No; and if you do, produce it, and you will be the greater."

"Cast your hook," said Tamakaia, "and get me a fish." He caught a turtle.

"Cook it," said Tamakaia, "that I may eat." He then drew up Tongoa from the sea, and founded it upon the bones of the turtle.

This process was repeated for every land. When Epi was drawn up it touched heaven. Tamakaia knocked it down, hence the great length of that island.

"Cast your hook," said Tamakaia, "and get me a fish." Maui-tikitiki did so, and got a whale.

"Cook it," said Tamakaia, "that I may eat." He then drew up Efate from the sea depths, and founded it upon the bones of the whale.

"Cast your hook," said Tamakaia, "and get me a fish." Maui-tikitiki did so, and got a porpoise and a dugong. Their bones were made by Tamakaia the foundation of Sydney (that is, of Australia).

At this point the grey-haired heathen (it is nearly twenty years ago) who was gravely narrating the story was interrupted by a travelled native standing by, who said, "No Sydney; England."

In drawing up Sydney and England (*Natonga*), however, so heavy was it with *bulumakau* (cattle), &c., that Tamakaia's rope broke, and, but for that accident, there would now be overland communication between Australia and the New Hebrides.

"Tamakaia then got the skin of a banana, and made a boat of it, determined to go and see England," continued the old man.

"He went to England, and never returned. He is known there as Jehovah. His banana-skin vessel became the white man's ships and boats. To this day there remain on two rocks on Mai two marks showing the truth of all this—the mark of Tamakaia's rope on the rock he used as a block, and the mark of his firmly-planted feet, where he stood when engaged in drawing all lands into visible existence. Maui-tikitiki died, and was buried on Mai."

The following is given in Efate as the song of Supe (Tamakaia) which he sang when pulling up the land from the sea :—

Maui-tikitiki ko maurimai
 Ku matuatua,
 Kinau mitau ki tonga,
 Tonga mau :
 Serinmatau, serinmatau,
 Serinmatau è.

tupe o tu

This song is sung by the people of Efate now in hauling up a heavy canoe, in dragging heavy logs, or anything heavy.

In Efate, Maui-tikitiki is said to have drawn up the lands from the sea, and little seems to be known about Tamakaia.

II. LEI MAUI-TIKITIKI.

In the above story the wife of Maui-tikitiki is mentioned. *Lei* that is, female, Maui-tikitiki, is said by the Efatese to dwell in the sky (heaven); more particularly what we call "the man in the moon" is said to be *Lei Maui-tikitiki me atenina*, "Lei Maui-tikitiki and her grandchild."

On Efate she is regarded as having been present when the lands were drawn up from the sea. She saw the land in a fluctuating condition, just after it arose from the waters, and dashed the earthenware water pots, which she was carrying, violently upon it, with such a shock as to make it fixed and stable. But the pots were shivered into fragments, and hence the fragments of pottery found strewn all over Efate are called *nabura mai ki Lei Maui-tikitiki*, the shells of the water-pots of Lei Maui tikitiki.

The art of making earthenware pots, which is still preserved in Santo, had been lost by the Efatese before the advent of Europeans. But these fragments of pottery are sometimes called *nabura ki Supe*, the shells of the water-pots of *Supe*, where *Supe* may denote either Lei Maui-tikitiki or the ancients, or ancestors. Efatese axes used to be made out of shells and called *karau*. Now that European axes have come upon the scene, these, discarded, are found in the bush, near villages, and are called *karau ki Supe*, the axes of the ancients.

III. THE ADVENT OF LIGHT.

This story is told by a Mai man. There is a place on Mai called Lim. Formerly there was no light, and a man living here was annoyed at this, and at the consequent dampness and muddiness that prevailed. He took a club called *ta*, or *maltalia*, and smote at the sky, or floor of heaven. Five times he swung his club, and five times missed. The sixth time his blow was effective, splitting open the sky and letting in the Sun and Light.

IV. THE SEPARATION OF THE SKY FROM THE EARTH.

In the primeval times, the sky was close to the earth. A woman was raking the stones in her oven with a long pole. The top of the pole came against the sky, interrupting her work. Angry, she smote the sky with the pole, bidding it, with a loud voice, "Ascend!" The sky immediately began to ascend, and, notwithstanding that she entreated it to stop, it kept on ascending till it reached the position which it now occupies.

V. THE ADVENT OF NIGHT.

A chief of Meli had two children who were always crying, and as the sun was always shining in that primeval time, he could get no rest because they never went to sleep. He therefore set out on a journey in quest of Darkness and Night. He went round the island by way of Havannah Harbour, calling at the various villages. When he called at a village, the people—(this part of the narrative is sung)—asked him where he came from? He replied, "I come from the lower side of the island." "What have you come in search of?" "I have come in search of Night and Darkness." He went on and on till he came near to the most eastern point of the island, or south-eastern. Here the people directed him to a jutting promontory, called Baulelo, as to where he should obtain the object of his search. Provided with a bamboo vessel, he lay in wait on this promontory, and having seized Night-Darkness and enclosed it securely in his bamboo, started triumphantly on his return journey. Again he called at the various villages, and in return for the hospitality accorded him, and at the end of the meal, sang a song of complete satisfaction, took out from his bamboo a portion of the Night-Darkness and covered the land with it. Then the *supe*, or ancestral chief, wound up by falling into a sweet sleep.

VI. MAN, THE LORD OF CREATION.

In the beginning, it was still undecided whether man or some other should be superior in the world. They tied up man as if

he were a pig, and let the pig go as if it were a man. The pig went roaming about all day, and, caring only for itself, returned at night with its stomach well filled. It took no thought for the man, and cared not that he was hungry. *Man tangisi nerei* pitied man, seeing him in this evil case, and sundered the cords by which he was bound. He, seeing how inhumanly selfish and unfit to have authority over others the pig was, ordained that man should be man having the lordship, and that pig should be put in subjection, as we now see it.

VII. THE ADVENT OF DEATH.

At the first, it was not settled whether men should die (*mate*), or renewing their youth perpetually be immortal (*mulu*). Some said, "Let us die"; others said, "Let us be immortal (*mulu*)."
Man tangisi nerei wished this latter to prevail; but *Pilake* burst in upon them while the deliberation was going on, and exclaimed, "You are deliberating about what? (the matter is practically settled). I have just buried my father and my mother. Beget offspring instead of them" (or to take their places). *Man tangisi nerei* wept, bewailing us (*tangisi-ngita*), so that his eyes are red to this day. Thus was established the existing order of things in which are set Death and Birth, the one over against the other, and in which as one generation goeth another cometh.

There are two little birds in Efate called respectively *Pilake* and *Man tangisi nerei*. The word *Pilake* signifies to be in mortal terror. *Pilake* is a dingy-looking bird, afraid of man, and keeping at a distance from him. *Man tangisi nerei* denotes, literally, "bird bewailing man"—that is, loving, pitying, and weeping over, or bewailing them involved in misery and death. *Man tangisi nerei* is a bird something like robin red-breast, venturing near the dwellings of men. It has beautiful bright red marks under its eyes; these are the marks said to have been caused by "weeping for men."

With respect to the word *mulu* in the above story it may be remarked that the Efatese explain its meaning in this connection in the following way:—The serpent, they say, casts its skin—that is, it *mulus*. By casting its skin it, so to speak, renews its youth. The old worn-out withered husk is slipped off and cast away, and the animal comes forth from it as if new-born, at once delivered from the effects of the wear and tear of time, and endowed afresh with youthful beauty, vigour, and life. If at the dawn of the world *Man tangisi nerei* had prevailed, and the decision of the fates had been that men should *mulu*, they should have never died.

The first man who buried the first dead in the beginning of the world is called *Maka Tafaki*. This, however, throws little light on the matter, as *tafaki* is from *afaki*, to bury.

The first funeral of the dead

VIII. HADES.

A chief of Bau was making an *intamate* (heathen feast), and searched for *Nabuma Nakabu* to be his *aure* (singer, or bard) at it. They told him that *Nabuma Nakabu* had gone to *Tukituki*, the west point of *Efate*, where is the entrance to *Hades*. He went to *Tukituki* and was told that *Nabuma Nakabu* had died, and been buried, and gone to *Bokas*. He went down to *Bokas* (the first stage of the under-world), and was told that *Nabuma Nakabu* had died, and been buried there, and gone to *Magapopo* (next lower stage of *Hades*). He went down to *Magapopo*, and was told that *Nabuma Nakabu* had died, and been buried there; and gone to *Magafafera*. He went down to *Magafafera* and was told that *Nabuma Nakabu* had died, and been buried there, and had gone to *Maganaponapo*. He went down to *Maganaponapo* and was told that *Nabuma Nakabu* had died, and been buried there, and had gone to *Matika* (the lowest stage of the under-world). He went down to *Matika* and inquired for *Nabuma Nakabu*, and they said to him, "Behold, there are his bones at the foot of a *nalas*" (a dark-leaved plant). He went and gathered his bones into a basket, and, reascending into the world carried them to *Bau* to the *Malel* (the *nupea*, or dancing and singing ground of the *intamate*). The drums were beaten, and as the (to *Efatese* ears) inspiriting, measured sounds thundered forth, the bones of *Nabuma Nakabu*, heaped together in the basket, burst forth into singing!

According to the *Efatese* every man dies six times, each time passing down to a lower stage, till he reaches *Matika*, and finally disappears.

IX. KARISIBUM AND MAKA TAFAKI.

The people of the sky perceiving that the tide was out and the reef bare, as it is at low water, came down and took off their wings (literally "thin sails"—*inlailaita*), which were white, and proceeded to fish with torches along the shore. *Sosoan* (a bird whose song begins at dawn) began to sing (like one at "cock-crow"), when they immediately came together, and, having laid down the fish they had taken, put on their wings. Then all joined in singing, and the wind rising blew them for a time backwards and forwards, till ascending they went on up into the sky.

This they often repeated. One night they came down and laid aside their wings, as usual, in order that they might fish along the shore. A man of the country, who had been watching them, saw where they had laid their wings, and when they were out of sight took the wings of one and hid them in a banana stem. In the morning, at the earliest dawn, they came together, laid down

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the fish they had taken, and began to put on their wings preparatory to their return ascent. All did this but one whose wings could not be found after the most anxious search, and who was therefore left behind. She proved to be a woman, and the man who had stolen and hidden her wings came and took her for his wife. They lived peaceably together and had two sons. The man said to his wife "Let us give them names." The woman said "No, let them call each other what they please." One day the two youths were playing with bows and arrows, the one inside, the other outside the house, when the one called to the other "Maka Tafaki," who responded to his brother, addressing him as "Karisi Bum." Thus they received their names.

By-and-by trouble arose in the hitherto peaceful household. The man ill-treated his wife, and said to her, "You are a wicked woman, cause of trouble and sorrow; go back to your own country." This made her heart sore, and she sighed for the lost wings, that she might fly away from all this turmoil and be at rest. One day she and her two sons were out. By accident the youths discovered a white thing in a banana stem. It was the thing their father had hidden there. Their mother was overjoyed. Determined to go, she first gave to her sons some information about her kindred, expecting that they would eventually see them. Then, putting on her wings, she sang the appropriate song, swinging backwards and forwards a few times while doing so, and went swiftly into heaven. They went home and told their father.

The two brothers grew up and became exceedingly clever and successful men. They excelled in everything, and became richer than any of the people of the land. They were therefore envied. They were told that they did not belong to that country at all, and bidden go in search of their mother's country. Their riches were the principal cause of this ill-will. The aborigines, no doubt, expected to possess these by driving them away. These brothers, however, were not to be trifled with. They did things that made them both renowned and feared. For example, on one occasion they "beat the winds" with a club. For this purpose they climbed a high *nieru* tree (casuarina), and lay in wait for the winds. First came *Suepate* ('*sua*,' to come down from), the trade wind, at which they aimed a terrible blow but missed. Then came *Tokelan*, the east wind, which they also missed. So with some others. Finally came *Mastan*, the south-west wind. This was their last chance, and they determined to make the most of it. On came the towering wind in all its pride; down came the club on its forehead with thundering crash, and it fell with a shriek, lifeless and prone. And this is the reason that, while all the other winds blow rude and strong, the south-west wind blows gently, or at any rate, soon dies away.

The brothers, continually taunted with being adventurers, longed to get way to their mother's country. One day they were shooting birds with arrows. An arrow went up into heaven and stuck fast in the roots of a *namanga* (banyan) tree. Another arrow sent after it stuck in the end of its shaft, and so on and so on, until the chain of arrows reached from heaven down to the brothers' foreheads. They took hold of the nearest and pulled. It was firm. They climbed up to heaven. On getting up and climbing in over the roots of the banyan tree, they saw an old blind woman cooking six yams. They immediately thought, "Perhaps this is our grandmother of whom our mother used to tell us." Being blind she counted the six yams by feeling them with her hands. They went forward without making any noise, and took one away. She again went over the yams, counting them, and could make out only five. "Perhaps," thought she, "my grandsons, of whom my daughter told me, have come and taken the sixth." Remembering their names as they had been told to her, she called out, "Maka Tafaki! Karisi Bum!" They immediately replied, "It's we." Thus ended their troubles.

According to another version of this Efatese story, the mother of Maka Tafaki, and Karisi Bum, was called Taurere. Before leaving her home in the world on account of the ill-treatment to which she was subjected by her husband, she comforted her two sons, and told them not to cry but to watch for a long rope that should be let down from heaven till it reached the foot of a banyan tree. They kept on watching, till one day the rope appeared as their mother had said. One of them first climbed up far out of sight into heaven, and shook the rope as a signal to his brother below of his safe arrival. The other then climbed up also. They saw their old blind grandmother and addressed her as *Lata*! She, on her part, had been forewarned by her daughter of their coming, and being requested to entertain them kindly, giving them sugar-cane, flesh, and yams to eat. After eating they said to her, "The skin of this sugar-cane is sharp for cutting. We will cut open your eyes with it that you may see. This they did. She said, "Oh children, you have made me all right; I am well." When finally they resolved to go down again to the earth they made a big *kawa* (woven basket), and put into it all things we now see in the earth, as fowls, pigs, male and female, and all the different kinds of food, one by one. They let down this loaded *kawa* from heaven by means of a long rope. At the end of this rope it kept swinging in the air over every land (or all lands), but the mountains at none of them were high enough (so that it might touch them). They hauled it up, and finally lowered it down at Utanilangi, in a valley called Papalaba, between two high mountains, so that the mountains should overhang the *kawa* and prevent it from swinging off into space. At

Papalaba the brothers took all the things out of the *kawa*. On this account (that is, because Maka Tafaki landed here), *Nakainanga bisi Maka*, the tribe that begets children entitled to the prefix name *Maka* (or *Mako*), dwell at Utanilangi.

X. LAUTUMETA. *Ran*

Lautaumeta was making an *intamate* in heaven. There were no animals (as pigs) for sacrifices, but only food (yams). All the different kinds of yams were at that time in heaven. There was only one kind in the earth then called *nakabu*. (But there are now twenty-seven different kinds of yams.) Lautaumeta was looking out for an *aure* to sing at his *intamate*, and heard that there was one on the earth called Nabuma Nakabu. This latter was asked to act as *aure*, and having consented went up to heaven to the *malel* of Lautaumeta. (It should be understood that Lautaumeta, and Nabuma Nakabu are both yams.) Maka Tafaki, and Karisi Bum said, "Let us beat for them the *napeas*" (drums.) They did so, and Nabuma Nakabu sang. Then all the different *nakainanga nani* (tribes, or kinds of yams) came and danced in the *malel*, till they stumbled and fell broken to pieces. Maka Tafaki and Karisi Bum gathered all the broken yams into a basket, and, when the song was ended, carried them down to the earth.

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