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Author(s): Titus Munson Coan

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HAWAIIAN ETHNOGRAPHY.

BY

TITUS MUNSON COAN.

The Hawaiians belong to a race that is remarkable for its unity in spite of a very wide dispersion. It is sometimes called the Maori race, but is best distinguished from other races of Oceanica, as the Micronesians, the Malaysians, the Papuans, and various Malay islanders, as the brown Polynesian. Its region is the central and eastward Pacific Ocean, whither the Maoris migrated, in all probability, from the Asiatic continent through Malaysia, making their first habitat the Samoan Islands; whence they spread as far as Hawaii in the north, and as far east as Easter Island in the southern Pacific, while their southward range extends to New Zealand. This ocean triangle of some 5,000 miles to a side includes about 15 groups or detached islands inhabited by the brown Polynesians: Hawaii, the Marquesas, Tahiti, Paumotu, Tonga, Rotuma, Samoa, New Zealand, the eastern Fijis, Tarawa, Manega, Tokelau, Phoenix and Lagoon Islands, and Easter Island.

Throughout this vast oceanic habitat, the "South Seas" in popular phrase, though it includes the northern group, Hawaii, the brown Polynesian is one. Both in physical type, in language, traditions, arts, usages, customs, he is everywhere substantially the same—or was before the obliterating hand of European civilization swept over the finely graven plate of Nature's etching. In briefly describing the Hawaiians as they were I shall try to restore the outlines of a portrait of which the leading features are common to all the groups. And it must be remembered that the modern Polynesian—the Polynesian since his discovery by white traders and voyagers—is a much vitiated type. The primitive peoples, before their debasing contact with white voyagers and traders, were greatly superior beings to those which traders and voyagers have described—a comparatively heroic race; and their vices, of which we hear so much, are in large part vices of modern introduction.

PHYSIQUE.—The Hawaiian men were tall and powerful, having an average stature of 5 feet 10 inches—the highest average, after the Patagonian Tehuelches, of any race that has been measured; and

their muscular strength also ranks among the highest records. The chiefs attained a still greater average of bulk and stature, being splendid giants often. The women were rather small, but exceedingly well formed. They had oval faces, expanded foreheads, dark brown or black hair, waving or curly, but never frizzled like the negro's, a somewhat flattened nose, full nostrils, large expressive eyes, a large mouth, and splendid teeth, with a pearly whiteness like the teeth of young dogs; while the sweetness and sensibility of their expression often atoned for the flattened features. Their personal comeliness, however, seldom lasted beyond youth, except in the case of the chiefs, who were kept in splendid condition by passive exercise,—the lomilomi, or Hawaiian shampooing; but their better feeding led often to enormous fatness—400 pounds being a not uncommon weight.

The Polynesian complexion is a soft brown, with a tinge of red or yellow in it. The skull has a minimum index of 75, placing it on the confines of the white type; it is never prognathous. Broca found among the Hawaiians the highest orbital index that he had ever observed.

MENTAL AND MORAL TRAITS.—The ancient Hawaiian was an amiable, pleasure-loving, and yet very intelligent and daring race, producing bold navigators and valiant warriors. During centuries of undisturbed residence in their group they had become perfectly fitted to their environment, and but for the cruel oppressions of their priests and their kings they would have been an ideally happy people. The priests harried them by their *tabus*, the kings by incessant wars; yet they reached a social concordance which we should look for in vain among more highly civilized communities, for the degrading struggle for the mere means of livelihood which is almost universal in populous countries was unknown throughout Polynesia. Why was it unknown? The studied restriction of the population, whether by limiting the number of births or by infanticide, kept the number of the people well within the limits of the food supply; and these practices, by exempting the survivors from the struggle for life, were, in my opinion, the secret of their material comfort and consequent mental and social development. In France the limitation of families to an average of a little over two children to a family has led to similar results—a great general diffusion of comfort and an amenity of manners that is unknown in more crowded communities. The natural indolence of the Hawaiians was thus not hurtful to them; it gave them leisure for games, poetry, and hospitality. It required

but a few days' labor to supply them with taro, their food-staple, for a year; their skill in fishing, and the abundant wild fruits of the mountains supplied whatever more they desired, and they had the opportunity of developing a kindly culture to which it would be hard to find a parallel elsewhere, whether among primitive or civilized peoples.

They were a curious, eager, excitable people; great talkers, full of fire and gesticulation, yet docile and teachable to the last degree. They had no power of prevision; their intellectual hospitality indeed has only hastened their decay, for they accepted the good and the bad together from foreigners, and allowed themselves to be imposed on by all the destructive arts of tradesmen and adventurers. What with imported diseases and the infertility resulting from changed conditions, which is the main factor in their decrease, there are now, in Hawaii, but 33,000 left of a population estimated by Cook at 200,000.

LANGUAGE.—The language is a dialect of that which is spoken throughout the whole domain of the brown Polynesian. This wide diffusion of the same speech is very striking. Anywhere else in the world the mere passing of a boundary line shall bring you into the Babel of alien speech; but I have sailed 3,000 miles due south from Hawaii, and on stepping ashore at Aitutaki found no difficulty in talking with the natives in the Hawaiian tongue; and 2,500 miles farther the same tongue is spoken in Southern New Zealand.

Of this common language, the first noticeable feature is the great predominance of vowel sounds. In spoken Italian the ratio of vowel to consonantal sounds may be estimated about as two to three; in Hawaiian, as three to two, or somewhat more than twice as great. A word may be composed of three successive vowels, and in some of the Polynesian dialects even of four; and it is possible to construct sentences of some length in which not a single consonantal sound shall occur, as, for instance, this in Hawaiian: *E i ai oe ia ia e oo ia*—"Speak to him now that he may learn." The American missionaries reduced the language to writing, employing an alphabet of but 12 letters—a, e, i, o, u, h, k, l, m, n, p, w. The number of actual sounds in the language has never been studied, but it is probably at least twenty, as against about twice as many in English. Every syllable must end with a vowel, a restriction which, with that of the fewer sounds in the language, makes English pronunciation a hard thing for the Hawaiian; thus *Ka-mi-ka* is the nearest approach he can make to "Smith." The accent generally falls on the penult,

but a certain number of words are distinguished from others only by the place of the accent, as *māno*, an immense number; *manó*, a shark. Nouns have no inflection; the pronouns have a dual as well as the singular and plural numbers. The comparative degree is formed by the juxtaposition of contraries, as "Peter is great, Paul is little." The verb has a full and complex conjugation, as in more than one primitive language. A remarkable circumstance is that the verbs *to have* and *to be* do not exist in the language. It should seem impossible to hold rational speech without making use of these auxiliaries; but the Hawaiians find no difficulty. We say, "That is a handsome woman;" the Hawaiian, *Wahine nani ia*—"handsome woman that." After a meal, instead of "I have eaten enough," they say, *Piha ke opu*—literally, "Full the belly."

Their vocabulary is rich in all the terms relating to life and nature. Thus, there are eight or ten words, according to special uses, for our verb *to break*. Thus, *hae-hae* is to rend the heart; *hai*, to break, as a bargain or covenant; *haki*, to break, as a stick of wood or other brittle thing; *kipo*, to break open, as a box; *moku*, to break, as a cord or chain, or as the neck of a victim; *naha*, to smash, as crockery; *poha*, to break, as thunder, as a torrent; *wawahi*, to break down, as a house. Their system of numeration was peculiar; decimal up to 40, but it progressed thereafter by decimal combinations of 40. For 70 the Hawaiian would say 40-20-10, as the Frenchman says 60-16. The numeration went by multiples of 40 as far as 400, for which there is a special word; and so on, with intervening partial numbers to 4,000, 40,000 and 400,000, each of these numbers having its special word. 400,000 was the limit of the notation, but higher numbers were not unmanageable; thus, for 864,895 they would say 2 *kini*, or 400,000; 1 *lehu* or 40,000, 6 *mano*, or 4,000; 2 *lau*, or 400; *umi*, or 10; and *elima*, 5. *Lima*, very curiously, is the Polynesians' word for hand, and the first four numerals, *akahi*, *elua*, *ekolu*, *aha*, are identified by some philologists with the corresponding words in the indo-European tongues; as if, at the remote time of their separation from the Aryan stock, the Maoris had learned to count four and no farther.

The language is deficient in abstract terms; and the missionaries, on translating their scriptures into the native tongue, found much embarrassment in giving equivalents for such terms as godliness and grace; while for virtue, in default of any equivalent term, the good men were driven into exposition and exegesis.

RELIGION.—The Hawaiians were devotedly religious, their system

being a mixed idol-worship and hero-worship. The divine powers *akuas*, dispensed good and evil to men. They were omnipresent; they ranked according to their dignity as higher or lower, and were represented by images of phenomenal ugliness, made of wood, wicker-work or stone, ornamented with sharks' teeth or human hair. The shades of kings and great priests were also deified. Each island and each chief had its own gods; their temples or sanctuaries, *heiaus*, were walled enclosures of undressed stone. The largest of these, built by Kamehameha I, is still standing; it is 100 by 224 feet, with walls 22 feet high and 12 feet thick at the base. Within was an inner court and a shrine, and here were offered human and other sacrifices. The famous *tabu* was the great instrument of religious oppression—a system of prohibitions with cruel penalties, which weighed upon almost every act of the people's life, and especially upon the women. Even animals were brought under the terrible ban. When a strict *tabu* was in force, to win the favor of the gods, no fire or light was permitted upon an entire island; no sound was to be heard; the dogs were muzzled; the cocks and hens were hid away in calabashes; none but the priests were allowed to stir abroad; and the penalty for infraction of these devout observances was death. The entire system of *tabus* was abolished by Kamehameha before the arrival of the missionaries.

SOCIAL USAGES.—The Hawaiians had a feudal system not unlike that of Germany in the eleventh century. A sharp distinction into three classes existed. First and highest were the *aliis*, or nobles, the king at the head; his councils were shared by the chiefs nearest the king, and by all his wives as well. The second class included the proprietors, so-called—for the kings had absolute right over both life and property; they paid regular taxes on the lands conceded to their use. The third class were the *roturiers*, or common people—small farmers, tenants, fishermen, builders, dancers, laborers; their property was liable to confiscation at any moment. The absolute despotism of the government was tempered only by the caprice or the humanity of the sovereign.

The domestic relations of the brown Polynesian, judged by European standards, left much to be desired. There were marriages, more or less permanent; wives, on suspicion, were sometimes subjected to cruel treatment, and the chiefs sometimes visited vengeance on the seducer; but the sentiment of chastity hardly existed, and the woman who refused herself was stigmatized as *pi*, or stingy. Polynesian hospitality to strangers, in the case of

guests of rank equal to that of the entertainer, usually included the wife or daughter of the house; these favors being reciprocated when the entertainer returned the visit; and the Hawaiians were always fond of travelling.

ARTS.—The ancient Hawaiians understood enough of astronomy to make long voyages by observation of the stars; in the earlier centuries, at least, though not as recently as the time of Cook, it is reasonably certain that they sailed as far as Tahiti, some 2,000 miles to the south, and returned safely. Their houses showed less skill in the construction than the canoes of that time; they consisted of a wooden framework, thatched with grass, and were furnished with mats, beautifully woven in the better houses; but these slight buildings lasted only a few years at the longest. For wearing apparel they beat the inner bark of the *wauki*, or paper mulberry, into a fabric not unlike brown paper, which they stained in ornamental patterns in brilliant vegetable dyes. Their magnificent feather cloaks are too well known to need any description here.

In the fine arts, save that of poetry, all the Polynesians were deficient. They had no pictorial art, no written language; and yet they carried the epic poem to a high development, preserving their ancient history and the names and exploits of their heroes in long *mélés* or chants, both musical and metrical, according to their own canons; and these were transmitted from one generation to another by hereditary bards. In other *mélés* they recited at equal length the names, descriptions and attributes of plants, animals, places, the heavenly bodies, the *materia medica*; their whole *corpus scientiarum*, indeed, as well as *poetarum*, was reduced to rhythmic form, and so perpetuated until the advent of the trader and the missionary, to whom these things were vanity. A certain portion of the old poetry, however, has been preserved by the labors of Fornander and other scholars. Their music was very primitive; drums and a bamboo flute, which I remember having seen played by the nostrils, being the principal instrument in their rude orchestras. But the Hawaiian has great natural aptitude for the art, and makes a good performer of modern music.

The games of the ancient Hawaiians were many and interesting; in this province, indeed, he was an inventor; but a long paper would be needed to describe his *hula-hula* and other dances, his hill-sliding, his surf-playing, his spear-throwing, his *puhénehéne*, and the rest. These sports are now mostly disused, together with most of the old customs; some belief in the ancient gods still remains;

but the native population is merging in the crossing waves of foreign blood, whether of white or yellow races. That most interesting of all aboriginal races continues to mingle with only too happy facility with the foreigner; the brown Polynesian is passing away by intermarriage; and the mixtures of the Hawaiian population will become one of the most complicated studies in the ethnology of the future.