

dom. When caught in a predicament, their solutions are idiosyncratic, often anarchic. We as readers cheer them from the sidelines, amazed at their wit, ingenuity, and courage.

Hau'ofa polished and refined these stories over a period of four years. The result is a South Pacific voice that is lucid, hilarious, and compassionate. Who can take offense when criticisms of our much-valued customs and institutions are couched in humor and presented elegantly? In the deft hands of this master storyteller, life is one big masquerade, and we its amused observers.

First published by Longman Paul (New Zealand) in 1983, this collection of stories was an instant success. Regarded as a milestone in Pacific literature by critics everywhere, *Tales* has become required reading in many high school and university courses in the Pacific and beyond.

*Talanoa* is fortunate and proud to be able to publish this minor classic.

Vilsoni Hereniko

## *The Seventh and Other Days*

When Jehovah created the Universe in six days and rested on the Seventh, He said it was good and that Man must so regulate his periods of work and rest. The children of Abraham observed the rule, and Christians everywhere do likewise; everywhere, that is, except in the little land of Tiko, notwithstanding its strict Sabbatarian laws. This doesn't mean that Tiko works seven days or even five days a week. No. In order to know its ways of doing things one has to find out first in which direction the Good Lord moves and then think of the opposite of that movement. The Lord moves one way, followed by Christians everywhere, and Tiko goes in the opposite direction, all on its own. Thus if the Lord works six days and rests on the Seventh, Tiko rests six days and works on the Seventh.

'And that's the truth,' said Manu with a firm nod of his heavy head. 'Our people work so hard on Sunday it takes a six-day rest to recover.'

'That's not true!' cried the ancient preacher. 'Nobody works or even plays on Sunday; it's against the law!'

Not wishing to argue with an obstinate octogenarian, Manu told the preacher about his great relative, Sione Falesi.

Sione is a Most Important Person who holds high positions in both the secular and the spiritual affairs of the realm. Sione stands six feet tall, weighs well nigh three hundred pounds, and looks every ounce a great Polynesian aristocrat, as Satusi, his wife of twenty-five years, puts it. Indeed, Sione is a true Polynesian chief, a practising Christian, and a self-confessed sinner who goes to church every Sunday mainly to ask God's forgiveness for his many, many errors.

Sione's house stands not too far from his local church, which has a huge bell. At precisely four-thirty every Sunday morning the big bell booms. Yes, it booms; the bells of Tiko don't peal like those elsewhere. Furthermore the bell at Sione's church booms simultaneously with thousands of other bells throughout the realm, wherein are four times as many churches as all other public establishments combined.

At the first sound of the great boom Sione bounces off his wife and crashes on to the floor stark awake. Satusi also bounces, falls on him, and is very cross because of the interruption. Their sixteen children spring up making nary a noise lest they receive the end of the broom. Everyone in the country jumps up at the same time as Sione and his family. And the bells stop booming only when everyone has gone to church. There is no other way of getting those bells to stop, which explains the almost one hundred per cent church attendance in the realm. Everyone goes to church; everyone, that is, except Manu, who owns the only pair of ear-plugs in the country. And Manu stays fast asleep.

That's how Sunday begins in tiny Tiko; and there is a long day ahead. Every two hours the big bells boom, and every two hours everyone but Manu goes to church. Everyone prays, everyone sings, everyone confesses; on their seats, on their feet, and on their knees. And throughout the Seventh Day the Lord is praised, the Lord is flattered, and the Lord is begged. Though perhaps the Lord doesn't hear if it's His day off.

The final act of piety takes place at 10.00 p.m. when each family gathers to say the family prayer before it retires to a well-earned six-day rest and recovery period.

Sione has sixteen children, none of whom was born on a Sunday. His wife is pregnant again and it is absolutely certain that the child will enter this world on any day but the Seventh. Indeed no one in the realm has ever been conceived or born from sunrise to midnight on a Sunday, on account of the bells which keep people inside the churches. It's impossible to commit sin of any kind on the Seventh Day. Babies could be born on Sundays, say the doctors at the National Hospital, only if their makers had sinned on this day. But no

one does, not even Sione, although he is a Most Important Person.

'The Seventh is the Day of the Lord; every other day belongs to Satan,' Manu explained. And Satan, as Teachers of Sunday School say, does nothing but lead people into Temptation. Thus the six days that belong to Satan are not only a period of rest and recovery, but also of Temptation and much, much sin.

Yet notwithstanding their pious demeanour and assertions to the contrary, Sione and his friends would have it no other way. So through rest and oh such awful sin during the six days after the Seventh, Sione has sired sixteen children, with more yet to come. Sione firmly believes that by raising a large family he is doing the Almighty a handsome favour. Didn't Jehovah tell Abraham to produce as many issue as there are grains of sand on earth or stars in the firmament? Yes, Jehovah did, said Sione, and there aren't yet as many people in Tiko as there are grains in even a handful of sand.

So Sione inevitably opposes the Family Planning Association (FPA) and what it represents. When the Association talked of the population explosion, Sione retorted that there aren't any explosions in Tiko except from behinds of members of the FPA. When the Association reasoned that if people rest less they will procreate less, Sione countered that rest and procreation are God's gifts to Man and have, therefore, nothing to do with the FPA. When the Association appealed to the clergy to lighten the Sunday burden so that people would not spend so much time resting at home on other days, the clergy would not countenance the suggestion, proclaiming that only when their flocks go to Heaven will they rest on a Sunday. Their flocks, said the clergy, may rest as much as they want on other days. And rest they do: at home, in the bush, on chairs, everywhere.

Sione, for example, drives every morning from Monday to Friday to his office to loaf on the chair behind his desk. At three o'clock every day from Monday to Friday he hurries home to spend the rest of the day on his wife.

None of this does any good whatever for National Development, said the Wise Men at the Thinking Office. These

Men of Wisdom once hired an Overseas Expert to look into the feasibility of making Tikongs work on weekdays.

The expert, a certain Mr Merv Dolittle from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra, Australia, interviewed half a dozen Very Important Persons, the last being Sione Falesi. Mr Dolittle arrived at Sione's office an hour earlier than had been arranged and found him playing cards with his secretary, Ana Taipe.

'Well, come in, come in, Mr Dolittle. You're rather early aren't you?' Sione greeted his guest with no sign of embarrassment. 'Would you like to play five hundred with us? No? What a pity. Take a seat, then. We're just having our morning-tea break.'

'Morning-tea break?' queried Mr Dolittle, glancing at his watch. It was nine o'clock. His eyes scanned the office for teacups.

'You won't see anything, Mr Dolittle. We have no money for tea so we kill the allotted time playing cards. If you can't feed your face you may as well fiddle with your fingers. That's what I always say. Ana, clear the desk and take the cards with you. Good girl. We'll resume at lunch-time.'

The secretary left the office and Sione turned to the expert. 'Nice girl that one. She's the sharpest card player in Tiko. That's why I hired her. She's not much good at anything else though. All our good ones are in New Zealand.'

'What does Ana do?'

'All sorts of things, Mr Dolittle. She and I play cards at morning-tea time and at lunch-time. Every so often we get into the spirit of things and play on. What's two hours here and there, I ask you?'

'What else does she do?'

'All sorts of things, like I said,' said Sione, racking his brain for Ana's positive attributes. 'She's a damn good masseuse. I've got this slipped disc you see, and she's been fixing it for five years now. Every day, in fact. She's tremendous; you must try her sometime.'

'Is your work-load heavy, Mr Falesi?'

'Oh yes, very heavy indeed. You should see me on Sundays when I work eighteen hours non-stop for God. Life's

a burden, an enormous burden,' said Sione, sighing heavily. 'But one must do one's bit for the Almighty. He's been very good to Tiko; you can see it all around. . . .'

'What about the other days?' Mr Dolittle cut in.

'What? Oh, yes. The other days, of course. Well, you see, Mr Dolittle. . . .' Sione stopped as if something had suddenly struck him. Then a wide grin creased his face. 'Incredible!' he ejaculated. 'How about that?'

'How about what?'

'Your name. Dolittle. It's so beautiful! Heavens above, you must be one of us! Ana! Ana! Bring the cards back in!'

'I must say that I've never, in all my life. . . .' Mr Dolittle began to protest, then thought better of it, rose, excused himself, and beat a hasty exit. The incident was more than sufficient to enable him to grasp the nature of the problem. He wound up his tour that very day, called a press conference, and declared that this lot of natives, like the Aborigines, had an enormous untapped potential for work; but that His Excellency's Government must first import the Protestant Ethic, two little words hitherto unheard of in the realm, although most Tikongs are Protestants. When Radio AP2U broadcast and explained the full meaning of the said ethic, the entire population suddenly turned deaf.

'And deafness comes from too much rest,' Manu proclaimed.

When one rests too much one grows too many hairs inside one's ears, blocking out all sounds except the voice of flattery. That's why people of the common order, the vast majority of Tikongs, are the most adept flatterers in the Pacific: they have spent so much time practising it. And to many Important Persons, the so-called Sitters-on-Chairs, Wise Men, Traumatized Experts, Devious Traders, and assorted Pulpit Poops, flattery is sweeter than ice cream.

One of these Sitters-on-Chairs is, of course, Manu's gigantic relative Sione, nemesis of the Family Planning Association and father of sixteen children. One Monday morning Sione was sitting behind the desk of his office. The desk top was shining clean with nothing on it except a copy of *Penthouse* magazine confiscated from a visiting American yacht.

Sione's foreign-aid adviser, to whom he has delegated all his work, entered the office on this lovely Monday morning to announce that their agency was on the verge of bankruptcy. Sione sat motionless staring through the window; not a muscle moved. He heard nothing, he saw nothing; he was in deep repose as always on the first day after the Seventh.

The foreign-aid adviser nevertheless perceived that as soon as he opened his mouth the three-inch hairs protruding from Sione's ears began to bunch up, blocking the ear-holes as effectively as Manu's ear-plugs. The adviser mumbled a profanity, stalked out in disgust, and lost his way, eventually finding himself, as usual, slumped over the bar of the Tiko Club.

Immediately afterwards the underpaid agency cleaner, Lea Fakahekeheke, crept into the office, insinuated himself behind Sione, and whispered thus into his ear: 'Most Respected Sir, the New Zealand Aid Delegation which came last Friday told me you're the wisest and most handsome man in the whole world.'

Even before Lea moved his lips the hairs in Sione's ears, as if anticipating what was coming, disentangled themselves and conducted the honeyed words swiftly into his brain. He suddenly came alive, breaking into a smile, yelling and hugging Lea.

Then he unlocked the agency safe, pulled out two five-dollar bills, and pressed them into Lea's half-unwilling hands, ordering him to take the day off. Lea slithered away well satisfied.

Every second week for over fifteen years Lea has gone to the office to whisper nice things into Sione's ear, and the Great Man has never failed to reward him each time with no less than ten dollars, which is considerably more than his fortnightly earnings.

'And who leads whom in Tiko?' Manu asked, never for a moment expecting a reply.

## *The Winding Road to Heaven*

'Religion and Education Destroy Original Wisdom' cry the letters on the back of Manu's shirt. 'Over Influenced' says the front of the same garment. The wearer of the said shirt is one of the best known characters in Tiko; and although His Excellency is the most famous, Manu runs a very close second. As for telling it like it is, Manu is the only teller of big truths in the realm. This is not to suggest that our country comprises a nation of liars as some uninitiated foreigners seem to think, far from it. Truth comes in portions, some large, some small, but never whole. Like our ancestors we are expert tellers of half-truths, quarter-truths, and one-percent truths. When Tevita Alanoa stole his neighbour's pig and protested, after being caught, that he had only eaten one leg, he was telling a quarter-truth. And when he affirmed that his victimised neighbour was his mother's brother and that therefore he, Tevita, was not really a thief, he was telling a half-truth. And furthermore, when he got carried away and said that his mother's brother's pigs were for him to take without asking, and was punched on the nose by his uncle, Tevita was telling a one-percent truth.

You can get away nicely with half-truths and quarter-truths, and indeed most people do so with joyful frequency; but it is not so easy to escape unscathed with one-percent truths, as Tevita discovered with a bloodied nose. Even the act of telling a one-percent truth requires a good measure of sophistication, acquired only after having completed six years of Modern Education at a church college. Consider the case of Inoke Nimavave who forged and cashed a cheque for \$100.

## *The Second Coming*

On the day Tiko gained her independence from the shackles of colonialism His Excellency the Paramount Chief proclaimed in no uncertain terms the immediate cessation of all undue exploitation of the citizens and resources of the balmy isles by the running dogs of Imperialism and Capitalism. In the Historical Proclamation, which has since been immortalised in five fine songs composed by Tiko's most eminent wordsmiths, His Excellency also laid down many other wise edicts, but the one which held Sailosi Atiu's attention, raised his hopes, and has since guided his destiny, as well as that of his beloved country, was the statement that henceforth the direction of National Development towards Tiko taking its rightful place among the nations of the Free World would rest in indigenous hands and no others.

Immediately following the Historical Proclamation came the localisation of every post and position that could conceivably be localised, including all the major offices of the realm, except those of the Ministries of Justice and Finance, since it was well nigh impossible to locate suitable candidates of just and honest disposition. The stage was thus set for Tiko to skin her own pigs and so control her Manifest Destiny.

At that time Sailosi Atiu had been working as the chief assistant to the imperial running dog Mr Eric Hobsworth-Smith, Director of the Bureau for the Preservation of Traditional Culture and Essential Indigenous Personality. Mr Hobsworth-Smith was a graduate in anthropology and prehistoric archaeology from the University of London, where he had read all there was to be read on the habits and peculiarities of native peoples in Africa, Asia, the Americas,

and Oceania. Following his graduation he entered the Colonial Service and worked for many years as Museum Director, Government Anthropologist, and Special Adviser on Native Affairs in a dozen far-flung countries of the Great British Empire. Nine years before Tiko's independence Mr Hobsworth-Smith arrived to establish and direct the Bureau for the Preservation of Traditional Culture and Essential Indigenous Personality or, more precisely, what remained of these after the running dogs had done their bit for more than a century.

Having not been educated abroad, Sailosi Atiu had no diploma or university degree, but at the time of Mr Hobsworth-Smith's arrival he had gained the kind of experience few men in Tiko could match: he had worked in every government department and agency in the course of twenty years, accumulating valuable intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the colonial administration and of the major and minor indiscretions of every highly placed civil servant. More importantly Sailosi had the right consanguineal connections through his late mother to Tiko's ancient aristocracy. His suitability for the post of Deputy Director of the Bureau was recognised publicly when Their Excellencies the Imperial Governor and the Paramount Chief jointly selected him for the office with minimum fuss: all opposition to his appointment was squashed in the usual manner.

Although Sailosi considered Mr Hobsworth-Smith an unredeemable running dog, he now confesses that he had learned much, nay, too much from him. Through the nine years of subordinate association, Sailosi had so emulated his style of work, dress, speech, and deportment that his friends took to addressing him by the Englishman's name. Most of his peers had received their education in America, Australia, and New Zealand and had adopted the habits and peculiarities of those countries and, seeing the ways in which they conducted and comported themselves, Sailosi was glad that he looked and sounded like a true Briton. Indeed he carried himself so much like Mr Hobsworth-Smith that the Imperial Governor often took him for a cultured English gentleman of impeccable lineage, or so the Governor would exclaim in

a tone that was only just perceptibly questioning. Sailosi was never quite certain of the Governor's compliments, although he swallowed them easily enough, especially when they were accompanied by gallons of the good Governor's booze at His Excellency's frequently held cocktail parties, to which Sailosi was regularly invited.

Soon after the great Historical Proclamation, Mr Hobs-worth-Smith received his marching orders and Sailosi his inevitable elevation to the exalted post of Director of the Bureau. And, as was then fashionable in the heat of immediate post-independence nationalistic fervour, Sailosi moved quickly to purge himself of all pernicious imperial influences and embarked upon the restoration and preservation of his essential indigenous personality. He dropped his posh accent and spoke English only when necessary and with the distinctive Tikong lilt. He stopped spicing his vernacular conversations with fancy English words and discarded his safari shirt, shorts, and long socks in favour of the national attire, varied with Tiki Togs, Afro-shirts, and other Third World clothes. Finally, with much wrenching of the heart, he abandoned his New Zealand paramour and picked a local lady of wandering inclinations to be his secret friend for life.

But he kept the concrete house, the Kelvinator refrigerator, and the Holden station wagon he had inherited from his predecessor, maintained his membership of the expatriate-dominated Tiko Club and his subscriptions to *Playboy* and *Time* magazines, paid regular visits to the International Nightlight Hotel to dine on grilled steaks and imported potato washed down with French wines, and sent his sons to the special school for the children of the elite and his only daughter to an upper-class convent in Perth. And, since he wore his conscience lightly and avoided thinking of contradictions, he saw no irony whatever in the inconsistency in his life-style. Like his close friends Hiti George VI and Sione Falesi, Sailosi was blessed with freedom from the kind of neurosis which arises from over-sensitivity to contradiction, doubt, or guilt.

Having partly cleansed himself of foreign influences and half-restored his essential indigenous personality, Sailosi set about doing the same to his staff and countrymen. He walked

into his office building one morning and stopped at the typist's desk. 'Amelia,' he said sternly, 'go to the back at once and wipe off that silly lipstick. I don't want to see you or anyone else in this bureau wearing lipstick. It's a foul foreign custom. While you're at it, get rid of the French perfume too; it smells froggy. Use the great Tikong all-purpose coconut oil. And is that a smear of talcum powder on your cheeks? Wipe that off too; and don't use it again, it won't turn your skin white.

'Aisea. Yes, you. Did I just hear you say something in English? Don't you ever again use the words "bloody" or "shit" within my hearing. If you have to swear, do it in Tikong; we have hundreds of filthy words you can choose from.

'And you, Kolo. Go shave off that stupid moustache. You look like a foreign sex maniac.

'Now listen, all of you. Every morning I shall tell you what things we must banish from our lives; and I shall do this until I'm satisfied that we have cleansed ourselves of the imperialist taint and have re-established our true Tikong selves. Get back to your work.'

Sailosi's first deputy director was a young university graduate whom he considered over-talented and miseducated. The deputy was so keen on reforming everything at once that when he found himself repeatedly blocked, mostly by Sailosi, he turned bitter and set out to undermine his superior using innuendo and ridicule as his weapons. One day Sailosi overheard him saying, 'That old fossil's a reactionary, half-educated nitwit.' Sailosi never forgave him for that.

'I don't mind one bit his calling me a reactionary,' he confided to his wife in bed that evening. 'It's in the nature of my job to be reactionary. How else can we preserve our culture?'

'Quite so,' responded his wife, 'I agree with you two hundred per cent. But I wish you'd react towards me sometimes. You hardly ever do nowadays.'

'We're too old for that sort of nonsense. I don't mind him calling me half-educated either. That pleases me, in fact. You don't need fancy certificates to sit on top chairs. All these youngsters coming out of the universities are a pathetic lot;



those who had lost their essential indigenous personality. Moreover both parties put up with each other for short periods only, since most foreigners left after two or at most three years, departing just before they went around the bend, or knew too much, or were in a position to do real harm—or real good.

And as clouds flew over the bridge and much water passed under it things began to return to the good old days when no one worried about bears or had heard of localisation. And with it came a different type of expatriate, including an increasing number of old colonial hands. These latecomers and returnees felt no guilt for anyone's sin, didn't give a damn about fickle affections, refused to go around the bend, and knew too much for anyone's good, as Sailosi Atiu discovered to his profound personal regret.

After the departure of his first two deputy directors, Sailosi recruited a third, whom he thought was schooled in the approved manner. The deputy had been to a university in South India where he had obtained the degrees of BA, MA, and PhD, all in two and a half years, specialising, some said, in Transcendental Meditation. He was certainly correctly tutored but was not quite with it and, according to his chagrined superior, was less than luminous and more than a little dense. He had also adopted the Indian habit of incessant talk and pointless argumentation. And Sailosi deftly manoeuvred his exit to Australia where he now contributes brilliantly toward that country's development. The fourth deputy, selected on the strength of his religious fervour and sincere demeanour, was dismissed and sentenced to hard labour and enforced chastity for embezzling the Bureau's petty cash and gobbling the forbidden fruits of his director's secretary.

Having looked in vain for a suitable candidate for the deputy's post, Sailosi resorted at last to seeking foreign technical assistance. The day after lodging his application with the Thinking Office he left on six-months' overseas leave, and returned to find someone at the deputy's desk a few feet behind his own.

'Welcome back, sir. How are you? Goodness me, you do look smashing,' greeted the smiling, familiar face.

'What on earth are you doing here, Mr Hobsworth-Smith?' Sailosi exclaimed after a minute of shocked incredulity. He noticed that his former superior had shaved his handle-bar moustache, softened his stiff upper lip somewhat, and donned the Tikong national dress instead of his standard safari shirt, Bengali shorts, and knee-length socks.

'Call me Eric, sir,' Eric returned with an endearing grin that sent goose pimples all the way up from below Sailosi's belt to the base of his skull. 'I've been here three months as your deputy and technical adviser, er... sir. Is there anything wrong? Take a seat sir, please,' Eric implored with brow-wrinkling concern, rose, and carried a chair to Sailosi who collapsed on it. Eric smiled, sucking his Falcon pipe. Sailosi reached with a shaking hand for his handkerchief, wiped the pouring sweat from his face and neck, mumbled something about feeling not quite well after a long flight from Los Angeles, and left.

As soon as he got outside the building he dashed two hundred yards to a public telephone, dialled a number, waited, and screamed, 'Who sent that bastard to me?'

'What bastard? ... Oh, I see. You asked for technical assistance and the British sent him,' replied the Chief Thinking Officer.

'But I did not ask for him; I would never in a million years!' shouted Sailosi. 'He's a totally unredeemed running dog.'

'You've got him. Besides, he's a reformed running dog. Didn't you see his smile?'

'Damn his smile! He's not reformed. Listen, he's a wolf in sheep's clothing. He won't be content to remain a mere adviser. He'll try to run the whole damn show again and that's the truth. Get rid of him for me. Please.'

'We can't do that. We can't afford to pay compensation if we break the agreement. Take it easy, he's here for three years only. You could do to him what Hiti did to Mr Higginbotham.'

'You're joking! Mr Higginbotham knew sweet damn all about Tiko; and he had a conscience. This creep knows Tiko too much and he's got no conscience. He's a crook, I tell you!'

'Aren't we all?'

'Fuck you!' Sailosi spat into the mouthpiece, slammed down the telephone, and strode home oblivious to anything and anyone he ploughed through.

Next morning he hastened to the office to be there before anyone else. As he closed the door behind him a sugary voice wormed its way into his consciousness. 'Good morning, good morning to you, sir. Dear, oh dear, you look rather whacked. Go home and take it easy; I'll look after the office for you, sir.'

'I'm quite all right and I can very well look after myself thank you, Mr Hobsworth-Smith.'

'I'm sure you can. Do call me Eric, will you, sir?' implored Eric with a humility and sincerity that finished the day for Sailosi who broke down and wept uncontrollably, said something about missing a beloved daughter he had left in Los Angeles, pushed himself from his chair, and found his way home a crushed man. Eric smiled and puffed his Falcon pipe. This went on for a few more days until Eric was able to persuade Sailosi not to bother coming to the office at all. Every day a clerk takes correspondence and files to the Director's house. Sailosi telephones instructions to the clerk who relays them to Eric who acts on them as he sees fit.

It's been like this for the last twenty-four months and Sailosi has done little besides count the days until his deputy's departure. The Englishman on the other hand has used his time astutely, grabbing every opportunity to display his streamlined efficiency and to invite the appropriate people to his lavish dinner parties. And unbeknownst to Sailosi Atiu, Eric Hobsworth-Smith has received assurances from the powers-that-be that at the end of his present contract he will be given another three-year term with an option on further renewal.

'Welcome to Tiko!' Manu sang out one day when he saw someone trying to sell a tiki to Eric, whom he had taken for a tourist.

## *The Big Bullshit*

Unlike most of his fellow villagers Pulu has ceased praying and going to church although he is neither an atheist nor an agnostic. He has not forgiven the Lord whom he blames for the troubles he recently had with the three cows and the bull he acquired as aid from New Zealand. Pulu had set out to build from this small beginning a herd that would make him the most prosperous man in Saisaipē.

Before he became a grazier Pulu had raised neither a cow nor a bull, although he had accumulated considerable experience in handling lesser creatures of which stunted pigs were the largest. His love for small animals dates from his childhood when he persistently raised cats and dogs despite their constant disappearance into other people's pots and pans.

Pulu's fondness for animals matches his aversion to plants. He nevertheless confines this sentiment to gardening only, for he harbours no objection whatever to eating yam, sweet potato, or banana, provided always that he doesn't have to grow them. Those who know him well say that his aversion to horticulture is a result of secondary schooling. When he was twelve Pulu parted from his cats and dogs and enrolled at Potopoto College to study mathematics, science, and English so he could enter university and become a veterinarian. Instead he found himself spending half his time cultivating cassava patches for the school food supply, since Potopoto lacked funds and had to compel Pulu and four hundred other boarders to grow cassava. For the rest of the time Pulu was too tired to learn anything.

It came as no surprise when, midway through his second year at the college, Pulu gave up and went home to his father

## *Blessed are the Meek*

It is said that an American likes to walk tall even though he may be short, and that he occasionally takes a giant step or two for mankind even though mankind may not have asked him to. Good luck to him, says Manu, and may he live long, what with the energy crisis, rising unemployment, falling Skylabs, policing human rights, and carrying other heavy global responsibilities befitting a member of the Greatest Nation on Earth.

A Tikong, on the other hand, tends to walk short even though he may be tall, and will not take even a dwarfish step if he can help it. He normally lives too long on account of his love for energy conservation, which he achieves with enviable success simply by doing as little as possible or by doing nothing at all if he can. He does not have to police human rights, even in his own village, since he's never heard of such things. Moreover, he has no global responsibility, for he is a citizen of a tiny country, so small that mankind is advised not to look for it on a classroom globe for it will only search in vain. More often than not cartographers leave Tiko out of their charts altogether because they can't be bothered looking for a dot sufficiently small to represent it faithfully and at the same time big enough to be seen without the aid of a microscope. So much by way of introduction; now let's return to the point. The point is Puku Leka who is really not a point but a tall man who appears short.

But how can a tall man look diminutive, one may legitimately ask, especially if one has never thought in opposites or never set foot in Tiko where everything is simultaneously possible and impossible. We may demonstrate the point by

abstracting some examples from the life-history of Puku Leka, in whose ample person is embodied the nobility characteristic of the humble citizenry of Tiko.

Now forty years of age, Puku came into the world on a rainy day, a twelve-pound baby and last of the three children born to Mr and Mrs Tuki Leka who adhered faithfully to the Old Testament dictum that one regularly beats the object of one's affection. Mr and Mrs Leka led a life of bliss and contentment, a happy connubial state brought about by Mr Leka's acumen and wisdom. At the beginning of their married life Mrs Leka was an extremely pretty, vivacious, wilful, and outspoken girl. Within three years Mr Leka had flattened and ironed out the vivacity, the wilfulness, and the outspokenness simply by slapping and belting Mrs Leka whenever she spoke out or did anything displeasing to him.

Even in old age Mrs Leka was still beautiful, but she had become a soft-spoken, sedate lady who obeyed, respected, and loved her husband. She often joked about how Mr Leka used to beat the living daylights out of her, and of her beloved's other just visitations. And Mr Leka would smile patriarchally, secure in the knowledge of a job exemplarily done. In later life Mr Leka beat Mrs Leka only occasionally, about once every three months: a sharp jab here and a quick kick there, mild, affectionate reminders of who's boss.

As for Puku, he was a most fortunate child in having an elder brother and an elder sister in addition to his mum and dad to slap him into shape and to wring and squeeze him into the approved mould, always with loving rage. If he spoke out of turn, as when he dared ask for more at meal times, or if in frustration he unwittingly uttered an unseemly word, he was sharply reprimanded or, more often, slashed into silence. If he rose when he should sit tight, he was slammed down hard and a dart of pain would shoot up from his bottom through the spine to the base of his skull, sending appropriate messages of goodness into his brain. When he sneaked away and played too long with other children, or when he took two hours to deliver a message that should have taken him only five minutes, he was set to run ten times around the yard, contributing to his physical growth and fitness.

His charming sister had a favourite and effectively beneficial way of moulding him. When he teased her, or more commonly whenever she felt like it, she would grab his left ear, twisting and pulling it upward, and he would strain his head, stand on his toes, and crease his face in delicious agony. As a result, his left ear grew twice the size of the other, vastly improving his aural capacity.

His father reminded him daily of what Jehovah did to those who pleased Him and to those who stirred His wrath. Although Puku was pleased with the idea of Heavenly rewards, it was the notion of the Lord's punishment that remained so vivid in his mind. He had little dreams of his being quartered and fed bit by bit into the Eternal Fire, and he would scream and shout promises of remaining for ever pure. He developed a healthy respect for the Lord.

In addition to his conditioning through thumping and threat of Eternal Roast, Puku received excellent training in bowing and bending and crawling. Whenever he walked into a gathering of adults he bent his body and bowed his head as he stepped gingerly to wherever he was instructed to proceed. At the twice-daily family prayers he knelt and bent his torso so that his head rested on the floor in the manner of infidels on their prayer rugs; and as prayers in Tiko were usually conducted at greater length than just about anywhere else, Puku would thus bow to the Almighty for upward of half an hour each time, and much longer when he went to church. He also spent much time crouching behind low bushes and other objects, concealing himself from his lovingly wrathful family.

And Puku did a lot of crawling. When the high chief of his district visited his father's house, or when Puku was dispatched to the high chief, he would drop on all fours and creep to him with proper respect and self-abasement. When he went to see important persons, he crawled in their presence, often dragging behind him some heavy gifts, a practice much encouraged by his family as the only effective way people of his like could get things to move in their direction.

Thus by the time he had grown into a six-foot-four-inch man, Puku had become so accustomed to bowing, bending,

and crawling that he could not sit, stand, or walk straight.

These were not the only factors in Puku's deceptive physical appearance; far from it. At primary school he was an object of joy and mirth for he was such a meek, mild, and awkward child. Much shorter boys than he, who strutted like tall cocks, jumped on his back or jabbed his stomach to see him fall to his knees. And everyone laughed at him, including his teachers. Puku took it all stoically, always praying to God to grant him greater endurance and to enable him to bear his cross with Christian fortitude.

And because he was told that he wasn't bright Puku believed that he was mentally backward and did much worse in his examinations than his native ability would have warranted. He nevertheless qualified for Potopoto College, where he spent much of his time crouching over low desks. He began showing interest in his school work and surprised himself and everyone else by performing very well in his examinations.

But just as he started to shine, hard times descended on Tiko when copra prices plummeted. As his father could not afford to keep all his children at school, Puku, the youngest, though brightest, left Potopoto College to spend the following decades on his father's land as a full-time subsistence farmer, an occupation that was much lauded by leaders everywhere but which earned him neither sufficient money nor standing nor the affection of women.

His brother and sister completed their schooling, secured lucrative employment, married partners with good connections, and got loans from the Bank of Tiko to build concrete houses for themselves. Puku, on the other hand, built on a corner of his father's land a traditional thatched house that was traditionally small, traditionally dark, and traditionally damp, a traditionally appropriate abode for a man of his lowly station. Inside the house Puku kept traditional company with rats, cockroaches, bugs of every description, and a thousand other tiny creatures of the Lord's creation.

Then his father died. And the land on which Puku lived and worked went by right of primogenital inheritance to his elder brother who lived in town, never worked on it, and had

no intention of working on it. The brother also leased out to a wealthy farmer all of it except that tiny corner on which Puku's hut stood. And, by the same primogenital right, the elder brother also inherited everything else from their father. Although Puku was left with nothing, he accepted his lot and accepted also the notion that one day he would be rewarded with an estate in Heaven.

When his brother leased out the land Puku was forced to apply for a daily-paid unskilled labourer's job with a government department. He was summoned for an interview presided over by the departmental head. It turned out that he was the only interviewee for the job, but he didn't know that until much later.

'Why did you apply for this position?' asked the departmental head.

'I need the job very urgently, sir.'

'Why?'

'I have no means of support, sir.'

'Have you applied for a job before?'

'No, sir.'

'Why not?'

'I never had the need to, sir.'

'What educational qualifications have you got?'

'I have no certificate, sir. I did well at college but I didn't finish.'

'Good. You're the only applicant without a certificate of any kind. It's been to your advantage. The job's yours. And you'll get eight dollars a week. What work have you done before?'

'I've been gardening for twenty-five years, sir.'

'Why did you give it up?'

'My elder brother inherited my father's land and leased it out.'

'Are you a good gardener?'

'Yes, sir. And I love it, sir.'

'Very good. So you have a skill to fall back on if anything happens. Excellent. You don't need to work your way up to an established position then. You can be laid off any time. You're lucky you have another skill.'

'But I have no land, sir.'

'It doesn't matter. As long as you have a back-up skill God will always find something for you to do. We're not concerned with those whom the Almighty looks after. After all, He's a much greater provider than all of us put together. Do you have your own house?'

'Sort of, sir....'

'But a house nevertheless....'

'Sir, it's not really a decent....'

'As long as we have our own roofs over our own heads, everything's fine. Thank God we're not in Bangladesh. Anyway, you're fortunate to have a house of your own. More so than most senior government officials. The state has to provide for us poor sods.'

'You mean with those huge houses all over the town, sir?'

'Yes. But to go back to your case. Since you have your own house you don't need a pension. The state can't afford to give everyone a pension; only some, like those who have no houses of their own. You look strong and healthy.'

'The Lord's been kind to me, sir.'

'Obviously. Let's hope that He'll always be kind to you. You're too strong and too healthy to qualify for sick or annual leave or any of that sort of nonsense. Leave is only for the weak and the unhealthy. That's all for now, Puku. Welcome to your new responsibility; I hope you'll do your best for Tiko. Report for work at eight-thirty sharp tomorrow.'

Although he was troubled by the conditions of his employment, Puku took the job. He had no choice. And, like so many lowly people with problems they couldn't solve themselves, he sought out Manu, who advised him to leave the job. But since he insisted on keeping it, Manu told him that if that was the case he shouldn't think about working conditions. It wouldn't do him any good, especially in view of the fact that Tiko has no such things as unions.

'My friend,' Manu concluded, 'in this less than just world of ours, only those who have coronary conditions and who suffer from obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, chronic diarrhoea, gout, and other afflictions of affluence, are entitled to highly paid, secure jobs with superannuation, and sick and

annual leave, in addition to other fringe benefits, for they will neither live long on earth nor will they inherit anything in Heaven. Ultimately, Puku, one must feel sorry for the poor sods. And that's my final advice to you: be sorry for them and not for yourself. That way, you'll feel a little better in this worst of all possible worlds.'

And so today Puku still works diligently as the cleaner for the same government department. He spends his spare time doing chores for his brother and sister who so use him on the grounds that since he has neither a wife nor children he must help those laden with family responsibilities. His pastor requires him to contribute generously to the Church, and his neighbourhood expects him to give of his time and energy to communal undertakings. He gives and gives in return for which he receives words: of appreciation and love, of pious blessings and encouragement to continue suffering through life as Christ did so long ago and, best of all, of assurances of eternal rewards in Life Hereafter.

In the judgement of his people Puku Leka is a good man and a noble example of what a Tikong should be. He knows his standing in his community and pays proper respect to his earthly betters; he is patient, long suffering, and devoid of personal ambition; he carries the burden for his family, church, village, and country without complaint and without much expectation of earthly reward. He and countless others of his kind are essential for the continued stability of the realm of Tiko. And although he is a tall man he walks short, for his spirit is humbled and his back permanently bent.

## *Bopeep's Bells*

His Holiness Bopeep Dr Toki Tumu comes from Chamber Island which, like many other places in the South Pacific, received its refined designation from the venerable Captain James Cook, who was given to naming the places he discovered as a way of honouring friends and patrons, or in commemoration of salient events. Chamber Island was so named to record for posterity the occasion when some of its inhabitants relieved the great navigator of his much loved and much sat-upon chamber pot. When, after a futile search for the missing vessel, the bereft Captain Cook set sail for New Zealand, the then chief of the island confiscated the stolen item and declared it his special kava drinking bowl. Ten years later, when the chief had taken to imbibing sailors' rum straight from the bottle and had eschewed drinking impotent kava, he gave the pot to his concubines to use for brewing tea for the island's first white missionary who, upon discovering how his beverage had been prepared, left his post in an unchristian huff, proclaiming that the next cup of tea he drank would be in Heaven.

Toki Tumu is a descendent of one of the thieves of Captain Cook's chamber pot. He had arrived in the world on a Sunday morning when church bells had just begun booming the call for the dawn service. This deafening initial experience so indelibly stamped itself into his infant brain that Toki grew up obsessed with bells. The first toy he asked for from his parents was a bell, and indeed the only toys he ever wanted and played with were bells. By the time he turned forty he could ring two hundred and fifty different rhythms with the bells he had hanging outside his house.

ing for fornication but declared it a necessity that he experience the suffering and agony of sin in order to transcend earthly pleasures. 'It's the only way!' he thundered deliciously from the pulpit, utterly transcended by his nocturnal transport.

And so His Holiness Bopeep Dr Toki Tumu of the Church of the Golden Bell forged ahead building the thriving institution that has spread throughout Tiko and may yet overtake the numerical superiority of the older Churches for, as Manu says, it has the bells that ring best those sweetest sounds of all: the music of coins and coition.

## *The Glorious Pacific Way*

'I hear you're collecting oral traditions. Good work. It's about time someone started recording and preserving them before they're lost for ever,' said the nattily dressed Mr Harold Minte in the slightly condescending though friendly tone of a born diplomat, which Mr Minte actually was.

'Thank you, sir,' Ole Pasifikiwei responded shyly. He was not given to shyness, except in the presence of foreigners, and on this sultry evening at a cocktail party held in the verdant gardens of the International Nightlight Hotel, Ole was particularly reticent.

Through the persistent prodding of an inner voice which he had attributed to that of his Maker, Ole had spent much of the spare time from his job as Chief Eradicator of Pests and Weeds collecting oral traditions, initially as a hobby but in time it had developed into a near obsession. He had begun by recording and compiling his own family genealogy and oral history, after which he expanded into those of other families in his village, then neighbouring settlements, and in seven years he had covered a fifth of his island country. He recorded with pens in exercise books, which he piled at a far corner of his house, hoping that one day he would have a machine for typing his material and some filing cabinets for their proper storage. But he had no money for these luxuries, so he kept to his exercise books, taking care of them as best as he could.

His work on oral traditions attracted the approving notice of the Ministry of Environment, Religion, Culture, and Youth (universally dubbed MERCY), a high official of which, who was also an intimate of Ole's, had invited him

to the cocktail party to meet the diplomat visiting Tiko on a project identification and funding mission.

'Perhaps you could do with some financial assistance,' Mr Minte suggested.

'That'll help a lot, sir.'

'We have money set aside for the promotion of culture preservation projects in the Pacific. Our aim is to preserve the Pacific Way. We want to help you.'

'Very generous of you sir. When can I have some money?'

'After you've written me a letter asking for assistance.'

'Do I have to? Can't you just send some?'

'Obviously you haven't dealt with us before.'

'No, sir.'

'Things are never quite that simple, you know. We have the money to distribute, but we can't give it away just like that. We want you to ask us first. Tell us what you want; we don't wish to tell you what you should do. My job is to go around informing people that we want to co-operate for their own good, and people should play their part and ask us for help. Do you get me?'

'Yes, sir. But suppose no one asks?'

'That's no problem. Once people know that they can get things from us for nothing, they will ask. And besides, we can always send someone to help them draw up requests. By the way, who's that jolly chap over there?'

'That's His Excellency the Imperial Governor.'

'My God. I have something very important to tell him. I must see him now before he leaves. Come and see me tomorrow morning at ten at the MERCY Building. Think of what I've said and we'll talk about it then. I'm pleased we've met. Good night.'

Shortly afterwards Ole left for home, disturbed and feeling reduced. He had never before asked for anything from a total stranger. If Mr Minte had money to give, as he said he did, why did he not just give it? Why should he, Ole, be required to beg for it? He remembered an incident from his childhood when a bigger boy offered him a mango then demanded that he fall on his knees and beg for it. Hatred for Mr Minte surged in his stomach to be mixed with self-hatred for his

own simplicity and for his reluctance to ask from a stranger while everyone else seemed to have been doing so without compunction. He needed a typewriter and some filing cabinets, not for himself but for the important work he had set out to do. Yet pride stood in the way. The Good Book says that pride is the curse of man. The Good Book also says, 'Ask and it shall be given unto you.' One should learn to ask for and accept things with grace. But he could not sleep well that night; his heart was torn—it was not easy to ask from a stranger if you weren't practised at it. He must do it nevertheless. There was no other way of acquiring the facilities he needed. Anyway, he supposed as he drifted into sleep, it's like committing sin: once you start it becomes progressively easier.

At ten the following morning Ole entered the MERCY office where Mr Minte was waiting.

'Good morning, Ole. Have you made up your mind about seeking help from us?'

'Yes, sir. I'd like to have a typewriter and some filing cabinets. I'll write you a letter. Thank you.'

'Now, Ole, I'm afraid that's not possible. As I said last night, things aren't so simple. We don't want to tell people what to do with the money we give, but there are things we cannot fund. Take your particular request for instance. My Minister has to report to our parliament on things people do with the money we give. Once politicians see that we've given a typewriter for culture preservation they will start asking embarrassing questions of my Minister. What's a civilised typewriter to do with native cultures? The Opposition will have a field day on that one. Most embarrassing. That won't do....'

'But in my case it has everything to do....'

'You have to ask for something more directly relevant, I'm sorry. Relevance is the key that opens the world,' Mr Minte said, and paused to savour the profundity of his remark before turning on an appearance of astounding generosity.

'Look, we can give you \$2000 a year for the next five years to publish a monthly newsletter of your activities. Send us a copy of each issue, O.K.?'

'But I still need a typewriter to produce a newsletter.'

'Try using a MERCY typewriter. You will have to form a committee, you know.'

'A committee? What for? I've been working alone for seven years and no committee has been interested in me.'

'Oh, they will, they will when good money's involved. The point, however, is that we don't give to individuals, only to organisations. You form a group, call it the Oral Traditions Committee or something, which will then write to us for assistance. Do you follow me?' Mr Minte looked at his watch and lifted an eyebrow. 'I'm sorry, I have to go now to talk with the National Women's Association. Don't you know that your women are more forthcoming and efficient than your men? When we tell them—sorry—suggest that they form a committee, they do so immediately. It's a great pleasure handling them. Their organisations have tons of money from us and other helpers. Think about it and come again tomorrow at the same time. See you then.' Mr Minte went out and disappeared into a black official limousine.

Ole remained in the office keeping very still, as was his habit when angry, breathing deeply until he had regained his equanimity. Then he rose and walked slowly to the office of his intimate, the high MERCY official, who sat quietly and listened until Ole had poured out his heart.

'The trouble with you is that you're too moralistic,' Emi Bagarap said thoughtfully. 'You're too proud, Ole.'

'It's no longer a matter of pride, I've seen to that; it's self-respect.'

'Self-respect is a luxury we can't afford; we have no choice but to shelve it for a while. When we're developed, then we will do something about dignity and self-respect . . .'

'What if we are never developed?'

'We will develop! There's not a speck of doubt about that. You must cultivate the power of positive thinking,' said Emi Bagarap looking wise, experienced, and positive.

'You must keep in mind, Ole, that we're playing international games in which the others have money and we don't. Simple as that. They set the rules and we play along trying to bend them for our benefit.'

'Anyway, those on the other side aren't all that strict with their rules either. Take Mr Minte, for instance. He offers to give you \$2000 a year for five years and all he wants is for you to form a committee and then the committee writes a letter asking for the funds and produces a newsletter regularly. But he didn't say anything about how the organisation is to be formed or run. See? You can get three or four friends and form a committee with you as chairman and treasurer, and someone else as secretary. Get only those who're neither too interested nor too knowledgeable. That'll give you the freedom to do what needs to be done.'

'Again, the letter asking for help will be from the Committee and not from you personally. Your self-respect will not be compromised, not that it really matters, mind you.'

'Furthermore, Mr Minte didn't say anything about the size of your newsletter, did he? Well. You can write it in a page or two taking about half an hour each month. And you don't have to write it in English either. And if you so wish you can produce two copies per issue, one for your records and one for Mr Minte. I'm not suggesting that this is what you do; that would be dishonest, you see. I'm only pointing out one of the many possible moves in this game.'

'Most importantly, Mr Minte didn't say what you should do with the rest of the money. So. You pay, say, two dollars a year for your newsletter and with the balance you can buy a typewriter and four filing cabinets every year for five years.'

'You see, Mr Minte is very good and very generous; he's been playing international games for a long, long time and knows what's what. He wants you to have your typewriter and other things but won't say it. Go see him tomorrow and tell him that you'll do what he told you.'

'But you must remember that in dealing with foreigners, never appear too smart; it's better that you look humble and half-primitive, especially while you're learning the ropes. And try to take off six stone. It's necessary that we're seen to be starved and needy. The reason why Tiko gets very little aid money is that our people are too fat and jolly. I wish the government would wake up and do something about it.'

And so, Emi Bagarap, whose self-respect had been shelved

for years, went on giving his friend, the novice, the benefit of his vast experience in the ways of the world.

When Ole left the office he was relieved and almost happy. He had begun to understand the complexities of life. Give me time, O Lord, he prayed as he headed toward the bus stop, and I'll be out there with the best of them.

'A word with you, old friend,' Manu's voice checked him.

'Oh, hello Manu. Long time no see. Where've you been?'

'Watching you lately, old friend. You have that look on your face,' Manu said simply.

'What look?' asked Ole in puzzlement.

'Of someone who's been convinced by the likes of Emi Bagarap. I'm worried about you. I know you and Emi have always been close, but allow me to tell you this before it's too late. Don't let him or anyone like him talk you into something you . . .'

'No one talks me into anything. I've never allowed anyone to do that,' Ole cut in with visible irritation.

'You're already into it, old friend; it's written all over your face. Beware of Emi; he's sold his soul and will have you sell yours if you don't watch out.'

'That's ridiculous. No one's sold his soul. We're only shelving certain things for a little while until we get what's good for the country.'

'No, no, old friend. You're deceiving yourself. You're not shelving anything; you're set to sell your soul no less. Do it and you'll never get it back because you will not want to.'

'You're wasting your time and mine, Manu. You belong to the past; it's time to wake up to the future,' Ole snapped and strode away.

Next day when he met Mr Minte he was all smiles. The smoothly seasoned diplomat raised an eyebrow and smiled back—he was familiar with this kind of transformation; it happened all the time; it was part of his job to make it happen.

'Well, Ole, when will you form the committee?'

'Tonight, sir.'

'Congratulations, Mr Chairman. Get your secretary to write me a letter and you'll get your first \$2000 in a month's time.'

'Thank you very, very much Mr Minte; I'm most grateful.'

'You're welcome. It's been a pleasure dealing with you, Ole. You have a big future ahead. If you need anything, anything at all, don't hesitate to contact me. You know, if we had more people like you around, the Pacific would develop so rapidly you wouldn't see it.'

They shook hands, and as Ole opened the door Mr Minte called out, 'By the way, the INESCA will soon hold a workshop in Manila on the proper methods of collecting oral traditions. It'll do you good if you attend. I'll let you know in a few weeks.'

'Thank you again, Mr Minte.'

'Don't mention it. I'm always happy to be of assistance. Goodbye for now. I hope you'll soon get a typewriter and the filing cabinets.'

Ole whistled his way home, much elated. That evening he formed the Committee for the Collection of Oral Traditions with himself as chairman and treasurer, his youngest brother as secretary, two friends as committee members, and the district officer as patron. The Committee immediately set to work drafting a letter to Mr Minte which was delivered by hand the following morning. Within a month Ole received a cheque for \$2000 and an invitation to attend a six-week training course in Manila. He went, leaving his house in the care of his elderly aunt, who did not understand what he was doing.

He found the course too confusing, but the throbbing night-life of Manila more than compensated for its uselessness. He enjoyed himself so much that on the third week he received a shot of penicillin and some friendly counsel from an under-standing physician.

On his return journey he bought a duty-free typewriter in Sydney, where he also ordered four filing cabinets to be shipped home. He was much pleased with his speedy progress: he had secured what had only recently been a dream. One day, he told himself as the aircraft approached the Tikomalau International Airport, he would take over the directorship of the Bureau for the Preservation of Traditional Culture and Essential Indigenous Personality. Both Sailosi

Atiu and Eric Hobsworth-Smith were getting long in the tooth.

When he finally arrived home his aged aunt greeted him tearfully. 'Ole, Ole, you're safe. Thank God those heathens didn't eat you. You look so thin; what did they do to you?'

'Don't worry, auntie,' Ole laughed. 'Those people aren't heathens, they're mainly Catholics, and they don't eat people. They only shoot each other.'

'You look so sick. Did they try to shoot you too?'

'I'm perfectly healthy . . . except that I stubbed my big toe one night,' and he chortled.

'You should always wear shoes when you go overseas; I told you so, Ole. What's the matter? Why are you giggling?'

'The house looks so neat,' Ole deftly changed the subject. 'Thank you for looking after it; I know that I can always depend on you.'

'Oh, Ole, I cleared and scrubbed the whole place from top to bottom; it was in such a mess. You need a wife to clean up after you. Why don't you get married? Yes, Ole, you were always messy, leaving things all over the place. You haven't changed, really you haven't.' She paused to dry her face. 'I threw out so much rubbish,' she said in a tone that alarmed Ole.

'You did, did you? And what did you do with my books?'

'Books? What books?'

'Those exercise books I stacked at the corner back there.'

'You mean those used-up filthy things? Oh, Ole, you shouldn't have kept your old school books. They collected so much dust and so many cockroaches.'

'They're the most important things in my life. I cannot live without them,' he declared and went looking for his books.

'They aren't here. What have you done with them?' he demanded rather crossly.

'Sit down, Ole, and let's talk like good Christians.'

'No! Where are they?'

'Ole, you've always been a good boy. Sit down and have something to eat. You must be starving. What have they done to you?'

'Never mind that, I want my books!'

'Sit down and don't scream at me. That's a good boy. We're poor, you, me, the neighbours. And food is so expensive.'

'Where are my books?'

'Toilet paper is beyond our reach. It used to be ten cents a roll.'

'Yes, but what has that got to do with my books?'

'You didn't leave me any money when you went away, Ole. I had to eat and keep clean, and things are so expensive.'

'I'm sorry, but where are my books?'

'Don't keep asking me that question, Ole. I'm trying to explain. I'm your only living aunt. And I'm very old and ready to go to Heaven. Don't hasten me along, please. Don't you think that I'm more important than any old book?'

'What did you do with them? Where are they?'

'Ole, I had no money for food; I had no money for toilet paper. I had to eat and keep clean. Stop looking at me like that. You frighten me so.' She sniffed, blew her nose, then continued in a subdued tone. 'I used some and sold the rest cheaply to the neighbours. They're poor, Ole, but they also have to be hygienic.'

Ole stared at his aunt in disbelief. 'No, no. You're pulling my leg: you didn't really sell my books for toilet paper . . .'

'I did. Yes, yes I did. I'm sorry but how could I have known they were so important?'

'Oh, my God!' Ole choked in anguish. He sat very still, breathing deeply, trying desperately to stop his arms from lashing out. Then slowly, very slowly, he mumbled, 'Seven years' hard work down the bloody drain; shit!' Almost immediately the import of what he had uttered sank in and he burst into hysterical laughter, with tears streaming down his cheeks. It was also then that the brilliant idea occurred to him. He reached out and embraced his aunt, apologising for his rudeness, promising never to do it again, and the old lady was so surprised at the transformation that she sobbed with tears of joy.

He recalled that he had Mr Minte's government committed

to \$10 000 over five years. That was to be the start; he, Ole Pasifikiwei, whose books had gone down the drain, would henceforth go after the whales of the ocean. If he were to beg, he informed himself, he might as well do it on the grand scale. He therefore sent Mr Minte an urgent letter and was soon rewarded with the arrival of Dr Andrew Wheeler, a razor-sharp expert upon whose advice Ole instituted the National Council for Social, Economic, and Cultural Research, bagging chiefs, ministers of state, top-flight clergymen, wives of VIPs, and his old friend, Emi Bagarap, into honorary office-holding positions, with himself as full-time secretary. Then Dr Wheeler devised a comprehensive four-year research program and despatched professionally-worded letters to the INESCA, the Forge Foundation, the Friends of South Sea Natives, the Third World Conservation Commission, and the Konshu Fish and Forestry Institute for \$400 000 funding.

A little later, and again with the skilled connivance of his indispensable Dr Wheeler, Ole expanded by creating eighteen other national committees and councils with specific, aid-worthy objectives, and designed irresistibly attractive projects and schemes to be funded from international sources. And he capped it all by succeeding in getting his groups placed by the Great International Organisation on the list of the Two Hundred Least Developed Committees—those in need of urgent, generous aid.

After six years Ole had applied for a total of \$14 million for his organisations, and his name had become well known in certain influential circles in Brussels, The Hague, Bonn, Geneva, Paris, London, New York, Washington, Wellington, Canberra, Tokyo, Peking, and Moscow, as well as in such regional laundry centres as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Suva, and Noumea.

And the University of the Southern Paradise, whose wise, wily leaders saw in the man a great kindred talent that matched their own, bestowed upon him honorary doctoral degrees in Economics, Divinity, and Philosophy, although that learned institution had no philosophy of any kind, colour, or creed.

With fame and honour to his name, Ole Pasifikiwei immersed himself totally in the supreme task of development through foreign aid, relishing the twists and turns of international funding games. He has since shelved his original sense of self-respect and has assumed another, more attuned to his new, permanent role as a first-rate, expert beggar.