

*Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga.* By Noel Rutherford. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1971. Australian price: \$9.

SHIRLEY WALDEMAR BAKER was one of the most colourful and controversial figures in the South Pacific during the latter part of last century. Born in England in the 1830s, his origins somewhat obscure apart from his own romantic fabrications, Baker emigrated to Australia during the gold rushes and arrived in 1852. Though his formal education had been meagre he was naturally gifted and was received into the ministry of the Methodist Church in 1860 and sent as a missionary to Tonga later the same year.

There he quickly attracted the attention of the King of Tonga, George Tupou I, who befriended him and turned to him often for advice on political matters. On King George's request Baker drew up the 1862 Code of Laws. After a period of three years absence from Tonga, he returned to the group in 1869 as chairman of the mission. At this stage his association with King George became more intimate as the latter increasingly relied on him not merely as political, financial and spiritual adviser, but even made him his personal physician.

Baker gave wholehearted support to King George and the Tongan people in their struggle to establish a viable government and to maintain their independent sovereignty in the face of mounting threats from the great powers. He drew up the 1875 Constitution and negotiated the treaty with Germany in 1876. At the same time he made many enemies. Under pressure from various quarters, the Mission Board in Sydney recalled him from Tonga in 1879. Baker decided to resign from the Methodist ministry and, in 1880, returned to Tonga where King George made him his Prime Minister, which position he held for ten years. During the stormy period of his premiership Baker tried hard to maintain Tonga's political sovereignty. At the same time he seemed determined to undermine the credibility and influence of the Wesleyan Methodist mission and the British Western Pacific High Commission, both of which he regarded as his enemies.

In 1881 he nationalized education thereby setting up a government school system as rival to the mission's, and in 1885 he established the Free Church of Tonga to become autonomous of the Wesleyan Methodist Overseas Mission. After an abortive attempt on his life in 1887, Baker convinced the King that it had been a Wesleyan plot and this led to wholesale persecution of the Wesleyans and to the execution of six men found guilty of attempted murder. Meanwhile he had provoked bitter reactions from European settlers and sections of the Tongan community by his rigorous law enforcement and by the imposition of what they regarded as burdensome taxes. Finally he antagonized the British Western Pacific High Commission by his efforts to undermine British influence in Tonga and his overtures to the Germans. When he tried to implicate the British officials in Tonga in the attempt on his life, his scheme backfired leading to his deportation to New Zealand by the Western Pacific High Commissioner in 1890. He later returned to live in Tonga in 1898 and his final public involvement was to establish the Anglican mission there. He died in comparative obscurity in 1903, almost completely deprived of the wealth, honour and respect which he had once enjoyed.

The title of the author's Ph.D. Thesis, 'Shirley Baker and the Kingdom of Tonga', would have been far more appropriate for the content of the book than *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, since Baker is the central theme of the book and the discussion of King George is only marginal.

The author's main purpose in this book is to set Baker's record straight by exposing the unfairness on the part of Baker's critics and opponents whose writings tended to show Baker in an entirely unfavourable light, and by revealing Baker's positive contributions to Tonga's development. In this respect Rutherford has succeeded very well, but in his efforts to achieve these aims, he has sometimes gone to the other extreme in white-washing Baker and blackening his opponents. While critical statements and actions made by Baker's opponents are always closely evaluated, with occasional subtle hints of mischievousness on their part, Baker's own statements are frequently taken at their face value, and the real motives for his actions left unquestioned. Yet there is ample evidence throughout the book of Baker's habit of fabricating stories and twisting facts to suit his own purpose. For example, the book accepts Baker's version of what happened when he took a request to make the mission in Tonga an independent church to the Conference in Sydney early in 1873. Baker claimed that four of the missionaries, including Moulton, knew of this request which he had supposedly read out at a 'missionary meeting' and a 'local preachers' meeting' (p. 40). This is flatly contradicted in a letter by Moulton to the General Secretary of the Mission Board in Sydney, dated 2 June 1873 in which he alleges that none of the missionaries knew anything about the request until they read of it in the *Advocate*. This letter, which would have challenged the credibility of Baker's version of this case, has been ignored. Because of this tendency Rutherford has unwittingly laid himself equally open to Dr. George Brown's criticism of Baker when he wrote, 'If anything bad has been done in Tonga which is hateful to the world, he shirks it and uses your name saying—"the King did that"; yet it is well known by everybody that he did it. Any good done he takes the credit for it and says, "I did it" . . . .' (p. 163).

Often too, Baker's opponents are made to share the blame for his actions implying that what Baker did was a reaction to what the others had done or said, and usually the reasons for their actions are conveniently left out, leaving the impression that they were the real culprits and Baker was the victim of their intrigues. Examples of these may be found on pages 59, 137 and 159.

In the conclusion of the book the author makes the claim that 'Baker wrought a revolution of tremendous significance in Tonga. Under his guidance a tribal, quasi-feudal society was transformed into a modern constitutional state; government by the whim of the powerful was replaced by the rule of law . . . .' (p. 177).

True, Baker made a valuable contribution to Tonga's development, but this must be placed in perspective, for Baker never 'wrought a revolution'. The unification of Tonga began with King George's assumption of the rulership of Ha'apai in 1820, continued with his being made ruler of Vava'u in 1833 and Tu'i Kanokupolu in 1845, and was completed by the end of the last civil war in Tonga in 1852—eight years before Baker's arrival in Tonga. The introduction of the rule of law

began with the first written Code of Laws in 1839 which was revised in 1850. These two Codes of laws were the basis of constitutional development in Tonga. Baker helped King George to continue these developments quite effectively, but he did not initiate a revolution. All the necessary groundwork had been successfully laid by King George with the assistance of other missionaries before Baker's time, and yet the contributions of some of these missionaries who were close advisers to the King in the 1850s and early 1860s, such as Thomas West and Thomas Adams, are not mentioned.

There are unsubstantiated statements and a number of factual and typographical errors in the book, but most of them occur in the introductory chapter which was not Rutherford's main area of research. However, one wonders whether, in fact, this was the last chapter to be written and that some of the facts in it were manipulated consciously or unconsciously to render support to unsubstantiated statements in later chapters. For example, King George is said to have suppressed the title 'Tu'i Ha'atakalaua altogether (p. 12). This erroneous statement gives support to a later unsubstantiated statement that 'Tungi's involvement in the movement had revived the traditional rivalry between Tungi's lineage, the Ha'a Takalaua, and the lineage of the king, Ha'a Tu'i Kanokupolu' (p. 117).

Actually the title of Tu'i Ha'atakalaua went out of existence with the death of Mulikiha'amea in 1799 (not 1797 as stated in the book), only two years after the birth of King George. The reason for this was that it no longer served the purpose for which it had been created, i.e., the shouldering of the responsibilities of the *hau*. These responsibilities had passed on to the Tu'i Kanokupolu and the position of Tu'i Ha'atakalaua had just become redundant. King George had no need to suppress it. There has never been any traditional rivalry between the Tu'i Ha'atakalaua and the Tu'i Kanokupolu lines. Tungi himself supported King George by joining the Wesleyan mission in 1850 (p. 10), and also sided with him during the last civil war in 1852.

Tāufa'āhau's campaign against heathenism in Ha'apai in 1829 and 1830 is confused with what the missionaries called 'the new Pentecost' (p. 9) which did not begin until 1834, first in Vava'u, later spreading to Ha'apai and the rest of Tonga. The Rev. John Thomas had begun work in Ha'apai in 1830, and King George was baptized in 1831, but there was still strong resistance to Christianity in the group in 1833. So the statement that 'Thomas hastened to Ha'apai to baptize the entire population' is misleading and confusing.

Similarly it is stated (p. 10) that 'The Tu'i Tonga, Tupou's old enemy, Laufilitonga, proved more refractory and in 1848 became a convert to Roman Catholicism. He was supported by the people of Pea and Houma and in 1852 these villages revolted.' The Roman Catholic mission was established at Pea in 1842 and at Houma soon after. These were the centres of the Ha'a Havea chiefs, the traditional enemies of King George and his father in Tongatapu. Laufilitonga resisted Catholicism until 1848, and was not baptized until 1851. He had, in fact, nothing to do with the revolt of 1852.

Again we are told that Tāufa'āhau went to Vava'u in 1831 with a fleet of war canoes, 'and by a combination of theological argument and armed threat converted the ruler, 'Ulukālala' (p. 9). Yet as early as 1828

'Ulukālala Tuapasi had asked for a missionary of his own, but none had been available. The occasion of King George's visit in 1831 was in response to 'Ulukālala's invitation to a canoe race, a popular sport among the leading chiefs of the time. While King George may certainly have persuaded 'Ulukālala to accept a Tongan teacher until a missionary became available, there is no evidence for suggesting that 'Ulukālala was converted under armed threat.

Some Tongan words are wrongly spelled, such as Ale'amotu'a instead of Aleamotu'a, Ha'eha'etahi instead of Haehaetahi, and Ulukālala instead of 'Ulukālala. King Josiah is said to be an uncle instead of a great uncle of King George (p. 57); Queen Sālote College is alleged to have existed (pp. 146, 147) several decades before it actually came into being; and the independence of Samoa was granted by New Zealand in 1946 (p. 177), instead of 1962.

In spite of the above minor criticisms, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*, is a unique contribution to our knowledge of this critical and exciting period of development in Tonga. For the first time the controversial and most interesting story of S. W. Baker is told in great detail and depth, often with rare insight into the intricacies of Tongan politics, religious conflicts, international rivalries and individual personalities, based on extensive and scholarly research making use of a mass of hitherto untouched primary sources. The book is written in an absorbing style. It is well organised, carefully documented, and has a good bibliography.

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