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The Grand Old Man and the Prince of Thieves

Anurag Subramani

At the Old Suva Cemetery, overlooking the Tamavua-i-wai bridge, lies grave no. 7193, unadorned and ordinary-looking, without any form of inscription. No flowers are resting on its deck, as there is on the surrounding graves, and the prison officer who located it said that no one, as far as he can remember, has visited the site. However, this unremarkable and forgotten grave does not belong to any ordinary individual. It is that of TL Francoeur, one of the most extraordinary men who lived in Suva in the early 1900s.

Thomas Le Clair De Francoeur was a descendant of a French ducal family. During the French Revolution, his father, Joseph Le Clair De Francoeur, who was Duc de Francoeur of Navarre, fled France and took refuge in England. Being a close friend of the Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father, he settled in Kent.¹ Joseph later immigrated to Canada and married Mary Ann Le Clair De Francoeur, née Badwin. Thomas Le Clair De Francoeur was born in La Roche, Quebec, Canada, on 15 January 1829.² Francoeur received training as a cabinetmaker at an early age. In his obituary, the *New Zealand Herald* said that he became so skilful that, at the age of 16, his employer sent him to England 'to execute some particularly fine and delicate work in a church in London'.³ Francoeur impressed everyone

1 *Auckland Star*, 1 December 1925.

2 Thomas Le Clair De Francoeur, marriage certificate, District of Auckland, 23 July 1925.

3 *New Zealand Herald*, 1 December 1925.

with the quality of his work, and he was commissioned to undertake more projects around England. Thus began a life of travel and adventure that would take him to many parts of the globe and have him participate in many important events.

On 2 February 1852, Francoeur was in Paris at the invitation of writer Alexandre Dumas to attend the premiere of the stage adaption of his *La Dame aux Camélias* (*The Lady with the Camellias*) at the Théâtre du Vaudeville. Many years later, on Tuesday 5 May 1925, he was invited by Miss Bayly (a sister of JP Bayly) of Universal Pictures (the theatre was located opposite the Old Pier Hotel, the building now occupied by Jack's Handicraft) to be a guest of honour at the screening of *La Camille*. In the *Fiji Times* of Thursday 7 May 1925, he thanked Miss Bayly for the honour and said he thoroughly enjoyed the picture 'which faithfully portrayed the scenes as he saw them four score years ago' in Paris.

Francoeur's thirst for adventure saw him participate in two wars. The first was in the 1879 war between the British Empire and the Zulu Kingdom in South Africa. In 1885, he fought on the government side against the rebellion by Louis Riel. Riel was a Canadian politician and the leader of the Métis people of the Canadian Prairies. He led two uprisings against the Canadian Government to preserve the culture and rights of his people. In 1923, Francoeur also claimed that he had had 'an accident' in the American Civil War in 1862, but nothing further is known about this.

There is an indication that Francoeur spent some time in New York. He was a Freemason and attended several meetings of the Lodge of Fiji when he was in Suva. There is no record of his attendance at Lodge meetings between 1910 and 1918. However, he attended meetings between 1921 and 1924. His last recorded presence was in 1925, on 19 and 24 June. The secretary added the notation 'Acacia 48 NYC' next to his name for the 24 June meeting. Acacia was his 'Mother Lodge', and being a member of that lodge, he probably spent quite a bit of time in New York City. The exact dates of his stay, however, remain unknown. He likely did not become an associate member of the Lodge of Fiji because Acacia was under a jurisdiction not recognised by the governing body, the United Grand Lodge of England.

Francoeur spent several years in Vancouver, Canada, before making the trip to the Pacific. *Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory* for 1889 lists a 'Francoeur, T.' as a mill hand for Muirhead & Mann,

but it is not clear if it is the same individual.⁴ The *Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory* for 1890 lists a 'Francoeur, L. T.' as a woodcarver for Cassady and Company.⁵ *Williams' Vancouver and New Westminster Cities Directory 1890* also lists 'Francoeur, T. L.' as an artistic woodworker at 317 Pender.⁶ The 1890 records are almost certainly of Francoeur. Francoeur also suffixed his name with 'Late of Vancouver, B.C.' in his *Fiji Times* ads in 1910.

Francoeur arrived in Suva from Vancouver on the *Aorangi* on 25 November 1908. He later stated that he had intended to go from North America to Auckland but stayed in Suva because he fell in love with the place. Francoeur also said that he spent time on several other islands but makes no mention of the names.

On arrival, Francoeur established two companies in Suva: the Suva Funeral Parlour, which supplied caskets, coffins and a hearse service, and the Fiji Novelty Works, his furniture business. We learn much about Francoeur during his time at Suva from advertisements, letters to the editor, and the minutes of the Suva Municipal Council meetings in the *Fiji Times* between 1908 and 1925. Francoeur had a penchant for announcing the minor aspects of his life in the papers. Perhaps his most memorable attribute was his great sense of humour. His ads and his encounters with people were never short of fun and drama. The items from the *Fiji Times* provide insight into the man and his life and reveal his rapier wit. Francoeur was also not afraid of verbal jousts with those who offended him in face-to-face encounters and the media.

On Saturday 15 January 1910, Francoeur announced in the *Fiji Times* that he would not be found at his place of business as he was 'taking a day off' to celebrate his 76th birthday. The *Fiji Times* said that Francoeur was a Canadian of French-Scotch descent and combined the volatility of the one race with the stability of the other to a very unusual degree.

4 *Henderson's British Columbia gazetteer and directory: Including a complete classified business directory of British Columbia for the year 1889* (Victoria, British Columbia: LG Henderson, 1889), 457.

5 *Henderson's British Columbia gazetteer and directory: Containing complete street and alphabetical directories of the cities Vancouver and Victoria and a complete classified business directory* (Victoria, British Columbia: LG Henderson, 1890), 315.

6 Thomas Draper, *Williams' Vancouver & New Westminster cities directory, 1890, containing general provincial information* (Vancouver: RT Williams, 1890), 105.

The *Fiji Times* issue of Wednesday 27 July 1910 notified the public that Francoeur intended to construct a modern and ‘unique’ two-storey building at the corner of Murray and Pratt streets, next to his existing premises. The ground floor was to have a ‘grand dining area’ for around 32 patrons and would be a place where ‘a busy man can get an appetising “snack” at any hour’. The upstairs would house the showroom or ‘Arcade’ stocked with ‘groceries, hardware, cutlery, silver, paint and glass and [chinaware]’. Francoeur also planned to have a photographic studio, an ‘imposing picture gallery’, and ‘18 airy cool and inviting double [bedrooms]’. The two floors were to be connected by a grand staircase. The staircase entrance was to be called the bazaar room and ‘fitted either side with stalls of ornamental and useful articles ranging in value from 1s. to 5s’. Francoeur intended to make his new establishment ‘quite the best thing in Suva in all departments’. The *Fiji Times* said that although old in years, Francoeur was in ‘excellent health and in energy and [could] give most of our young men long odds and then beat them “hands down”’.

In 1911 Francoeur placed an ad in the *Fiji Times* that first appeared on Tuesday 10 January and that ran for the next few weeks, in which he sought a first-class cabinetmaker for his business, the Fiji Novelty Works. He offered 15/- per day in wages and said that the prospective employee had to be a ‘good all around man’ and that ‘no lazy bone need apply’.

In the *Fiji Times* issue of Tuesday 28 February 1911, Francoeur announced that the Fiji Novelty Works had opened a new showroom in Victoria Parade with ‘a very handsome and attractive display’. He also said he had ‘useful and ornamental articles in various woods, the specialising being work in Yaka, which should be seen to be appreciated’.

On Thursday 27 April 1911, the *Fiji Times* ran an article that said a vacant plot of land opposite the Cable Office, which weeds had long overrun, had been cleared and the rustic kern removed. It noted that there had been rumours in town that Mr Francoeur had obtained a 10-year lease of a portion of the land, and he intended to erect a two-storey building.

In 1913, Francoeur took out a full-page ad in the *Fiji Times* announcing a ‘Grand Exhibition and Discount Sale’. With his usual wit and eccentricity, the ad read: ‘Ladies, don’t forget to come and see the old man. He is not dead yet; the Town Board has not been able to kill him; he is too tough for them all.’ The exhibition opened on Wednesday 5 July and closed on Saturday 5 August.

Another ad from 18 February 1913 read: 'The Town Council having cut their weeds in Pratt Street, MR DE FRANCOEUR has CUT his PRICES at his wonderful Clearance Sale of BEAUTIFUL FURNITURE.'

An item in the *Fiji Times* from 12 July of the same year informed readers that Francoeur '[did] not consider it necessary to do more than to announce in his advertisement that his factory [was] running at high speed all the time'.

Francoeur's most over-the-top advertisement appeared in the Saturday 13 August 1910 issue of the *Fiji Times* as a four-page supplement. In it, 'Professor T. L. de Francoeur' provided a complete catalogue of his services, products and prices. He offered to give a free coffin to all, 'white or coloured', who had lost a family member and were 'too poor to pay for a coffin', as long as they were able to satisfy him that they were 'respectable and worthy people'. Francoeur warned patrons not to trust 'bogus and hypocrite agents', claiming that due to his 'sixty-three years of reverent and careful attention to all the different points of funeral undertaking, and the study of the embalming of the body, from the old Egyptian dates down to the present time', he was 'the only reliable and responsible funeral contractor and conductor in Suva, or in any other place on the Pacific'.

Francoeur took a keen interest in the municipal affairs of Suva. Mr WH Johnson's resignation as a town councillor in 1911 presented him with an opportunity to put his interest to practical action. Francoeur announced his intention to stand as a candidate in the *Fiji Times* (Tuesday 21 March) and said he would address the ratepayers at the Town Hall at 8 pm on Saturday 25 March. On 25 March, the returning officer, WM Good, announced that an extraordinary election of a member for the municipal council of Suva was set to take place on Tuesday 28 March 1911, at the Town Hall between 10 am and 2 pm. He provided a list of the candidates vying for the vacant seat: Joseph Harper, nominated by Robert Crompton and Arthur J Ratford; S Porges, nominated by SL Lazarus and HM Scott; and TL De Francoeur, put forward by Arthur H Ogilvie and Arthur G Griffiths (he was the son of *Fiji Times*' founder, George L Griffiths).

Francoeur's meeting on the evening of 25 March was marked by an overbrimming of laughter, cheers and jeers. The event more resembled a night at a comedy club than a gathering of concerned ratepayers and the *Fiji Times* in their issue of Tuesday 28 March 1911 aptly headlined it, 'Fun Fast and Furious'.

The audience began filling up the hall at an early hour to the accompaniment of music by the Weaver's Orchestra, and soon the place was filled to the rafters. At the appointed time of 8 pm, the deputy mayor, JB Turner, 'in a happy little speech, terse and to the point, introduced Mr Francoeur, who was greeted in most hearty fashion'. Francoeur wasted no time in getting to his election manifesto. He began by saying that his campaign's first pillar 'was independence, void of all partiality and selfishness' and that he would do everything to benefit the ratepayers or resign. This assurance brought cheers and applause from the audience.

Francoeur then went to the heart of his manifesto, which was beautifying Suva. He said that he had come to Suva as a temporary rest stop on his journey to New Zealand but had taken a fancy to the place. He said he had been to other islands but considered Suva the 'Jewel of the Pacific' and felt that it could be made even better through hard work and dedication. He said the main thing to do was to concentrate on sanitation and sewerage. Francoeur explained he would upgrade the roads and footpaths, embark on an electrification project and ensure the upkeep of the public swimming baths.

At the mention of the latter, one of his chief hecklers of the night, one Captain Callaghan, stood up and, despite a chorus of hisses and cries, asked Francoeur if he would take a bath himself once a month. This comment sparked a round of raucous laughter, and Francoeur added to the fray by saying that he would bathe once a week if he had dirty work. It was clear who was the star of the show and had the sympathy of the audience, for every time Mr Green and Captain Callaghan rose to ask questions, they were jeered and heckled and told to 'sit down'. Francoeur's speech continued with more promises and digressions, and there was more cheering with staccato bursts of jeers from the two antagonists, Mr Green and Captain Callaghan. The chairman had to interpose several times to stop Mr Green's mocking and taunting. After his presentation, the orchestra struck up 'Marching through Georgia' as Mr J Harper, another candidate, took to the stage but in more subdued tones, without the same outburst of cheering and celebration from the audience that marked Francoeur's grand entrance.

But despite attempts by his detractors to derail his campaign, Francoeur's address to the ratepayers seems to have done the trick, for on Tuesday 28 March 1911, the *Fiji Times* announced that he had won the election, 170 out of the 389 votes cast. The other candidates, J Harper and S Porges, received 156 votes and 60 votes, respectively.

After being elected, Francoeur went straight to the business of bringing about change. At a municipal council meeting at the Town Hall on Monday 19 June 1911, Francoeur addressed a large gathering of ratepayers giving what the *Fiji Times* called ‘a dissertation on municipal matters’. His tone was very cryptic, and he said that he had called the meeting to reveal some facts of what had taken place since his election to the council but that he would not expose everything. With the usual accompaniment of cheers and heckling and the usual dose of pointless banter and digressions that had become the hallmark of his interventions in these public meetings, Francoeur voiced his disapproval of the performance of the council. He said that the condition of the steps in Suva Street, the general disposition of Amy Street, the lack of progress on the development of the Pratt Street sidewalk, the wholesale granting of building permits to Indians and the want of attention on the part of the Works Committee were an indictment against the council’s ineffectiveness.

He also strongly objected to the treatment of his motion to use the Town Hall for board meetings. He gave an ultimatum that he would not remain on the council for too long given the state of affairs. His proposal that he would provide boxes for his fellow councilmen and dump them into the Pacific brought on a round of wild laughter and applause. The *Fiji Times* of Tuesday 20 June 1911 reported that the meeting did not accomplish much, ‘but most people agreed that [it] was better fun than the average picture-show – and cost nothing’.

On Monday 30 October 1913, Francoeur was forced to cancel a meeting of ratepayers at the Town Hall due to inclement weather. However, the cancellation caused more trouble than he would have liked. The next day, a ratepayer calling himself ‘Fresh Air Meeting’ wrote a tongue-in-cheek letter to the editor of the *Fiji Times* designed to rile the ‘old man’.

The letter titled ‘Alice, Where Art Thou?’ described how the writer and his friends hired several cabs and arrived at the venue at 8:05 pm only to find Francoeur absent. He protested that several hundred people waited like ‘ducks in the rain’ but that the proposed meeting did not occur. He said should it be that he and his friends ‘have contracted the “flue”’ due to standing outside in the rain and cold, Francoeur should pay for their doctor’s bills. He also questioned Francoeur’s credibility, asking whether the old man had made an impact as a councillor or if he had been ‘giving us more B.S. (I mean brandy and soda)’. He said that the ratepayers had had enough of the ‘Canadian bluff’.

On Thursday 16 November 1911, a livid Francoeur wrote a rejoinder to the letter by 'Fresh Air Meeting', calling it a slur against him 'by some person from the Suva Petticoat Lane'. He said the letter contained nothing but lies 'against an old man who has sacrificed his time and money during the last six months against a Town Board Works Committee of experimentalists'. He explained that he was at the venue with three others until 8:10 pm, and no one else was there. He signed off by saying, 'good-bye, Mugwump, alias Mudbound, alias "Fresh Air Meeting," alias Hon. of the Suva Petticoat Lane. From your great grand-dad, Cr. De Francoeur, Suva Town Board (Not ashamed of his name)'.

However, this was not the end of the matter. Over the next few weeks, several individuals wrote letters to the editor of the *Fiji Times*, both criticising and defending Francoeur. A 'Voter' wrote on Saturday 18 November 1911, saying that the 'Old Man' was 'a connoisseur of ignorance'. One of the individuals who came to Francoeur's defence was J Harper, who had stood against him in the Town Board elections. Harper said that the ratepayers had preferred Francoeur in the polls and that he was 'grateful to them for their choice'. He noted that Francoeur had 'done more good by muddling', and he admired the fact that age had not 'made the slightest difference in that gentleman's abilities'.

In March 1923, Francoeur stood as a candidate for the third time in the Suva Municipal Council elections (the second was in 1913 when he lost), styling himself 'The Old Warhorse'. He addressed the electors by saying that he 'was only 49 years, no he meant 94 years old, and he felt well and active'. He was the only candidate who canvassed door to door, but unfortunately, this was not enough to secure victory. After his loss, he thanked all those who voted for him – 'thirteen of you with myself, making fourteen votes' – as well as those who made promises to vote. To the latter, he spoke with his usual searing wit: 'they had turned their coats, while others had put on their double faces, forgetting their promises to me ... my most sincere thanks to them changing their faces, and for the trouble, they took to turn their coat over.'

On Friday 7 November 1913, someone broke into Francoeur's private room between five and six in the morning. The burglar ransacked the cupboards and a chest of drawers and attempted to open his strongbox with a screwdriver. Fortunately, Francoeur had put all his money in his pocket before leaving his residence.

Francoeur directly addressed the intruder in the *Fiji Times* issue of Saturday 8 November 1913, mocking him with his usual caustic wit. He called him a 'donkey' and said that the next time 'he wishes to try his hand at his thieving game', he would give him the key to his box 'or something else that he will probably never forget'. He spoke to 'burglars of all denominations', saying because he wished to spare them the trouble of 'carrying a heavy load to Hospital', he would in future leave the door of his room open and the box unlocked. He did not mind 'so long as they [did] not steal any coffins or the hearse during the smallpox scare'.

Although he attributed his longevity to the fact that he never married, the records show that he got married in Auckland on 23 July 1915, to a widow named Armandine Marc Souron, née Corvisier. She was the daughter of Eugene Corvisier, a farmer, and Marie Corvisier, née Monchot. Her first husband passed away in December 1908. Souron was 37 at the time of her marriage to Francoeur, who was 66. She died in Auckland on 11 November 1918. She left no children to either spouse. Her probate papers show 'Thomas' was her executor.

After Souron's death, Thomas may have returned to Fiji, as there is a note, dated 3 April 1919, in the probate papers that nothing is to be done without reference to Henry Hubert Ostler, solicitor for Thomas De Francoeur of Suva. This caveat was removed on 2 July, and he seems to have returned to New Zealand. However, it appears he went back and forth between Auckland and Suva from 1915 to the 1920s. Francoeur never remarried, and during his final years, his only companions were two fox terriers that 'shared his bed'.

An advertisement for 'Furniture Factory' appeared under the 'Businesses for Sale' column in the *New Zealand Herald* (31 March 1916). The sale was of Francoeur's furniture company, and the ad described it as the 'largest and most up-to-date factory in Suva, Fiji, with the best connections in the islands'. The ad explained that the 'reason for selling is the owner is retiring on account of failing old age'. Interested buyers were asked to contact Messrs Phillippe and Impey Ltd., Queen Street, Auckland, or inquire directly with the proprietor. The company that eventually purchased Francoeur's business thought they were getting a bargain by convincing him to accept an annuity, paid in monthly instalments, until his death. However, according to the *Auckland Star* of 1 December 1925,

‘the old man held the best end of the bargain, and drew his annuity with regularity’. By the time Francoeur died in his 90s, he had received a sum that was several times the property’s value.

After retiring, Francoeur kept an establishment at 30 Hercules Street, Suva, that he let out to lodgers. The *Fiji Times* frequently published ads for the establishment. One of the ads said the ‘grand old house’ formerly owned by AH Ogilvie had been renovated and converted into lodging by the new owner, TL Francoeur. Situated between the Fiji Club and the vicarage, the establishment had ‘first class furnished rooms’ and were available from between 6 shillings to 18 shillings per week. Also, it contained a reading room supplied with ‘the best of reading, books, magazines, and papers’, and had a parlour, lounge, verandah, swing, flower garden and grove for use by lodgers. Music was also provided ‘whenever required’. The lodging was for ‘respectable, sober, young and single men or widowers’, and Francoeur stressed that any lodger ‘coming home intoxicated and disturbing the other lodgers, or the peace of others, [would] be turned out without notice’.

The *Auckland Star* of 2 February 1923, under the headline ‘Fiji’s Grand Old Man’, reported that Francoeur had recently celebrated his 94th birthday. The newspaper said that Francoeur ‘entertained a large company of guests and kept them amused all afternoon by telling all sorts of episodes in his long career’. It added that despite his age, Francoeur ‘[could] read easily without glasses the smallest of print’ and took a daily walk downtown ‘to have a yarn with old friends’. The newspaper also noted that Francoeur was keenly interested in writing his memoirs as his memory would not be as sharp in the coming years.

The *Fiji Times* also congratulated him on his 94th birthday. It said Francoeur was in ‘fine health’ and made his way daily downtown ‘with considerable vigour’. It said that he received many visitors ‘at his pretty home on Gladstone Road’, who stopped by to wish him well. The paper noted that like Johnny Walker (whisky), which ‘[had] a reputation for still going strong’, Francoeur was nearly 100 and also ‘still going strong’. Two years later, on Thursday 15 January 1925, the *Fiji Times* congratulated him on yet another birthday. The paper explained that although Francoeur was 96, he was sure he was 98.

Not much was heard from Francoeur in 1924 and early 1925, but on Monday 30 March 1925, he placed an ad in the *Fiji Times* announcing that he was offering for private sale at his residence at 21 Gladstone Road, all his household furniture and a pedestal gramophone with 164 records. This announcement was uncanny because eight months later, he died. However, it seems Francoeur had long prepared for the inevitable.

On Tuesday 6 January 1970, the *Fiji Times* published an article on Herbert Spencer Faddy, a Suva resident in the 1920s, who had spent his last days at the Pearce Home. Faddy told an amusing anecdote about Francoeur – there seemed to be a lapse in his memory, however, as he referred to Francoeur as Le Feveur – ‘who used to invite friends and customers into his bedroom to admire a handsome coffin he had prepared for himself’.

Thomas Le Clair De Francoeur, cabinetmaker, undertaker, soldier, auctioneer, town councillor and the son of a Duke, died at the War Memorial Hospital, Suva, on Sunday 22 November 1925, at the grand old age of 96. He had been ill and admitted to the hospital for a week before passing away. The attending physician, Eric Molesworth, declared the cause of death to be heart failure due to old age. Obituaries for Francoeur appeared in the *Fiji Times*, *The Herald* (Melbourne), the *Auckland Star* and the *New Zealand Herald*, the latter running the headline ‘Death in exile’. He was buried at the Old Suva Cemetery on Monday 23 November on plot no. 7193. Rev. Hands of the Church of England conducted the funeral service. It is certain that his funeral was attended by hundreds of people, both admirers and wellwishers and even those whom he offended at some point in his life (there were many). There must have been both tears and laughter as the townsfolk remembered the ‘grand old man of Suva’.

As a postscript to the account of a remarkable and eccentric individual’s life, the author adds the following. Although the *Fiji Times* (Monday 23 November 1925) mentions a photograph of him in full Masonic regalia, the author has been unable to find any extant photos. Francoeur’s only description is in CW Whonsbon-Aston’s *Pacific Irishman*.⁷ Speaking of the beautifully carved high altar placed in the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Levuka by Rev. AE Frost as a memorial to Floyd, he writes:

7 Charles W Whonsbon-Aston, *Pacific Irishman*, William Floyd memorial lecture, inaugural lecture (Stanmore: Australian Board of Missions, 1970). Available at: anglicanhistory.org/ocania/whonsbon-aston1970.html.

‘The work was done by a French Canadian of Huguenot stock, M. le Francoeur, a tall, very dignified, handsome gentleman with a full set of Habsburg facial fungus, as particular in his work as he was in his person.’⁸

* * *

Between November 1912 and August 1913, an individual named Dwarka, who styled himself the ‘Prince of Thieves’, committed a series of what the *Fiji Times* of the day called ‘daring robberies’ in Suva town and its suburbs. Though he managed to evade the law for much of the time, he was arrested and convicted on four occasions.

On the first occasion, on 30 November 1912, he was given 12 strokes of birch for being on the premises of Sturt Ogilvie and Co. for some unlawful purpose. Despite the lashing, he continued his crime spree, breaking into Mr Porges’s store on 12 December and making off with a gold wristwatch and 2 pounds, 2 shillings in coin. Dwarka was later arrested and appeared in court on 24 December, charged with larceny. He pleaded guilty to the charge, and this time the authorities punished him with 24 strokes of the birch.

A few days after his conviction, Dwarka entered into the service of one Mrs Lee of Toorak, under the false name of Jimmy. While engaged as a domestic servant, he stole a Kruger sovereign brooch, valued at £2, and two purses, valued at 3 pence, one containing 2 shillings, 6 pence in cash. He appeared before Acting Chief Police Magistrate Henniker Heaton on 6 January 1913, charged with larceny for this latest offence.

The police prosecutor, Inspector Barnett, said that Dwarka had made ‘a bold confession of his guilt’, but other individuals implicated would be presented later in court charged with receiving stolen property. Although Magistrate Heaton sentenced Dwarka to six months imprisonment, he suggested that the governor might pardon him on the condition that some European would take charge of him, for you see, Dwarka, the Prince of Thieves, the infamous burglar of Suva, was a mere 10 years old and the vulnerability of one so young in years was sufficiently apparent to the police magistrate. One can imagine 10-year-old Dwarka sitting in the box awaiting sentencing, shedding copious tears to win leniency.

8 Ibid., Chapter 16.

Despite the editorial opinion of the *Fiji Times* that 'he is not exactly the sort of servant the average person is looking for', it seemed Dwarka's case weighed heavily on Henniker Heaton's conscience. Over the next few weeks, he tried to find ways of disciplining him while keeping him out of prison. A few days after convicting the boy, he interviewed his father, Gangaram, a cook, to see if he could intervene. The father was distraught and informed Heaton that he had tried his utmost to reform his son through whipping and various other equally persuasive means. Unfortunately, he had to concede that he had been unable to mend his son's ways.

On 7 January 1913, Heaton wrote to the colonial secretary,⁹ suggesting that something should be done urgently about Dwarka, as he was afraid the boy had all the makings of 'an incorrigible rogue and thief'. He explained that since there was no provision in the colony's laws by which a magistrate could order police supervision, he had no choice but to sentence him to six months imprisonment. However, he would recommend that the governor remit the sentence 'on such terms as he might consider fitting'. He prayed that the governor would pardon Dwarka on the understanding that he be handed over to a European, perhaps a police or prison official as a domestic servant until the completion of his six months sentence. He pointed out that such a course of action was taken previously in the case of another Indian boy convicted by the Supreme Court, who was handed over to the care of Mr Cyril Francis for a year or two.

Records show that between 9 and 14 January, after Dwarka's sentencing, there was a series of high-level exchanges between government officials on the boy's fate.¹⁰ On 9 January, the inspector general constabulary wrote to Magistrate Henniker Heaton suggesting that while Dwarka was in jail, he be under the immediate care and supervision of the keeper of the jail. He also proposed that under no circumstances he be allowed to mix with the more seasoned prisoners, who would impact him negatively. Heaton replied the next day, enquiring whether the keeper of the jail would agree to such an arrangement and, if not, was there a possibility that the Methodist mission could take charge of him. Three days later, on 13 January the inspector general constabulary informed Heaton that the keeper of the jail would not take Dwarka as a servant but agreed to keep him separated from the other adult criminals.

9 Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) correspondence, MP 206/1913; all CSO files held at the National Archives of Fiji (NAF).

10 CSO MP 206/1913.

Later that day, Heaton informed the colonial secretary that Dwarka's father, Gangaram, had expressed the desire to take him to Cicia, Lau, to put him in the service of his former employer, Walter Atkin Hickson. Walter Hickson was the son of the late Captain Robert Atkin Hickson and manager of the island estate. Gangaram explained that Hickson had explicitly asked for Dwarka and felt he was a suitable person to take charge of his son. Heaton told the colonial secretary that, in his view, their primary objective was to get Dwarka out of Suva and all the temptations that came with living in an urban environment. He, however, had reservations about sending him to the Methodist mission station at Davuilevu because he felt that Dwarka was likely to corrupt the other boys, given 'the trouble he has caused in Suva'. He said whatever the case, it was imperative that the boy 'should not be allowed to become familiarised with the Gaol'.

The colonial secretary responded to Heaton on 14 January saying that after their phone conversation the previous evening, he had instructed the inspector general constabulary, Mr Francis, to interview Gangaram further. He noted that Gangaram gave Francis his assurance that he would take his son to Cicia and hand him over to Hickson for a year. He also expressed his intention to return to India with his son after he completed his indenture with Hickson.¹¹

After the various negotiations and assurances, Magistrate Heaton presented Dwarka's case before Governor Ernest Sweet-Escott. The latter agreed to extend his pardon upon the condition that Dwarka be transferred to the Cicia Estate as soon as possible and enter into Walter Atkin Hickson's domestic service for a year. So, having been given the governor's pardon, young Dwarka was released from Suva Prison on 16 January at 8 pm and handed over to the care of one Constable Peni. The constable escorted him the next day to the *Amara* bound for Cicia and handed him over to his father, Gangaram.

There is no record of Dwarka's time at Cicia, but Hickson returned to Suva a few months later with the lad for reasons unknown. Unfortunately, upon his return to Suva, Dwarka absconded. An irate Mr Hickson filed papers in court charging him with neglect of duty as a domestic servant. The few months spent in Hickson's company at Cicia did not seem to have fully reformed the boy, and it was not before long he was back to his

11 CSO MP 206/1913.

old ways. The *Fiji Times* of Thursday 7 August 1913, announced the boy's return to Suva and his most recent encounter with the law with a simple, 'Dwarka again'.

On this latest breach of the law, Dwarka appeared in the Police Magistrates Court on 7 August, charged with being in possession of stolen property. The police prosecutor described how the boy went one evening to the residence of one Mr JH Thompson looking for work. Thompson refused him employment and later discovered that someone had ransacked his son's room and stolen many items. He reported the matter to the police, who, from the information given by his son, recognised the culprit to be Dwarka.

The police issued a warrant for his arrest and later found him in Toorak about to enter the service of a European. When arrested, he had many items, including opera glasses, binoculars, a tin of cocoa, a knife, a coat and other objects, presumed to be stolen. Dwarka pleaded guilty to larceny, and Acting Chief Police Magistrate Cyril Francis sentenced him to six months imprisonment with hard labour and 12 strokes with a birch. However, he said that given the boy's tender age, he would communicate with the governor for a pardon.

Later that day, Magistrate Francis wrote to the colonial secretary, Eyre Hutson, furnishing him with the details of Dwarka's case.¹² He explained that he was faced with the same dilemma as his predecessor, Henniker Heaton, whether to condemn a child to prison 'to mix with criminals and undesirables' or find alternative ways to reform him. He explained that a more significant objection existed, which was 'to his being at large in Suva while such an incorrigible thief'.

Magistrate Francis said that despite Dwarka's guilty plea to larceny, he recommended favourable consideration. As a start, he recommended that the authorities cancel Dwarka's service with Mr Hickson as he was no longer living at Cicia. He also suggested that if Dwarka was willing to enter into indenture to the inspector general of constabulary as a domestic servant to the Officer's Quarters Totogo, or elsewhere at a low rate of pay for a term of two or three years, the governor could perhaps grant him a pardon as on the previous occasion. He felt that this was the only efficient method of dealing with him and that supervision at a police

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station would tend a great deal towards reforming him. He gave the example of an Indian boy named Ramcharan, who had previously been placed in his care for three years after being pardoned for murder.

Meanwhile, a few miles from Suva, at Nausori, an individual had been following Dwarka's misadventures with a great deal of sympathy and concern. Rev. Cyril Bavin, superintendent of the Nausori Circuit of the Methodist Church Indian Mission, wrote to the inspector general of police on 12 August, saying he was disturbed to read in the *Fiji Times* that Dwarka had been before the court again and sentenced to six months imprisonment. He said that the Indian Mission of the Methodist Church had a boarding school for boys at Nausori where several lads 'with equally bad reputations' had been sent but who were now 'well-behaved children'. He offered to take charge of Dwarka for the duration of his six months sentence and report to the authorities at regular intervals regarding the boy's behaviour and welfare.¹³

On 1 September, the governor wrote to the keeper of Suva Prison, informing him of his decision to pardon Dwarka. He said that it appeared desirable to him to extend mercy to Dwarka upon the condition that Rev. Cyril Bavin took charge of him at his Mission School Dilkusha for six months. Following the governor's orders, the inspector of constabulary, Rewa, handed over Dwarka to Rev. Cyril Bavin on 6 September.¹⁴

During his time at Dilkusha, Dwarka had been under the care and watchful eye of sisters Mabel M Graham and Hester J Clark. On 17 December, Rev. Bavin wrote to the inspector general of constabulary, presenting a report on Dwarka's conduct and progress.¹⁵ He said the sisters-in-charge had been very happy with his progress, seeing nothing of the behaviour that had perpetually landed him in trouble with the authorities. The sisters had also been pleased with his conduct and performance in school, stating that he had made good progress in Roman-Urdu, English and arithmetic. They said that the change in his attitude and character was further apparent from the fact that his peers no longer referred to him as Dwarka but as 'Naya Dil' (New Heart).

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Rev. Bavin told the inspector general of constabulary that the lad had given no trouble and was rapidly improving mentally and physically. He hoped that when his appointed term of six months at Dilkusha came to an end, he would choose to remain for a further period. The acting colonial secretary, J Stewart, was so pleased with the boy's reformation that he wrote to Rev. Bavin on 31 December, thanking him for making such an effort. He said that the governor was happy to hear of the positive report.¹⁶

The correspondence between Stewart and Rev. Bavin was the last documented exchange between the authorities regarding Dwarka. There are also no further records regarding the lad's days at the boarding school at Davuilevu, and nothing is known about whether he continued his positive growth. However, the records show that he remained at Dilkusha beyond the six months he was allocated to stay, leaving in February 1916 after two and a half years. However, what happened to the boy after that, whether he returned to India with his father or stayed in Fiji, whether he reformed his ways for good or went back to a life of crime, is unclear. There is also nothing in the records about his mother.

There exists at Dilkusha today photographs of the children who lived there during Dwarka's brief stay. There are photographs of individuals who must have been his friends – Allah Diya, Chimdagu, Rajah, Daniel Wood, Rasuli, Bharat, Mohan, Ram Gharan, Ram Bharosa, Shamud Din, Jhinku, Masih Prakash and Shubrati Jack – and with whom he must have played, laughed and shared his sorrow and happiness. The author laments, however, that there exists no photograph of Dwarka, New Heart.

16 CSO MP 10226/1913.

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