

of a comparison between the past and present condition of the Hawaiians, and between their usages and customs and those of the other groups of Polynesia. On these points I have endeavoured to obtain the most correct information, and have been fortunate in receiving it from the highest and most authentic sources.

In former times there were no fixed laws of succession to the throne, and the practice in relation to it varied. It was, however, the general usage that the crown should descend, on the death of a sovereign, to one of his children, sons being preferred to daughters, and the rank of the mother being taken into consideration, as well as priority of birth. Thus Kamehameha I. had children by several wives, but his eldest son, as well as a daughter, were superseded by the children of another wife of more elevated birth. Even if a sovereign had sons by females of low origin, a daughter might succeed, if her mother were of very elevated rank.

A case of this sort had occurred two generations prior to the discovery of the island, when the throne was held by Queen Keokeolau, who had several half-brothers, but they were of lower rank on the mother's side. There have been only two instances of the accession of females to the supreme power, Keokeolau, and Laca, of still greater antiquity.

Exceptions sometimes were made to the regular descent, by the conceded right of the sovereign to name his successor; and, in consequence, it has sometimes been willed to a younger instead of the elder son, of the same mother, and sometimes to a member of another family. Where special reasons existed for such a course, it was generally concurred in by the chiefs. But these rules were often set aside, and personal valour decided the point. Kamehameha I. was an instance of this kind.

A chief of inferior rank stood little chance of attaining the royal dignity, however highly he might be endowed; but even the lawful heir, if a weak and pusillanimous man, was sure to be supplanted by a chief better qualified. Thus, in consequence of their being many different aspirants for the high office, the death of a king was always the signal for a civil war.

During the life of a king he generally signified his wish in relation to the descent of the crown, and often a council of chiefs was called upon the subject. If they all concurred, it put a stop to any difficulties, and the party nominated succeeded to the kingdom without disturbance.

If the king married a low woman, the right of her children to the crown was always disputed. Hence it was considered of great im-