

persons who possess land, but are not of noble birth; many of these were originally slaves, who have obtained land by acts of bravery, or through the favour of their chiefs. The kawas are those who possess no land, or no one from whom they can claim support. The omatas consist of all the free and well born, who possess the greater proportion of the land, as well as the political authority of the group. The oldest male of a family is the chief of the community, and presides over all their matters: he is called nea. They are, however, independent of each other, although great deference is always paid to the oldest among them.

In Makin, the class of katokas is not known; and the only distinctions they have, are the high and the low. This class, therefore, appears to have been only introduced on Kuria and the adjacent islands.

Wars between the different towns are of frequent occurrence; and in some of the islands ambitious chiefs have obtained the rule through conquests, and made themselves sovereign over the whole.

There does not appear to be any general authority existing throughout the group, even in those islands that are in the neighbourhood of each other, excepting in the islands of Apamama, Nanouki, and Kuria, where there is a king, who governs the three: he resides on the former, and is named "Tetalau." His grandfather was the first to make war, and by conquest acquired supreme power in Apamama. The present king has extended his authority over the two smaller islands, against which he waged a successful war, in consequence of the murder of one of his relations. To this little kingdom, most of the facts in reference to the Kingsmill Group more particularly apply, as Kuria was the residence of Kirby; but from the observations of the naturalists and officers, I have little doubt that the manners and customs of the other islands, with the exception of Makin, are very similar.

On Tarawa there is also a king, as well as on Makin; but it appears that this has only been the case on the latter since the time of the grandfather of the present king, called Teouki. The acquisition of royal power by him was said to have been effected only through a series of bloody wars, which established his authority so firmly, that peace and quietness have reigned for a century; nor has any attempt been made on the part of the conquered chiefs to regain their independence.

The government is carried on after the simplest patriarchal form, the king contenting himself with receiving the tribute due him, without intermeddling with the administration of the affairs of the separate towns over which he rules.