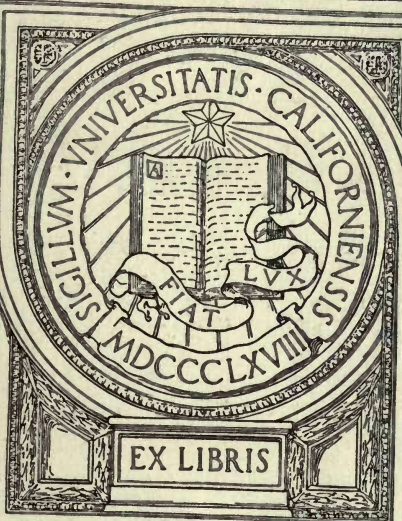


Use the arrow buttons on your keyboard
to navigate through this e-book.



GIFT OF
Dr. C. A. Kofoid



EX LIBRIS

Digitized for Microsoft Corporation
by the Internet Archive in 2007.

From University of California Libraries.

May be used for non-commercial, personal, research,
or educational purposes, or any fair use.

May not be indexed in a commercial service.

MIDST VOLCANIC FIRES

Handwritten notes in a vertical column on the right side of the page, consisting of small, illegible characters.



MOUNT BENBOW IN ERUPTION.
CAPTAIN AND OFFICERS OF H.M.S. SEALARK AT EDGE OF CRATER.

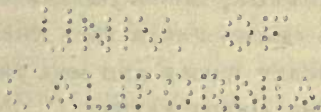
MIDST VOLCANIC FIRES

AN ACCOUNT OF MISSIONARY TOURS
AMONG THE VOLCANIC ISLANDS OF
THE NEW HEBRIDES

BY

MAURICE FRATER

MISSIONARY OF THE JOHN G. PATON MISSION FUND



WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS ON ART PAPER

BOSTON: THE PILGRIM PRESS
LONDON: JAMES CLARKE & CO., LTD.

Univ Calif. Digitized by Microsoft®

PRINTED IN ENGLAND

DV5680
NG F7

To
MY WIFE

TEACHER, TENDER, COMRADE, WIFE,
A FELLOW FAREER TRUE THROUGH LIFE,
HEART WHOLE AND SOUL FREE,
THE AUGUST FATHER
GAVE TO ME.

(R. L. S.)

*Gift of
Dr. C. A. Kipfel*

PREFACE

THE past generation knew of the New Hebrides Islands through the life and labours of the sainted John G. Paton. The present generation is aware of their existence mainly by reason of the novel form of Government that is in operation—the New Hebrides Condominium, or system of Dual Government by which Great Britain and France jointly attempt to administer the islands. Established in 1906, it was an attempt to settle the vexatious disputes between the rival claimants for the ownership of the islands. It made provision for the establishment of a system of dual control whereby every service is duplicated—two resident commissioners, British and French ; two sets of officials, British and French ; two coinages, British and French, with one of them undergoing, during recent years, heavy depreciation, producing endless confusion ; two codes of law, English and French, with a Spanish judge as president of the joint court. During its sixteen years of existence the Condominium has proved a hopeless experiment, failure inevitably arising from the impossibility of harmonising the British and French ideals in regard to the treatment of native races.

M31844

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I. THE FORGE OF VULCAN | 9 |
| II. AN EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN | 32 |
| III. AN ISLAND HEROINE | 61 |
| IV. AMONG THE HEATHEN | 72 |
| V. STORMING THE HEATHEN CITADELS | 102 |
| VI. SAINTS AND SAVAGES | 137 |
| VII. THE WINNING OF PAAMA | 167 |
| VIII. THE WINNING OF PAAMA (<i>continued</i>) | 188 |
| IX. TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS IN EPI | 206 |
| X. SUNSHINE AND SHADOW | 240 |
| XI. THE HUMOROUS SIDE OF MISSION WORK | 257 |
| APPENDIX | 285 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| MOUNT BENBOW IN ERUPTION | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| AMBRIM HOSPITAL, DESTROYED BY VOL- CANIC ERUPTION | <i>Facing p. 10</i> |
| LAUNCH AT ANCHOR IN TWELVE FATHOMS OF WATER OVER THE SITE OF HOSPITAL | „ 30 |
| NATIVES ADMIRING PHOTOGRAPHS OF THEM- SELVES | „ 72 |
| AMBRIM WOMAN | „ 118 |
| EVANGELISTS OF PAAMA | „ 188 |
| CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF EPI AND PAAMA | „ 228 |
| THE AUTHOR ON TOUR AMONG THE VILLAGES OF AMBRIM | „ 272 |

MIDST VOLCANIC FIRES

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER I

THE FORGE OF VULCAN

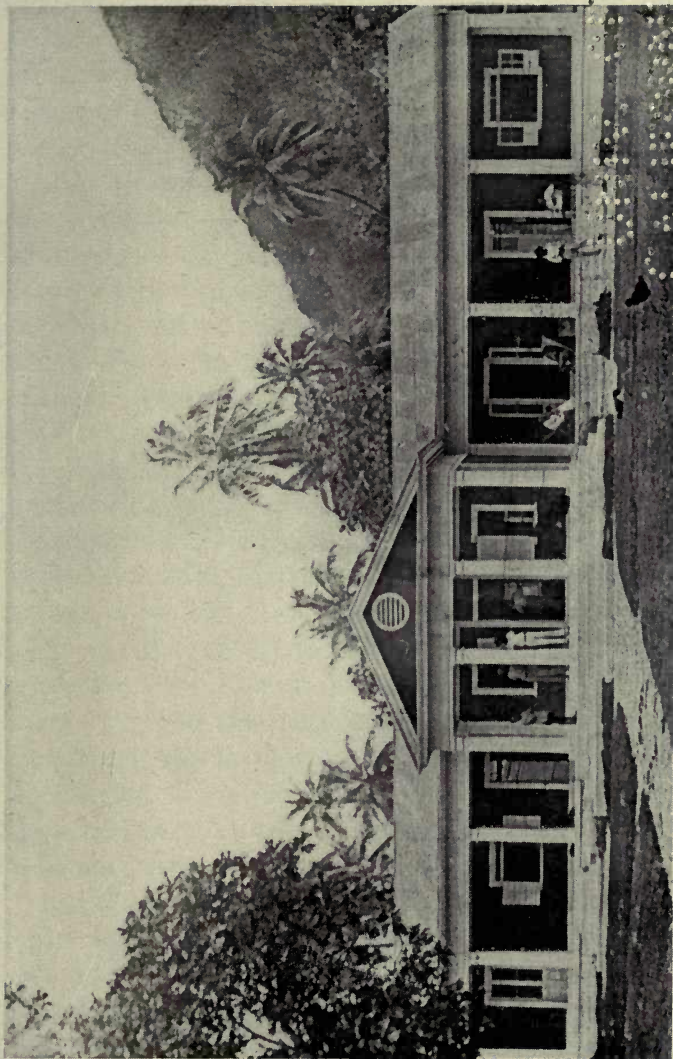
THE New Hebrides group of islands was first fully made known to Europe by the great English navigator, Captain Cook, who in 1774 spent forty-six days among them. Situated in the Southern Pacific, about 1400 miles north-east of Sydney, the total number of islands is nearly eighty, the largest of which has a coast line of over 200 miles. The islands are mainly of volcanic origin; and the line of activity, which runs down the Pacific Ocean from Japan in the far north to New Zealand and Mount Erebus in the South Antarctic, passes through the New Hebrides Islands, its course being marked by the active volcanoes of Tanna, Lopevi, and Ambrim and the boiling springs of Vanua Levu.

These three volcanoes work in sympathetic agreement with each other. The Tanna volcano is the Stromboli of the Pacific, and is the great lighthouse of the Southern Seas. Like a revolving light, it bursts out every three or four minutes with great brilliance. A few years ago, the regular, clockwork

Midst Volcanic Fires

explosions suddenly ceased. The natives became alarmed: they had become accustomed to regard the volcano as the safety-valve of the district, and they had sufficient knowledge of mechanics to understand that the closing of a safety-valve is as dangerous in a volcano as in a steam-engine. In company with a crowd of natives, the resident missionary climbed to the edge of the crater and discovered that the walls had collapsed and choked the "fire." But no sooner had Tanna closed down than Mount Benbow in Ambrim, 300 miles northward, burst out with increased activity. The eruptions of Mount Benbow, which had hitherto been spasmodic and irregular, now took place at regular intervals of three or four minutes, glowing at night with an intermittent fire resembling the flashing light of a lighthouse. For a few weeks the Tanna volcano remained silent, and then, with a convulsive roar, the imprisoned giant broke its bonds and awoke to life. The clockwork regularity of Mount Benbow ceased, and the eruptions again became uncertain and spasmodic.

The medical mission station on the island of Ambrim was situated in one of the beauty spots of the New Hebrides. The hills around were covered with the luxuriant vegetation of the Tropics and festooned with wild vines and creeping plants. In the centre of an extensive clearing, studded with tall cocoanut palms and spreading banyan trees which had weathered the storms of centuries, stood the mission station with its commodious and well-equipped hospital. Under the superintendence of



AMBRIM HOSPITAL.
DESTROYED BY VOLCANIC ERUPTION.



The Forge of Vulcan

Dr John T. Bowie, a wise and capable surgeon and a devoted missionary, the hospital had become a centre of busy life and activity, and the additional buildings which had been erected at great expense during the year by the New Zealand Church had greatly increased the usefulness of the institution. But little did the staff and patients imagine that underneath the calm and luxuriance of external nature the forge of Vulcan was being set up, and that they were really living over a slumbering volcano. On the day when the eruption took place the wards of the hospital were filled with patients.

In the centre of the island, about 12 miles from the hospital, stood the active volcano, Mount Benbow, named after one of the British men-of-war which visited the islands in the early days of European settlement. Its lofty cone rises from the centre of an extensive ash plain, 2000 feet above sea level. The ring-shaped crater wall which surrounds the ash plain, like a wall of circumvallation, led the survey party of the H.M.S. *Benbow* to conclude that the plain is the basal wreck of a much loftier volcano which was shattered by an eruption in bygone days, and that Ambrim Island, with its rich volcanic soil, now remains as a memorial to the destroyed volcano. For untold centuries, Mount Benbow had been at work, puffing out steam which at night glowed with a bright, intermittent light. As in the days of Captain Cook, the eruptions were still taking place. There was the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night. So accustomed had the natives become to its presence that the frequent

Midst Volcanic Fires

outbursts occasioned no fear. They cultivated their gardens up to the edge of the ash plain near the base of the volcano, and some natives who had climbed to the mouth of the crater with bunches of cocoanuts—the usual peace-offering to the spirit of the volcano—had reported that all was well. But all unknown to the natives, and to the British and French settlers who had their homes in Ambrim, there stretched from east to west a belt of volcanic fracture, which was studded with a series of extinct craters, occasional puffs of steam being the only indication of the pent-up fire beneath.

In December 1913, the age-long sleep of these extinct craters was broken, and the imprisoned giants awoke to life. From numerous thunder-throated vents the island was rent and torn by convulsive explosions. The outburst was heralded by a series of earthquake shocks which increased in frequency and severity until the solid earth reeled and tottered. The hospital buildings rocked like a ship at sea; the natives, in their picturesque mode of speech, saying that Ambrim danced. Then, from the newly-formed vents, was seen to rise, dark as the blackest London fog, a dense cloud which shot up like a pillar and spread out in all directions like a gigantic mushroom. In a short time ash and cinders began to fall, making a noise like hailstones and smothering Ambrim and the adjacent islands in a thick layer of volcanic ash.

From the mission house on the neighbouring island of Paama—20 miles distant from the scene—we obtained an unobstructed view of the outbreak.

The Forge of Vulcan

During the day dense volumes of smoke could be seen hanging over the island of Ambrim, but the natives of Paama thought that a bush fire was raging ; and as the islands had been parched by a drought of several months' duration, the explanation was quite a likely one. But towards evening the atmosphere cleared, and the approach of darkness removed all doubts, revealing one of the most awful and one of the most magnificent sights that it is possible for the eye of man to behold. Over an area of ten miles the earth seemed to have opened up, and out of this huge fissure tongues of living flame were shooting up into the sky. In one place, which seemed to be the centre of the disturbance, six volcanoes had burst out within a short distance of each other, and out of these six furnaces pillars of fire were leaping. The entire district was illuminated, and the inhabitants of Paama and the surrounding isles beheld a spectacle such as had never been seen before in the memory of living men. Rivers of molten lava were flowing from the newly-formed craters, and so great was the flood of this liquid fire that no single channel could carry it. High up on the mountain side the lava rivers divided, and in separate channels flowed in their destructive courses to the sea. From the mission house on Paama the whole course of the Port Vato flow, from the crater to the sea, could be clearly defined fifteen miles away. In the darkness, winding among the hills, the track of the red-hot lava was like the trail of a serpent. One can imagine, better than describe, the kind of cauldron that was formed when the enormous mass of red-hot lava

Midst Volcanic Fires

mingled with the waters of the ocean. An Aurora Borealis of shooting stars—really masses of lava at white heat—could be seen leaping and jumping continuously; and to such a height was the column of steam shot up that it seemed as if a new volcano had burst out on the sea-shore. During the night the six volcanoes stood out clear and distinct, presenting a magnificent spectacle. Outbursts continued without intermission during the entire night; and with every explosion enormous masses of molten lava—red, white, and glistening—were hurled to a great height. Some of the glowing missiles fell back into the crater; but the others, thick and fast as snowflakes, fell on the upper reaches of the cones, maintaining an incessant fusillade, and forming a display of fireworks such as is given to few mortals to behold. As night wore on, the awful fight waxed hotter and hotter; the explosions became louder and more frequent, until it seemed as if the ground on Paama was about to open. The sight was truly magnificent; but the thought that the rivers of lava, in their destructive courses, might be overrunning the native villages that lay scattered around the base of the mountain, made the display far from attractive. Several times during the night the question was asked between missionary and trader, “How were the natives faring?” We never dreamed of the hospital being in danger. It seemed as if the outburst were between us and the mission station.

A heavy sea on the beach of Paama prevented an immediate departure; but as soon as our motor-

The Forge of Vulcan

boats could be launched we set off to the rescue. Long before the coast of Ambrim was reached, we could see crowds of natives assembled on the long stretch of sand near the Pansileo boat-landing waving branches of trees as a signal for us to approach. The people were all terror-stricken. They had come from the fire zone around Port Vato, and were waiting a chance of escape by boats from Paama or Malekula. Their place of refuge was clear of the fire zone, and was comparatively safe; but we could see to what straits the poor people had been put. Their houses and belongings had been buried deep in ash and scoria. Every green leaf was stripped or scorched from the trees, and the Ambrim bush resembled a winter scene on a dark November day in England. The land was a very desolation to behold. The place at which they were congregated seemed in no immediate danger; and, with the promise that we would return and rescue them later, we set off with all possible speed for the hospital district, where the people were in the greatest danger.

The journey down the Ambrim coast was fearsome in the extreme. A heavy pall of livid smoke lay over the island, ash and cinders were falling all around, and the sea was covered with floating débris and pumice-stone. Several volcanoes were belching out near the sites of villages. At intervals, tremendous explosions occurred, when all nature seemed to reel. The scene resembled pictures of the Judgment Day which the old painters were accustomed to paint—heaven and earth in ashes

Midst Volcanic Fires

burning. But what a shock of surprise and horror we sustained when on rounding Craig Cove Point we saw a volcano belching out from the hospital grounds! To approach anywhere near was impossible. The sea, all around, was boiling hot, and an island had been thrown up in front of the place where the mission station stood. Running out to sea we overtook a boat of refugees, from whom we learned what, alas! was but too apparent—the destruction of the hospital, and the loss of many people in the inland villages, who had been surrounded and trapped by the lava flows. Fortunately, they were also able to report the rescue and escape of the hospital staff and patients to the island of Malekula.

On our arrival at Malekula, we found the doctor prostrate with malarial fever; but from the nurse and patients we got the story of their marvellous deliverance. During the night the doctor and staff watched the fire and the erupting volcanoes, never dreaming that their lives were in danger. The worst that could happen, the doctor imagined, would be a flow of lava down the valley behind the mission station; but, as the place was encircled with a high ridge of hills, it seemed impossible for such an event to occur. About a mile to the north-east of the mission station there was a lava flow; and when it reached the sea the doctor imagined that, having found an outlet, the danger was over. Indeed, so interested were some of the staff in the lava stream that they went over to have a look at it, and approached as near as the heat would permit them

The Forge of Vulcan

to take a photograph. The stream, like an incandescent avalanche, swept everything before it. Big banyan trees and teakwood giants were torn up by the roots, while masses of rock and vegetation were borne along on its surface. The molten lava took them up and tossed the huge trees into the air. Falling back again into the incandescent lava flow they rebounded like india-rubber balls. This lava stream was 10 miles long from the crater to the sea, and 200 yards broad, and was travelling at the rate of 4 miles per hour. A fearful cauldron was formed when the molten lava reached the sea : it plunged into the water with loud detonations. The red-hot lava shivered, like melted glass, into millions of particles : gigantic blisters were formed, exploding like miniature volcanoes. The sky was darkened, and for miles around the sea was covered with dead fish and débris of all sorts.

At that time the hospital staff did not know what was only discovered several months later by the survey party of the H.M.S. *Sealark*, that the line of volcanic activity which ran from east to west through the island cut right through the hospital grounds. The erupting volcanoes followed this line of weakness, which was the line of least resistance. Beginning at the extinct craters in the centre of the island, the line maintained a westerly direction, and every few miles a new volcano burst out. Each fresh outbreak brought the eruptions appreciably nearer the hospital, until, in the early morning, twelve hours after the first outbreak, the glow of the advancing fire could be seen immediately behind the hills

Midst Volcanic Fires

which encircled the mission station. At daybreak, a dense black cloud was seen about a mile behind the station, but the hospital staff thought that the bush had been set on fire by a lava stream. While they were watching it, a neighbouring trader, who had two boys in the hospital, arrived by motor-launch, and reported that it was a volcano which had burst out. At the same instant, terrified natives from the inland villages arrived with the news that the earth had opened up some distance up the valley, and the molten lava had formed a lake of fire. They told of villages blown up, of villages surrounded by fire, and of hairbreadth escapes from death. Most of the adults carried children. Large numbers of cripples and old people had been left behind to perish. Preparations were at once made for the removal of the hospital patients. One of them, the wife of a missionary, had given birth to a child a few hours before, and she with her new-born son were the first two to be rescued from the doomed hospital. Another lady, the wife of a planter, had her baby born when on the way to a place of safety. When the patients were being moved to the boats an inferno burst out between the one they had been watching and the sea, within 500 yards of the station. The hospital motor-boat was filled with the more helpless patients, and sent, under the direction of Mr Robertson, one of the doctor's assistants, to the island of Malekula, 15 miles away. The launch had scarcely left the beach when the engine stopped: a valve had jammed. After watching for a little, the doctor rowed off in a small boat, and, locating

The Forge of Vulcan

the trouble, banged the obstinate valve down with a hammer. As he was returning to the shore, the doctor saw his wife with a number of native women and hospital patients racing for their lives along the beach. The crisis had come one step nearer. The speedy Ambrim girls refused to outstrip Mrs Bowie, but, seizing her hand, helped her to run through the heavy sand. At that moment the doctor had said to Mr Bailey, his other assistant, that he was going back to the hospital. They could see one side of a hill belching fire, not a quarter of a mile away. Setting their teeth, they made for the hospital; and when they had ascertained that the place was clear, they raced back to the boat on the beach, while the ground heaved and swayed beneath them. At the boat-landing another problem confronted them. The sea was boiling, and the boat lay a little off from the beach. The doctor thought the end had come. Providentially, a box was found, and, throwing it down at the edge of the water, Mr Bailey and he sprang from it into the boat. The native crew pulled with might and main. They had only gone a short distance when the earth reeled with a great thunder, and looking back, the doctor saw the fragments of his house and hospital hurled into the air. A volcano had burst out in the middle of the hospital grounds, and from the place where the hospital stood a column of compressed steam was shot up with such prodigious velocity that in less than a minute it had risen 20,000 feet above the level of the crater, filling the atmosphere with dust and ash and cinders. At this elevation

Midst Volcanic Fires

the particles of finely-powdered rock were caught by the prevailing winds and carried great distances out to sea. A mail steamer, running between Australia and Fiji, several hundred miles away, had her decks covered with volcanic ash. On the island of Malekula it rained ash and cinders, and the vegetation was sheathed in a thick layer of sulphurous ash. On Paama a sticky mud rain fell—a mixture of condensed steam and ejected ash. The compressed steam rushing at lightning velocity from the newly-formed vent turned the volcano into a gigantic hydro-electrical machine, and generated great quantities of electricity. The atmosphere was charged with it, and every few seconds there issued from the murky cloud flashes of vivid lightning. The doctor and his party, adrift in a small boat, by the side of a thundering volcano, seemed in as hopeless a plight as was possible to be. They continued to pull away from the shore, when all unexpectedly, from out of the mist, relief was providentially sent. A brave heart, over on the island of Pentecost, the Rev. Mr Filmer, of the Church of Christ Mission, had been watching the fire all night, and as he saw the line of conflagration gradually encircle the mission station, he hastened in his launch to the rescue. In the providence of God, he arrived in the hour of their extremity, and was in time to save them; though for a time, even after they were in the launch, it seemed as if they were going to be smothered in the burning cinders that were falling around. So hopeless did their position seem that they actually discussed whether it would not be

The Forge of Vulcan

preferable to meet death by drowning than to be burned alive in the falling cinders. But a swift launch gradually carried them away from the burning zone. Out at sea they met a schooner which had come from the island of Malekula to the rescue. Transferring their load of refugees into the schooner, those lion-hearted fellows went back with the launch into the mouth of hell, in the hope of rescuing some more of the helpless natives. At the Craig Cove boat-landing they found a crowd of refugees awaiting a chance of rescue. As they were making their way into the boat passage, the eruption, still following the line of volcanic weakness, made a further leap, and reached its last stage. Out to sea, about a mile from where the hospital stood, where there was a depth of 25 fathoms of water, a submarine volcano burst out and formed an island 330 feet high. The upheaval caused a tidal wave, and made the sea so rough that the launch could not approach the boat-landing. Signals were made to the natives to go over a high hill to a boat-landing on the other side. There they crammed the launch full of refugees until the water began to lap over both gunwales. Very fortunately, other launches were soon on the spot to relieve the congestion, and for three days the traders and missionaries carried on the work of rescue. About three thousand natives were saved and conveyed to the islands of Malekula, Paama, and Epi.

The two traders of Paama (Messrs Roxburgh and Grube) and I confined our rescue operations to the districts of Ambrim contiguous to Paama, where we

Midst Volcanic Fires

landed the refugees. At the Pansileo and Moru boat-landings about a thousand natives had assembled to await a chance of rescue. They presented a woebegone spectacle: the women laden with baskets piled high with their worldly goods—mats, bush-knives, water-bottles, and yams; and the men with rifles in their hands and the younger children on their backs.

Fortunately, the launches of the traders were fairly large, and provided deck accommodation for about seventy persons; but the mission launch was an open boat, and great care had to be taken lest it might be rushed and swamped. A heavy surf was rolling in on the beach, and the launch had to be backed out and in, while Kalipate, a native teacher, took the refugees over the bows in twos and threes. First, the woman's basket, full of food-stuffs, would be swung up, and then the woman herself would jump in: even the old women were wondrously light and active that day. Then a heathen man, with a naked and painted body, would clamber up with his gun in one hand and a screaming child in the other. The children, poor little mites, were all stunned and dazed with their terrifying experiences, and every one seemed cowed with an instinctive foreboding of danger. There was no distinction made between heathen and Christian. All were bundled together in a great tribulation; and, in the general eagerness to get away, no one thought of the other but as companions in suffering.

Thus, gradually, the launch was loaded until there were forty, all told, on board. I had then to cry

The Forge of Vulcan

“halt,” for there were seven miles of rough sea to cross to Paama. All that could be done to assure the waiting natives was to promise to return at daybreak. As soon as we cleared the coral reef, the launch ran into a big, tumbling sea, in which it jumped and plunged in an uneasy manner. The heavy load deprived it of its usual spring and buoyancy; and, while wallowing in the tide rips, several seas broke over us, drenching every person on board. Most of the refugees had never been to sea before, and many of them wondered whether, after all, it would not have been preferable to die at the hands of the fire monster, than to be drowned like rats in a trap. But the launch bravely held on its way, and the precious freight was safely landed on Paama, soon after dark.

Midway across the channel, a strange and wondrous sight was seen. From under the clouds a bright streamer suddenly appeared, winding down the mountain side, glowing crimson. It was a lava stream from a fissure eruption on the edge of the ash plain. This fiery stream, like a red ribbon, so beautiful withal, continued to glitter and shine far into the night. It lit up the clouds above, and shed a strange, unearthly brilliance over its tortuous path.

On the following morning rescuing operations were resumed, and carried on without serious interruption until the whole company of refugees had been rescued. In the three small launches we succeeded in conveying over seven hundred persons across a treacherous piece of water to a haven

Midst Volcanic Fires

of refuge on Paama. Only one unfortunate incident, happily unattended with loss of life, marred the accomplishment of our task. A native boat, engaged in the work of rescue, was caught in a tide rip, and, pull as they liked, the men could not reach the Ambrim passage until long after sunset. In the darkness, the steersman mistook the passage, and, approaching too near the reef, the boat was seized by the big ocean breakers and dashed violently against the reef. Realising their danger, the crew jumped overboard, and with the greatest difficulty succeeded in swimming ashore. The broken, up-turned boat was the first thing to greet the eyes of the rescuing parties on entering the passage in the morning.

Some natives, who were at first reported to have been lost, had wonderful escapes. High up on the hills, not far from the active volcano (Mount Benbow), stood the village of Meltungan, the abode of one of the largest tribes on Ambrim. The ground all around the village had been ruptured by successive earthquake shocks; and when the volcanic eruption took place, Meltungan was the first village to feel the violence of the fire. Streams of molten lava literally gushed out from the fissures in the earth's surface. Panic-stricken, all the able-bodied men and women, boys, and girls ran for their lives and took shelter at the mission station. Before his departure, the chief of the village had the cripples and the old men and women taken into the church, and after supplying them with food and telling them to pray to God for deliverance, he, too, cleared as

The Forge of Vulcan

quickly as his legs would carry him. On the following day, when it became evident that the hospital mission station was also in the line of fire, the refugees from Meltungan were again forced to flee. Rescuing launches carried them across to the island of Malekula. As the stream of fire which overtook the hospital followed the line of the Meltungan valley, it seemed certain that the village had been swept away, and all hope was abandoned of the poor people who had taken refuge in the church. A week afterwards, when the smoke and ash had cleared away, six volcanoes could be seen belching out near the site of the Meltungan village. There seemed to be no possibility that the abandoned cripples and aged in the church could have escaped. When the lava streams had solidified, though the volcanoes were still active, a few bold spirits pushed their way up to the village in the midst of the burning mountains, and to their great surprise they found the church still standing, and the aged and infirm people still living in it. But what an experience they had passed through! Volcanoes were belching out all around them, rivers of molten lava were flowing on either side of them, dust and ash and cinders had fallen so thickly that their period of imprisonment was one long night, and at times the heat was so stifling that it seemed they must all die of suffocation. But the long night passed. They lived through it, and are alive to tell the tale. The natives believe that their escape was due to the intervention of God on their behalf.

Among all native races the grand and striking

Midst Volcanic Fires

phenomena displayed by volcanoes are specially calculated to inspire terror and excite superstition. The same feeling of superstitious terror which made classical mythology regard the volcano as the forge of Vulcan makes the natives of the New Hebrides regard the volcano as the abode of tribal deities. Natives have no idea of the operation of natural laws. Some spirit or person was responsible. One of the volcanoes of Ambrim threw out great quantities of a material, resembling spun glass, called Pele's hair, caused by the passage of the steam through the mass of molten glass. Heavy showers of those glass filings fell on the villages; and as the natives have a superstitious dread of this particular kind of discharge the sacred men declared that the spirit of the volcano was angry with them. To appease the wrath of the offended demon a number of young fellows were told off by the sacred men to climb the volcano with bunches of cocoanuts, and throw them into the crater as a peace-offering; or, as they expressed it, to make the fire dead. At Port Vato I met some of the men who had been up. In spite of the danger and the terrible climb over the loose cinders and scorix they had actually reached the top and looked down into its awful depth. I could not but admire their pluck. My head swam as I looked at the forbidding mountain, with its gaunt, blasted cone, the dense volumes of smoke issuing from which told of the dreadful turmoil going on within. There was sadness in their voices when they reported the state of matters up above. *Abango boulu mulesi* was their verdict.

The Forge of Vulcan

The fire was unquenchable, and they recognized they would have a stiff fight with the cocoanuts to stop it. When this method proved ineffectual, the heathen natives accused each other of causing the eruption, and began fighting. So that the extraordinary thing happened, that while rivers of molten lava were destroying life and property the heathen were killing each other with clubs and tomahawks !

The Christian natives of Paama and Malekula treated the Ambrim refugees with the greatest hospitality. A committee of chiefs was formed to make arrangements for their disposal among the villages, and the tribes simply vied with each other as to which would carry away the largest number of refugees. The hospitality of the Christian natives of Paama formed one of the most inspiring and most illuminating sights in the midst of the death-dealing experiences through which we passed, and gave us a new vision of the transforming power of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An old chief, possibly the oldest man on the island of Paama, who showed great kindness to the refugees, told me that when he was a boy he could remember a big volcanic outburst on the island of Lopevi, when large crowds of natives escaped in their sea-going canoes, and sought refuge on Paama. I asked the old man if he were as kind then, in his heathen days, to the people of Lopevi, as he now was, in his Christian days, to the people of Ambrim. With a smile he said, "We ate them."

On the abatement of the volcano which had swallowed up the mission station and hospital, it

Midst Volcanic Fires

was found that a lagoon, connected with the sea by a narrow channel, had formed in the crater, covering the entire mission compound. Over the place where the hospital stood was a depth of 12 fathoms of water. When the soundings were taken by the H.M.S. *Sealark* the lagoon formed a safe, land-locked hurricane harbour for ships of shallow draught, though further changes have since taken place. The first time an attempt was made to enter the lagoon the mud around the edge was still boiling, and steam was rising from the entire surface of the water. The sounding-line was kept going, and at 20 fathoms it dropped into the burning lava where the lead attachment was melted. While the native crew rested on their oars at the entrance of the lagoon a submarine explosion startled the occupants of the boat, and quenched the desire for further exploration. It was no place for either men or angels to linger.

The configuration of the surrounding country has been entirely changed by the titanic upheaval. Only by the aid of instruments is it possible to locate the position of any particular place. Across the extensive valley which lay behind the hospital, a range of hills 500 feet high has been raised. So complete was the destruction of the hospital and mission buildings that not even a match was left. Thousands of acres of fertile lands have been changed to barren wastes, forests were blasted, and large numbers of lives lost.

Several months after the eruption, the British Government despatched the H.M.S. *Sealark*, the Admiralty ship for survey and hydrographic work,

The Forge of Vulcan

to the New Hebrides to make a fresh survey of the island of Ambrim, in consequence of the changes wrought by the volcanic outbursts. Acting on the instructions of Admiral Purey-Cust of the British Admiralty, who, as captain of the H.M.S. *Dart*, made in 1894 the first survey of Ambrim, Captain Hancock intended to call at Nikaura and invite Mr Smaill to accompany the expedition. On his arrival at Vila, the captain learned that Mr Smaill had been dead for many years, and so came on to Paama and invited me to accompany him.

From Paama H.M.S. *Sealark* steamed to Ranon, an anchorage on the north coast of Ambrim, and from this port the survey party made an expedition inland to the two big volcanic cones, Mount Marum and Mount Benbow, which are situated in the centre of the ash plain, 2000 feet above sea level. Soon after leaving the beach the rain began, and continued to pour for the rest of the day. A steady climb of three hours brought us to the edge of the ash plain, where, owing to the bad weather, the captain decided to camp. The whole party was soaked to the skin, and, amid the grimy surroundings of the ash plain, we looked as miserable as it was possible to be. Amongst the baggage was a supply of canvas sleeping-bags, and, wrapped in these, we spent the night on the ash plain.

The following day was ideal for the work the captain had in view. Mount Marum, the larger of the two volcanoes, was perfectly quiet, with not the slightest indication of steam or smoke. But Mount Benbow was exceptionally active, and presented a

Midst Volcanic Fires

magnificent spectacle. Eruptions were taking place every few minutes, and, with each explosion, clouds of steam and ash were shot up to a great height. From the H.M.S. *Sealark* the officers measured the height of the column of smoke, and found it to be 12,000 feet. We spent about an hour at the lip of the crater, where I took the accompanying photograph, showing Captain Hancock and Lieutenant Hosie watching the eruptions. Near the eastern end of the ash plain a crater was found still steaming, and doubtless from this volcano issued the outbreak which caused the panic among the people of south-east Ambrim. The six volcanoes which burst out on the first night of the outburst were situated on the extreme western end of the ash plain. The streams of molten lava which issued from them poured down the creek near the Balap village and two valleys behind Port Vato. Neither of the Port Vato flows reached the sea; but the captain imagined that the Balap flow, which reached the sea about a mile to the east of Craig Cove, must have been a raging torrent of lava, and we, who witnessed the awful sight, knew that it was so.

From Ranon the captain came to Dip Point, and anchored the *Sealark* in 22 fathoms of water, just off the new land formed by the volcano. From this base he traced the different lava flows from the sea beach to their sources in the centre of the island. The two flows, immediately to the east of the hospital, issued from five volcanoes within two miles of the mission station, thus accounting for the vast torrents of lava which rushed into the sea. The



LAUNCH AT ANCHOR IN TWELVE FATHOMS OF WATER OVER THE SITE OF HOSPITAL.



The Forge of Vulcan

Craig Cove flow stopped within 500 yards of the beach, and well that it did so, or it would have cleared all the houses of the two villages situated on the sea front. This flow was the broadest of all, being three-quarters of a mile wide in some places. Hundreds of blow-holes were still steaming, while lava columns were dotted over the flow, some of them assuming the shape of round chimneys. Tracing the flow to its source, we found that the lava proceeded from immense fissure eruptions on the edge of the ash plain. The whole scene was a picture of utter desolation, and in some places the smell of sulphuric acid gas was overpowering. Not a green blade could be seen, and from the noise and smell one could have imagined that we were in the middle of a huge foundry in the heart of England's Black Country. In the district behind the old mission station our course was barred by a huge crater which had become almost choked, but was still steaming. Slinging our water-bottles, haversacks, and cameras over our shoulders, we joined hands, and made a path across the loose ash on the inward slope of the volcano. On the northern ridge four other craters were found, and from there we again made our way to the bed of the creek. At last we came in sight of the lagoon which formed in the crater of the volcano that destroyed the mission station, and on its calm and placid surface, where was a depth of 12 fathoms, the captain indicated the place where the hospital stood.

On a subsequent visit I anchored my launch over the place, and took the accompanying photograph.

CHAPTER II

AN EVANGELISTIC CAMPAIGN

MANY people, who form their ideas of the South Sea Islands from the map, are apt to get the impression that an evangelistic campaign among the islands of the New Hebrides would be a sort of hop, step, and jump affair. A glance at the map of Oceania leads them to the conclusion that those specks on the surface of the ocean conform more or less to Euclid's definition of a point. But there is one thing always to be remembered in speaking of the South Sea Islands, and that is, that they are not nearly so small as they look. Santo has a coast line of over 200 miles ; Ambrim, one of the islands we traversed, has a coast line of over 100 miles, with bays and harbours and running streams and mountains of no mean altitude. On these islands are races of people with curious customs and often interesting histories, each possessing characteristics of its own, thus making the evangelistic tour which the Rev. J. B. Weir and I conducted among the different tribes and islands a source of abiding interest.

The weather was on its best behaviour for inter-island travelling. As we journeyed by motor-launch over the sunlit seas, the grandeur of the hills, the

An Evangelistic Campaign

wild aspect of the country through which we passed, with the primeval bush stretching from the water's edge to the summit of the mountains, arrested the eye and excited the imagination. Only a fringe of the islands has been touched by the magic wand of civilization, and the general aspect of the New Hebrides to-day is much the same as greeted the eye of Captain Cook in his great voyage of discovery in 1774. In the short compass of our travels there was a wide difference in the character and formation of the islands, ranging from the ring of upraised coral and the solitary volcano to the mountain ranges which tower to the sky and stretch inland for many miles. Set in opal-tinted waters and clothed with the luxuriant vegetation of the Tropics, all were equally brilliant and gorgeous. Though we were in the middle of the cool season, there lay round the islands an atmosphere hot and sultry and laden with the balmy, indefinable aroma of the Tropics. Cape and promontory opened out as we made our way through the group, but very rarely was a native habitation seen. The only indication that human beings tenanted those primeval forests was the curl of blue smoke ascending, here and there, in spiral columns, from the native villages dotted over the hill-sides.

Mission work has been in progress in the New Hebrides for considerably over fifty years, but at no previous time in the history of the mission has the work been at a more critical stage than that through which it is now passing. The simple and primitive habits of the natives are rapidly disappear-

Midst Volcanic Fires

ing, and giving place to the very doubtful changes which follow in the wake of civilization. A new world is opening before the eyes of the people; and civilization, while it brings many blessings to native races, brings also new and subtle forms of temptation. The Church may well tremble for young and immature converts when the civilization which forces itself upon them is steeped in intoxicating spirits. The new heathenism is worse than the old.

On the three islands of Epi, Paama, and Ambrim, to which the evangelistic tour was confined, there are communities, nominally Christian, but without the stability which comes from the testing of experience. The natives are passing through a stage of transition. They are losing the enthusiasm of a first love, and some of the younger generation who have never known heathenism are longing for a return to the ways of their fathers. The policy of the mission, in its dealings with the people, has been to interfere as little as possible with native customs, unless radically bad. The good seed of the kingdom has been planted in the native soil in the firm assurance that it will one day be acclimatized, and in its new environment bring forth an abundant harvest. In the New Hebrides, the Gospel has won the allegiance of a simple and primitive people, and the task before the mission now is to make that allegiance a moral and spiritual force in their lives. But it is just at this stage where the people are climbing the slow, upward course of the Christian life that the most serious

An Evangelistic Campaign

difficulties begin. The Christian life, they find, is one not of ease but of conflict.

The genial climate of the islands and the ease with which natives make a livelihood tend to foster the twin vices of lust and indolence—the besetting sins of the natives. Most, if not all, native Christians profess to despise heathen customs, but the call of the wild and the lure of the past still possess their souls and captivate their imaginations. Witchcraft, too, and a belief in the propitiation of evil spirits exercise a malign sway over their lives. It is not in a day that people who have for ages been sunk in gross superstition and materialism, and who have never known any restraint in their lives, can attain the disciplined and steady-going character of people in Christian lands.

The truth is, the islands are only wakening out of a sleep that has lasted thousands of years. The eyes of the people are dim and their ears dull of hearing. Their minds are stunted by the manner of lives they have led and the superstitions that have governed their conduct. In spite of their big strong bodies, they are but little children, and the irony of the situation is that their brains refuse to expand as they grow up. The “black man,” with the mind of a child and the body of a man, is the acute problem of the South Sea Islands, and it affects the Government official as much as it does the missionary. In all things, temporal and spiritual, they have to be led like children. They recognize themselves to be weak amid the wonders of the white man’s civilization, and that they need a guide and protector. They

Midst Volcanic Fires

have the child's facility of being easily spoiled, of growing conceited, and of making foolish experiments with a half knowledge. They have a good deal of the guile or power of deceit we sometimes find in children; but they have also the fidelity of children and the affection that no change in outward circumstances can shake. Under Christian influences, they are growing in strength and gaining in stability, but full emancipation can only be secured by a continued process of teaching and training, and many years may have to pass before they can be entirely set free from the rule and guidance of the parent Church.

One of the great difficulties connected with an evangelistic tour in the New Hebrides is the confused babel of tongues spoken by the natives. In the three islands we visited, with a population of eleven thousand, there are no fewer than ten dialects, with differences so great as to be unintelligible to the natives of the different districts. Teachers who accompanied me from one island to another, or even from the south to the north end of the same island, had to speak in English to make themselves understood.

The differences will be better understood by the comparison of a verse of Scripture in two of the Ambrim dialects: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In the north Ambrim tongue, the verse runs: *Nek ome Netuk, lok mikekebene ney mogorten nek omae sisi bocon mu.* In the south-east Ambrim tongue, the verse runs: *Keiko vi Natkuli keke eik vatuko houlu inau na sinau venuko.*

An Evangelistic Campaign

This diversity of language is a serious obstacle to mission work, and is one great reason for the teaching of English to the natives. Already the mission schools are effecting a silent but steady revolution. As tribal barriers break down with the advance of Christian teaching, English becomes the medium of exchange. In future, varied tongues of the New Hebrides will go the way of the language of the Scottish Highlands; and if the islands are annexed by Great Britain, as the natives desire, greater facilities will be given for the teaching of English, and so hasten the end of the polyglot system.

But the native languages are not the barbarous jargon that one naturally associates with the tongue of a cannibal race, and it is well that many of them are already enshrined in translations of the most enduring of books—the Bible. A distinctive feature of the grammar is the existence of four numbers: singular, dual, trial, and plural; and the complexity is still further increased by the use of a double first person plural, called by grammarians “we inclusive” and “we exclusive.” The “inclusive” includes the speaker and the person or persons spoken to, while the “exclusive” excludes those spoken to. A preacher, in using the words, “Our Father which art in heaven,” would use, if addressing his congregation, the inclusive pronoun to include the persons spoken to; but the same words used in prayer, when the preacher is addressing God, would be rendered by the exclusive pronoun, so as to exclude Him, the person addressed. The follow-

Midst Volcanic Fires

ing verse gives an illustration of the nicety of distinction to be observed by the translator of Scripture owing to this peculiarity: "Master, WE saw one casting out devils in Thy name and WE forbad him because he followeth not Us." "WE," in both cases, excludes the Master, and therefore requires the exclusive pronoun *komai*, while "Us" is evidently meant to include the Master, and so the inclusive pronoun *ire* is used.

The native languages are far ahead of the natives. Indeed, there is little resemblance between the people and the language they speak. When first the natives were brought within the ken of history, they were found to be savages of the lowest type, devoid of poetry and harmony; but the language they used bore the stamp of thought and development. The wonderful monoliths which stud certain South Sea Islands bear evidence of a truth familiar to every student of language that, in bygone days, the Pacific was peopled by a race far in advance of the present inhabitants. The savages of to-day are not the ancestral type but the degenerate offspring, and are incapable of forming and moulding the language they speak. A process, not of evolution, but of devolution, has been in operation. Unchecked, during the centuries, a rapid degeneration has been going on. Side by side with this backward trend, a steady depopulation has been in progress which has accelerated, rather than retarded, the devolution of the people.

But in all the islands the Gospel has made wonderful changes in the reclaiming of those people from

An Evangelistic Campaign

the state of barbarism in which the early missionaries and travellers found them; and if the de-volutionary process is to be arrested, it can only be by the regenerating influence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. That Jesus Christ can regenerate and give a new start to even the savage tribes of the New Hebrides the success and progress of the Evangelistic Campaign afford abundant evidence.

Into every village, heathen and Christian alike, Mr Weir and I entered with the same divine message—to preach the Gospel and heal the sick—that Christ gave the early disciples. Could we have healed the sick with the same word of power which was the prerogative of those early missionaries, we should have conferred an inestimable blessing upon the multitudes of sick people whom we met on our travels. But “preach the Gospel” we did—the same Gospel of love and compassion to the rebellious and far wandering, which was the glory of the early Church. To the natives of the islands, with open receptive hearts, it had the same charm and freshness that it had to the first-century converts. In all the villages, heathen and Christian alike, the people received us gladly, and from none had we to wipe the dust off our feet as a witness against them. The Christian villages treated the entire mission party as their guests, supplied us with food, prepared sleeping accommodation, and, in some instances, they even erected small grass houses for our use. On our departure from one village, pretty well the whole tribe escorted us to our next camping place. Repeating the experiences of the early dis-

Midst Volcanic Fires

ciples, the converts accompanied us on our way, and we parted with prayer, commending each other to the love and grace of God. In this way we went from village to village right round the three islands. The campaign occupied three months, and during that time we visited 150 villages, and came into personal touch with over 10,000 natives.

The purpose of the campaign was primarily "to confirm the souls of the disciples and exhort them to continue in the faith"; though on the island of Ambrim, where there is a big heathen population, the campaign was mainly evangelistic. In the mission field the difficulty with the converts is to prevent the initial keenness from gradually dying away in after years. Our aim was to win back those who had become careless and indifferent, to restore backsliders to their first love, to raise the converts to a higher level of spiritual life, and to impress upon them their responsibility for carrying the Gospel message to their brethren still in darkness.

Ambrim was the island selected for opening the campaign. Beginning with the village of Metungan, near the head station at south-east Ambrim, we worked our way round the island, from village to village, until we returned to our starting-point at Metungan. In the south-eastern district is the largest body of Christians on Ambrim, and our first meetings were thus held in the midst of a Christian population. Auspiciously enough, Metungan is the head-quarters of Jamie Taltaso, the travelling evangelist who, more than any other convert, has been used of God for the evangelization of the district; and before pro-

An Evangelistic Campaign

ceeding to relate the experiences of the campaign, it will be well to give a brief account of the life-work of this heroic and consecrated soul.

Jamie Taltaso is a native of Ambrim, and grew up as one of its first-rate fighting men. Having no respect for life or property, his name was dreaded all over the district. Owing to the numerous outrages he had committed, Taltaso was at last obliged to leave the island, and escape in a labour ship to Queensland, where he indentured himself for a period of years as a *kanaka*. While working in the cane-fields he heard for the first time the story of the Gospel, and it produced one of the greatest changes that could take place in a human life. The savage heathen, who would yield to no power on his native island, yielded himself to Christ, and ever afterwards became his willing and obedient slave. The service of Christ became his highest ambition, and he returned to Ambrim with the passion burning in his heart to spread among his fellow-islanders the knowledge of God's love.

Soon after landing at his native village of Lalinda he learned, to his great delight, that a mission station had been opened on Ambrim during his absence; and, within a short time after the distribution of the numerous gifts he had brought from the White Man's land, he was on his way to the Dip Point Mission Station to interview Dr Lamb, the new missionary, and to volunteer for service among his dark and degraded brethren.

Dr Lamb gave him a warm welcome, and, having told him that the whole land lay before him, in-

Midst Volcanic Fires

vited him to choose his own field. With a courage seldom credited to the dusky sons of the South Seas, Taltaso opened a station in the wildest part of south-east Ambrim and amongst a people whose language he did not understand. Soon afterwards, Dr Lamb was obliged to leave the islands in ill-health, and some years elapsed before any representative of the mission was able to visit Taltaso, to see how he was faring. On all sides he was surrounded by a black wall of heathenism; and no one would have wondered if, in the meantime, his own faith had become cold, or even, if he had been swept back to heathenism by the prevailing customs which surrounded him on every side. For some years he carried on his labours amid the thick darkness with but little light to alleviate the gloom and with his life in constant peril. Like a skilful soldier, he attacked the enemy in their strongest citadels; and with the help of one of his early converts, he succeeded in making his headquarters in the heathen village of Toak. No difficulties or dangers ever dismayed him. Amid countless perils, known and unknown, his life was mercifully preserved; and, at length, after several years of patient toil, the turning-point of the south-east Ambrim mission was reached. Village after village renounced its heathenism, and came under the influence of the Gospel. His was the joy and privilege of seeing the good seed of the Kingdom take root and of reaping an abundant harvest. Soon after my arrival in the New Hebrides I set off with him on a visiting expedition among the villages of south-east Ambrim; and from what I saw

An Evangelistic Campaign

of the work which Taltaso, single handed, had been able to accomplish, I could not but thank God for the courage and devotion of this humble native evangelist. In the succeeding years, ours was the privilege of seeing the torch which Taltaso had lit spreading in a blaze of glory all over the district, and of beholding a wild and savage community transformed into a peaceful, God-fearing people.

The various attempts Taltaso made to introduce the Gospel among the heathen villages were frequently at the risk of his life, and many cunning plots were laid to trap him. On one occasion, when he was preaching in the heathen village of Matnissa, a woman's heart was touched with the story of the Gospel message, and she was led to abandon heathenism and throw in her lot with the Christian party. Her relatives were incensed; and as it was the first secession from heathenism in the history of the tribe, they imagined that the woman's action would bring down upon them the anger of the spirits. The chief warned Taltaso that, if he dared to preach in the village, summary measures would be taken, and he would be shot. Taltaso's friends tried to dissuade him from re-visiting the village; but so strong was his faith in the protecting power of God that he refused to be turned aside from his purpose. Taltaso returned to the village, and the chief, true to his word, fired at him when engaged in preaching. The bullet, however, only grazed his skin, and he continued his work and preaching as if nothing had happened. This incident, instead of injuring his cause, proved the

Midst Volcanic Fires

turning-point of the mission in the village. The people recognized that Taltaso's God had protected him from the bullet of the heathen chief, and was therefore worthy of knowing and serving. With a view to obtaining instruction, they invited him to settle amongst them as a teacher and make his home in their village. Acceding to their request, he removed his headquarters from Metungan to Matnissa, and remained there until the whole population was converted.

But Taltaso's predominant impulse was a passion to preach the Gospel among the heathen. So, as soon as the mission work was established on a firm basis, he was again set free for pioneer work. Since then he has laboured as a travelling evangelist, visiting, like a wandering friar, the heathen tribes that lay scattered around the south-east coast of Ambrim and making his home in the village which offered him the greatest hope and promise of success. But no sooner was he rejoicing in the ripening fruit of his labour than, full of hope, he looked out for a new sphere. "One soweth and another reapeth" was the watchword of his faith.

In the New Hebrides, as everywhere else, the witness of a true disciple is a more eloquent testimony to the power of the Gospel than the tongue of man or angel could be. The cause is hidden, but the effect is evident, and the heathen are fully sensible that there is a power behind all. A good life is an argument for Christianity never misunderstood. There is no answer to a heathen man like the life of Christ displayed by a living, loving Christian.

An Evangelistic Campaign

Nothing puts their madness more to shame and silence than the quiet, consistent life of the native convert. The European missionary they regard so much above their level to be influenced to the same degree by the power of his life and example. But when they beheld, as in Taltaso, one of their own kith and kindred, a religion which transformed the outward conduct, which kept the speech pure and honest, the actions considerate and unselfish, which lifted the savage from the ground and turned his face heavenward, then they had before them the living arguments for the power of the new religion which could neither be misunderstood nor gainsaid.

The first meeting of the campaign was held in the Christian village of Metungan, where Jamie Taltaso is surrounded by a fine class of converts, whose zeal and fervour gave the mission a fine send-off. Indeed, it was no small privilege to join with them in a service of intercession for the success of the campaign and in offering to God a solemn outpouring of praise and thanksgiving.

The only drawback we experienced in connection with the first meeting was the difficulty in reaching the place. The site on which the village stands was originally chosen when hostile neighbours had to be taken into consideration. Perched on the brow of a steep cliff, Metungan seems to bid defiance to all who approach. A walk of three miles along the ocean beach brought us to the foot of the cliff on which the village stands. A recent hurricane had swept away the loose earth around the base, and left an ugly, bare precipice. To facilitate climbing,

Midst Volcanic Fires

the natives had fastened a long, stout creeper to a tree on the top of the embankment, and let it hang over the face of the cliff, dangling in the strong, trade winds. Catching hold of the rope, and with the aid of steps hewn into the soft stone, the visitor is expected, like a steeple-jack, to haul himself up the face of the cliff until he reaches the top. Natives are sure-footed animals, and do not mind scaling heights; but Mr Weir and I had not taken tracks of this kind into our reckoning, and looked a bit scared when we saw the road we had to traverse to reach our first meeting. It was like having a meeting on the roof of a sky-scraper. In the course of his journeys the Apostle Paul had a host of varied experiences, but we do not hear of him doing much steeple-jacking to visit his converts and confirm the infant churches.

On the way to our next meeting in the village of Moru, we met the remnant of a pigmy tribe which once inhabited south-east Ambrim. Ages ago, long before the advent of the white man, a race of pigmies lived in this part of the dense bush, quite separate from the rest of the population. During a time of drought, when the whole land was parched, and food was scarce, the dwarfs were blamed as the cause of the trouble, and the surrounding tribes conspired to kill them. Only a few escaped, and the dwarfs we met were the lineal descendants of the pigmy race.

At the village of Moru there was an interesting after-meeting. On leaving the church the whole congregation accompanied us to see an old chief

An Evangelistic Campaign

who is the last remnant of heathenism in the tribe. On accepting Christianity, the people, in order to make the cleavage with heathenism as distinct as possible, left their old homes and founded the Moru village of to-day, which stands in a beautiful situation, with a neat, weatherboard church in the centre of the village. But the old chief would have none of it. With his three wives he remained in the heathen village, surrounded by the painted symbols of pagan worship. We found old Horsham within the sacred inclosure, with his naked breast covered with pigs' tusks and his arms and legs decked with croton leaves; but, without the slightest hesitation, he came out and engaged with us in conversation about the truth of the Gospel. Step by step we went over the life of our Lord, and presented to him the saving truths of Christianity. His fellow tribesmen, too, joined earnestly in the conversation, and pleaded with the old man to leave his heathen ways and give his heart to Jesus. It was interesting to notice the emphasis the converts laid on the idea of the one true God, who made all things, and who loves all people, in contradistinction to the host of evil spirits that Horsham was seeking to propitiate. They recommended Jesus as the Son of God who came into the world to take away his sins and give him a new heart. But a "new heart" was something quite strange and foreign to him. It was like speaking of colour to a blind man. The old chief could only think of it as something that could be got by a sort of magic. We went over the ground of our conversation again and again until some rays of

Midst Volcanic Fires

light began to dawn upon his darkened mind. Before parting, we had united prayer, in which the old man reverently joined.

At the meetings in the Christian villages special emphasis was laid on the necessity of the native converts undertaking a greater responsibility for the maintenance of God's work, and collections were taken up for that purpose. At the village of Matnissa we were greatly touched with the liberality of the Christian chief, who was a leper and unable to attend church services. He was the same chief who, fifteen years before, had attempted the life of Jamie Taltaso when preaching in the village. The first symptoms of his dread disease appeared soon after his conversion to Christianity, but his faith in God never wavered. When he heard of the purpose for which the collection was being made he expressed a desire to make a contribution, and sent the offering by his wife. At the close of the service we called at his house to see him. We found him lying on a bed of cocoanut leaves which had been spread for him in the shade of a great banyan tree. A helpless leper is a pathetic figure. For eight years he had been a victim of this terrible affliction, and every time we visited him we noticed the fresh inroads the disease was making. But, amid all his suffering, he never faltered, but remained faithful in his allegiance to God. A short service was held around the bed of this Christian leper, and in joining with him in prayer we felt that we were on hallowed ground.

The deputy-chief of the village was not quite so

An Evangelistic Campaign

heroic a figure. He complained that the cocoanut disease which was working such havoc with the copra industry had cut away their source of income, and that they had now very little to give to the Church. I recommended him to plant cotton trees, and assured him that he would find cotton-growing a more lucrative employment than copra-making.

"Yes," was the apathetic reply.

"You have plenty of good land, and I will get the seed for you," I said.

"Yes," in a very hesitating way, was again his reply.

"Then, why do you object to go in for it?" I said.

"No use, Missi, no use; the old woman is too lazy to do the planting."

From Matnissa we retraced our steps to the head station at Taviak for the Sunday, when impressive Baptismal and Communion services were held. It was a memorable day for all present, but especially for the thirty-three converts who sealed their allegiance to Christ in baptism. Six hundred men and women gathered together from the various villages of south-east Ambrim. Nothing material was to be gained by coming: no presents were made. Those six hundred men and women were attracted by the Gospel, and assembled for Christian worship and the fellowship of the Communion. The converts represented many distinct tribes. Only a few years before they were bitter enemies. For generations their forefathers had fought, and the men who met with a common purpose that day

Midst Volcanic Fires

had often met on previous occasions with club and musket in hand. Men, who throughout their lives had sought each other's destruction, now met as friends to unite in the fellowship of the Communion and in offering to God a solemn outpouring of praise and thanksgiving. Besides the native converts, there were present English, French, German, Chinese, and Loyalty Island Christians. The Chinese are employed as artizans and storekeepers in the district, and are themselves the fruits of mission work in China. It was symbolic of the world-wide nature of Christ's kingdom that native converts from China should unite with their South Sea Island brethren in the celebration of the Communion. For the native converts it was a great object lesson in the solidarity of the Christian brotherhood to see members of European and Chinese churches seated with them at the Table of the Lord in mutual love and fellowship, and all animated with the same spirit of allegiance to one Master. To the teachers, drawn from widely-scattered districts, the fellowship of the Communion was a great uplift and a source of quickening and encouragement. They returned to their lonely stations with hands and hearts strengthened for the arduous and often discouraging work of ministering to the spiritual needs of their heathen fellow-countrymen.

The village of Taviak, where the Communion services were held, was formerly a citadel of heathenism, and the tribe was very slow in giving its adhesion to the Gospel of Christ. Across the fence of the mission compound there could still be seen the

An Evangelistic Campaign

tall, well-carved images which the heathen worshippers had erected to perpetuate their ancestral cult. In heathen lands there is something peculiarly appropriate in having the central service of the Christian religion in view of the images which visualise to the heathen the dread powers they worship. In some way which they cannot define, these images and the various ceremonies connected with them are but the rude attempts which untaught and savage men have made to draw near to the infinite. Most of the heathen, although they refuse to leave their old ways, will readily acknowledge the futility of their ancestral worship. They realize, however, as truly as the native Christians, that the Communion is the symbol of Eternal Love, and that, in it, God draws near to his people. This accounts for the strange fascination which the Sacrament has for all natives and for the reverent and silent awe with which even the heathen view its celebration.

It is a great privilege to take part in Communion services in islands still largely heathen, where, until recently, the name of Christ was unknown. It is like planting the banner of the Cross in some unoccupied territory, and publicly proclaiming it as Christ's possession. In spite of the fact of a large heathen population on Ambrim, we can never regard the community as wholly given over to the power of the Evil One: and the ordinance, once begun, will continue, we trust, "till He come."

At the Baptismal service twenty-five infants were baptized, and thirty-three men and women sealed

Midst Volcanic Fires

their allegiance to Christ. To me the most striking feature of the occasion was the courage shown by the women. An Ambrim woman, in ordinary circumstances, is the shyest and most timid of mortals. They shrink from anything which brings them prominently into public notice. It would have been quite in keeping with island ways if the assistance of the teacher had been found necessary to lead them to the platform. But their faith and love were equal to the great occasion. No sooner were their names called than they immediately responded, and in the presence of 600 people signified their faith in Christ by baptism.

There is something almost pathetic in watching the rise and progress of a church in a South Sea Island community. For months teacher and missionary had been in almost daily converse with the candidates for baptism. To see them emerging from the toils of heathenism and snapping the links that bind them to the past, to watch their first steps in the walk of faith, to feel assured that the sensual and vicious are being subdued by the spiritual within them, is a sight which no Christian teacher can witness unmoved. The rupture with the past is so abrupt as to divide their lives into two distinct parts. The entrance of Christ into their lives means the starting of life afresh. They are babes in Christ; and though they have but a slight acquaintance with inspired truth they have responded to the Master's message to their souls and by faith have laid hold on Him. Such experiences are a missionary's highest joy. It brings him near to the heart of

An Evangelistic Campaign

things to see men and women, who were formerly savage and cannibal, declaring their faith in Christ and dependence upon Him. Amid such scenes a missionary realizes the power and triumph of Christ ; and the radical difference between what they were formerly and what they are to-day is the best witness to the presence of His Spirit in their midst.

In some islands it has become the custom for the converts to assume new names at baptism—a practice we seek to discourage as much as possible. Their island names are picturesque and euphonious, and our aim is to get the Christian religion wedded to island conditions rather than appear as a pendant of alien growth. But the native converts invariably prefer to start the Christian life with new names. Whether from evil associations, or from a desire to make a complete rupture with the past, very few converts care to retain their heathen names. Their selection is almost always biblical, and sometimes not very choice. I have always a certain uneasiness when a South Sea Islander stands before me for baptism and I have to name him after one of the patriarchs.

At the Baptismal service on Ambrim, after a heart-searching address by Mr Weir, we had a sudden descent from the sublime to the ridiculous. One of the candidates for baptism was a tall, strapping South Sea Islander, in the full vigour of early manhood. As he stepped forward for baptism he put into my hands a slip of paper on which his baptismal name was written. I struggled to keep my balance when I found I had to baptize this hefty fellow by the name of Zaccheus. He was much taller than I ;

Midst Volcanic Fires

and like our Lord, when dealing with the original bearer of the name, I had to ask him to "come down," in order to baptize him. His fellow islanders had difficulty in pronouncing his name correctly; and since his baptism he has been called by a variety of names, all, more or less, distant imitations of Zaccheus. But the effort was too great, and the pronounciation at last filtered down to a name something like Jackass.

When the native Christians were assembled at Taviak for the Communion, arrangements were made for a monster rally at the village of Samio, where a large section of the people had lately abandoned heathenism. In order to make the occasion of special importance, it was agreed that the deputation should be composed of parties from all the Christian villages, and in this way express to the people of Samio their delight at the establishment of Christian worship in the village. Starting from the village of Penaboe, where Mr Weir and I were encamped, our numbers rapidly swelled as we passed through the populous villages on the route. Marching in single file through the bush, the procession, composed of men, women, and children, formed one of the largest assemblages of people that had ever invaded an Ambrim village.

As we entered the defile leading to the village of Samio, the natives pointed out a small crater which might possibly have been of the same size as those formed by the bursting of German shells. Some years ago, there was a small volcanic outburst which had only vitality enough to form a small cone.

An Evangelistic Campaign

However, it lay in the line of fissure running through the island of Ambrim, and might have formed part of a larger outburst. Adjoining the miniature crater was a lava flow which bore on its surface a solitary footprint, as if some man or woman, in their anxiety to escape from the fire, had stepped over it when the lava was still hot and plastic. To the natives it was the footprint of God. Through successive generations that tradition had been handed down. It was no use trying to explain its existence by natural causes. They would not believe it. They approached the place with dread, and spoke, with bated breath, as if in the presence of the supernatural.

The road then led through a narrow defile which, in wet weather, became a water-course. Fortunately, our movements were not hampered by a running stream, but heavy showers of ash and cinders proved a veritable thorn in the flesh. Egyptian darkness settled down upon the defile, and, during the passage, the deputation was smothered in ash. The falling cinders made a noise like hailstones, and it seemed as if there was going to be a repetition of what happened at the destruction of the hospital. The track, for a considerable distance, lay up a trench-like gorge, with walls of cinders, and so narrow that we experienced the greatest difficulty marching in single file. It was no lovers' walk, and the goose-step had to be practised to get one foot past the other. That morning we sang at worship, "Count your blessings, name them one by one"; and in struggling up the narrow pass we reckoned it as

Midst Volcanic Fires

not the least of our blessings, that neither of us was bandy-legged. Approaching Samio, which lies near the volcano, we noticed that the land was formed almost entirely of ash and cinders. In the villages to the leeward of Mount Benbow three inches of ash fell within an hour, and around the village of Samio, cinders, the size of plum stones, had fallen. An evangelistic tour, under such conditions, was rather a nerve-racking experience.

Fortunately, the violence of the outburst was of short duration, though the dust and ash continued to fall all day; but the cordial reception we received from the people of Samio more than made up for any fatigue and discomfort we might have experienced in reaching them. The track to the church led through the heathen quarters, but even there we had an enthusiastic welcome. On the outskirts of the heathen community a large crowd of women and girls were busy with preparations for a feast. One of them was a bonny little girl of twelve summers, with her face painted in strips of fantastic colour. She had become engaged two days previously, and the painted face was her engagement ring—a sign, or rather a warning, that she was the property of some man.

The village of Samio comprises a cluster of small communities, each with a chief of its own, but with a high chief over all. For untold generations this village had been a centre of invincible heathenism. From places far and near came neophytes to be instructed in the heathen cult. The high chief and a few of his subordinates formed a college for

An Evangelistic Campaign

initiating the novices into the mysteries of their order. The fees demanded were heavy, and were willingly paid. Samio thus became a rich and flourishing community and its chiefs the most influential men in the district. It was quite to be expected that the chiefs and people of Samio would oppose the introduction of the Gospel. From their standpoint the success of the new religion meant the overthrow of the sacred shrines on the stability of which the wealth of the community depended. Indeed, so bitter was the hostility of the people to the Gospel that the village of Samio was left severely alone by the native evangelists and new ground broken at more promising places.

When, at length, an attempt was made to enter with the Gospel into this citadel of heathenism, failure dogged our footsteps for years. Not only was no religious service allowed, but the converts were often ignominiously hustled from the village square. The presence of a party of Christians within the precincts of the sacred inclosure was regarded as a pollution, and, to avert the anger of the spirits, the sacrifice of several pigs was subsequently made. At length the time came when all the other heathen villages had been garnered, and Samio stood out alone against the Gospel. On one occasion, when united prayer was made in all the churches for the conversion of Samio, a foothold was gained and occasional services were allowed. But Hilmann, the high chief, again hardened his heart, and, asserting his power, the teachers were obliged to abandon the services, and the foothold was lost.

Midst Volcanic Fires

That was the position of Samio when I left on a recent furlough to Australia. A meeting of native converts was held, when it was agreed that constant prayer should be made on Samio's behalf with a view to another campaign on my return. So accustomed had we become to the obstinacy of the people that I never dreamed of finding Samio anything else but heathen. But God's footsteps are in the sea, and His designs are not always executed by the most likely instruments. As if to rebuke my lack of faith, the turning-point was reached when the foreign missionary was on furlough and in the garnering of the harvest he had no share.

Even in the heathen New Hebrides God hath not left himself without a witness. In almost all heathen villages with which we have had dealings, we found a few souls more kindly disposed than the others, and in whose hearts the Gospel seemed to find a ready acceptance. The village of Samio was no exception to the rule; but, owing to the malignant power of the chief, these Simeons were afraid to let their voices be heard. But they were gathering strength all the time, and the day arrived when they could insist upon the chief granting freedom for religious services. Jamie Taltaso and the other teachers got to work, and by the time we returned mission work was firmly established in Samio.

Mr Weir and I accompanied the large deputation of native converts to Samio, and the reception we received was in strange contrast to the hostile attitude of the natives on former occasions, when scowling looks, a dead weight of prejudice, and a

An Evangelistic Campaign

general atmosphere of suspicion awaited us. I did not recall the incident to Hillman, the chief; but during a visit, some years previously, he would not allow a service to be held, while he himself got up on the stump of a tree, and, in the hearing of all, declared that the people of Samio would have nothing to do with the Jesu religion. With the native converts it was a case of being "baffled to fight better." Now, Hillman is a leader in Christian work, and as prominent in the furtherance of the Gospel as he was in its undoing. A neat and commodious church has been erected, and the rapid progress of the work affords a striking illustration of the action of God's Holy Spirit in the hearts of the people. In the eyes of those who saw the struggle and hardships of the beginning, the hope of harvest was scant; but in the goodness of God there has been granted to a few of those who sowed the seed the privilege of coming again, bringing precious sheaves with them.

In the atmosphere which pervaded the big congregation our meeting could not be otherwise than a success. Nor let it be supposed that the missionaries gave everything and received nothing in return from the native Church. God has given all for each; and even the humble South Sea Islander, emerging from the slough of heathenism, has a gift for the kingdom of God. When the antecedents of the native churches are taken into account, and due regard is had to the scantiness of the opportunities they have enjoyed for the acquisition of Christian knowledge, and the antagonistic influence of a heathen heritage against which they have to contend,

Midst Volcanic Fires

we cannot but thank God for the wonderful progress that has been made.

We missionaries felt humbled by the consciousness that the knowledge of God which had been our inheritance had not availed to make us more devoted Christians. The surprise of the future will be when they shall come from the East and the West and from the North and the South, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER III

AN ISLAND HEROINE

ON the wild north coast of Ambrim is the Christian village of Wilir. Entwined about its religious history are the life stories of two remarkable native converts—Rebecca, a leper, and James Kaum, a native evangelist.

Like many of her fellow-islanders, Rebecca, when little more than a girl, ran off in a labour ship to Queensland. While working with her husband in the cane fields they heard the story of the Gospel from some kind soul whose memory they ever afterwards cherished. The story of the Great and Good God, Who made all things and loves all people, was quite new and wonderful to them, and the truth found a ready lodgment in their darkened hearts. Their souls were kindled, and the current of their lives was diverted into a new channel. Under the influence of the mission school, the raw, uncouth islanders became members of a well-ordered Christian community, and, abandoning their heathen worship, they acknowledged allegiance to Christ, as Lord and Master. While at work in the cane fields they had frequent visions of their own savage island in the South Seas, where their people dwelt, and they longed to convey to them the wonderful tidings

Midst Volcanic Fires

they had learned. At the end of their three years' indenture they returned to Ambrim with the passion burning in their hearts to spread among their fellow-islanders the knowledge of God's love. On their arrival they put themselves in touch with Dr Bowie, who was at that time the missionary of the island, and at his request they took up evangelistic work in connection with the hospital.

For about a year they had been assisting in the work of the hospital, when, one day, the doctor detected on Rebecca's face a slight scar, which made him shudder. For a time he kept his thoughts to himself, hoping against hope that his fears would be falsified. But the symptoms became unmistakably pronounced, and the doctor could no longer hide from himself the fact that Rebecca, one of his best workers and one of the most promising women on the station, was a leper. The mission station was a centre to which came people from all parts of the group, and it was no place for a leper. With a pain in his heart and a lump in his throat, the doctor broke the news to Rebecca, at the same time intimating to her that she could no longer make the mission station her home. He asked her what she would like to do and where she would like to go: and Rebecca, brave woman that she was, did not take long to make up her mind.

On the opposite side of the island was her husband's native village of Wilir, where the people were living in the darkness of heathenism. On the various occasions when she visited the village her heart was sore to see the wretched condition of the people,

An Island Heroine

and she longed to teach them the saving truths of the Gospel. Rebecca told the doctor she did not know very much, and that her experience of Christian truth was very limited, but she would like to go with her husband to Wilir, to tell the people of Jesus.

Leper though she was, the people of Wilir did not object to her presence in the village, but they fiercely resented her preaching a new religion. The chief said that Rebecca was spoiling the place, and told her husband that he could only remain in the village if he could get his wife to stop talking about God. Nothing daunted, they managed to build a small grass house, and, much to the dislike of the chief, inquirers began to frequent their dwelling to know more of their wonderful message. Several months afterwards, on the occasion of one of his visits, Rebecca reported to her missionary that they had gained a small following, and that the place was now ripe for the settlement of a resident teacher, suggesting, at the same time, the name of James Kaum, who was at that time working as a native evangelist among the heathen tribes that lay scattered around the hospital.

The doctor recommended the work at Wilir to Kaum; but with characteristic caution, Kaum said that he would like to see the place before deciding. Going to Wilir he stayed several weeks with Rebecca and her husband. With the keenness of a reaper working among the golden grain, Kaum scented the rich harvest awaiting the sickle, and had no difficulty in making up his mind. Going back to the hospital for his wife and child, Kaum returned to Wilir; and

Midst Volcanic Fires

from that time to the death of Rebecca, two years later, the two lives were inseparably linked together in the evangelization of the north coast of Ambrim.

The natives of Wilir had, in a measure, become reconciled to the teaching and presence of Rebecca in their village, and, although only a few had been influenced by her teaching, the others allowed her to go on her way undisturbed. But when James Kaum arrived and joined hands with her, the flame of opposition burst out afresh and raged fiercer than ever. Kaum received the assistance of a few men whose hearts had been touched by the preaching of Rebecca. The commencement of building operations on his dwelling-house was the signal for a fresh outburst. The heathen arrived with clubs and tomahawks and muskets, and tore the posts out of the ground. The chief commanded Kaum and his wife to leave the village. Taking his courage in both hands, he replied that he had come to the village on the business of God, and would stay until God gave him notice to quit.

When the trouble was at its height, an old man, with a naked, painted body, and as savage-looking as any of the others, approached Kaum and his wife very sympathetically, and told them not to be afraid, that he was the proprietor of a small piece of ground in the centre of the village, and would gladly give it to them as the site for a dwelling-house. Kaum regarded the visit of the old man as the intervention of God on his behalf. To him it was the old story of the Lord going before His people in a pillar of cloud to lead the way. Kaum gladly accepted the

An Island Heroine

old man's offer and, at length, after countless difficulties and interruptions, succeeded in erecting a house. No sooner was it completed than the heathen made a raid upon it, and burned it down. Kaum and his wife had to quit the house in a hurry, leaving their worldly goods behind. Thinking they had him at their mercy, the heathen approached in a threatening fashion, and ordered him to clear out of the village. But he treated their hostility with apparent unconcern, and starting a house-to-house visitation, urged the people to come to Jesus. No difficulties or dangers ever dismayed him. In season and out of season he laboured for their conversion. In course of time, the Christians became numerous enough to assert themselves and make their presence felt, and the heathen had at last to acknowledge that all their attempts to ruin his work had signally failed. The mission is now firmly established at Wilir, and goes on without serious interruption. From the modest haunts of church and school the Living Word goes forth, conquering and to conquer.

As soon as the mission work at Wilir was established on a firm basis, James Kaum and Rebecca looked further afield, and cast longing eyes on the neighbouring village of Konkon, which was still heathen and ignorant of God. One Sunday, after the morning service at Wilir, Kaum and Rebecca with a number of converts set out for Konkon, and that day they succeeded in having a service. To the people of Konkon the teaching of the evangelists was not altogether new and strange. From time to

Midst Volcanic Fires

time tidings had reached them of how the people of Wilir had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. The way was in a measure prepared, and Kaum and Rebecca found little opposition to the preaching of the Word of God. Ascertaining that the people were really favourable to the worship, Kaum asked them to break caste and abandon heathenism, or, as they call it on Ambrim, "breaking the fire." Each caste has a fire of its own, where all the cooking of the caste is done. No one of a lower caste may use the fire, nor is it permissible for one of the caste members to eat food with people of an inferior fire without infringing their caste regulations. In the northern islands caste observances are strictly observed. A heathen man may be anything he pleases so long as he does not openly abuse the rules of caste. He may be a moral wreck, a great swindler, a downright liar. He may be anything, do anything, but he must not violate his caste laws. But when a man becomes a Christian, the whole community turns against him, considers him unclean, and hates him with the bitterest hatred. Eight men of the Konkon village agreed to Kaum's invitation to break caste, and, as a token of sincerity, at once partook of food with men of an inferior rank and with some of the women. To eat with women was *the* unpardonable sin of their caste. But that night they broke with their past, and, in so doing, became members of that great brotherhood whose motto is, "All one in Christ Jesus." Judging that Konkon was ripe for the Gospel, Kaum and Rebecca removed their headquarters from Wilir to Konkon, and

An Island Heroine

remained there until the whole population was converted. Church and school were opened, and every one, with the solitary exception of Wunberang, the heathen chief, attended the Christian worship.

After the conquest of Konkon, Kaum and Rebecca proceeded still further afield, and visited the heathen village of Fawnwar, which was a citadel of heathen worship. On the arrival of the Christian party in Fawnwar, the natives were found engaged in the celebration of a *manki*, one of their heathen ceremonies. On the elevation of the people from one caste to another, a *manki* ceremony is made, when elaborate images are reared and the requisite number of pigs sacrificed. As the evangelists entered the village, the sacred men were conferring new names on the natives who were being elevated in caste rank. Kaum walked straight in amongst them, and told them that he had come to them with a message from God. At the close of his speech he asked them to do the works of God, and throw away the *mankis*, which were the work of the devil. So impressed were they with his words that the chief asked him to uproot the *mankis*, and throw them into the sea. Kaum told them that they must do that work themselves. With one accord the people cast down the graven images, and from the brow of the hill on which the village is situated the *mankis* were thrown headlong into the sea. A village was born in a day. Church and school were opened, and the whole population began the worship of God.

But Wunberang, the heathen chief of Konkon, was not at all pleased with the changes which were

Midst Volcanic Fires

being made with the ancient religion of his people, and he brooded mischief in his heart. One day he met Kaum in the bush, as he was travelling between Fawnwar and Konkon, and, in angry words, told him of the havoc he was making with the tribal worship. The enraged chief parted from him with the threat that he would one day get his deserts. Soon afterwards, a young man told Kaum that the chief of Konkon was very angry with him, and had determined to kill him. On the Sunday following, Kaum had held the forenoon service at Konkon, and was proceeding to Fawnwar for the afternoon service, when whom should he meet in a lonely part of the bush but Wunberang. Judging from his scowling face, he knew that the chief meditated mischief. Fortunately, Kaum was accompanied by a considerable body of converts whose presence, in any case, would have deterred Wunberang from putting his evil designs into execution. As it was, Kaum stepped boldly up to him and greeted him, at the same time holding out his hand for a hand-shake. But the old chief declined both the salutation and the hand-shake. Kaum, addressing him, said: "Friend, I am very sorry you meditate mischief in your heart and say bad words against me and the worship of the true God. The best thing you can do is to give your heart to Jesus."

The old heathen grunted out an emphatic "No," and accused Kaum of spoiling the people and destroying their ancient religion. Kaum replied that he was sorry the old man nursed ill-will in his heart, and pleaded with him to give his heart to

An Island Heroine

Jesus. After a few more words of counsel and goodwill, Kaum parted from him, and the mission party proceeded on its way to Fawnwar. The old chief, too, went his way, and never halted until he reached his home at Konkon.

Wunberang felt heart-sick and ill at ease with himself. His wife declared that he never let his eyes off the Konkon road until the appearance of Kaum on his return journey. As soon as Kaum appeared the old man went out to meet him, and in a very shamefaced way offered him a present of a few shillings. Kaum looked at the money, and was the first to speak.

"Why should I take your money?" he said; "you are under no obligation to me."

Then Wunberang began a confession of all the plots and evil designs he had planned in order to compass the death of Kaum. "I feel sorry," he said. "I want to make peace with you. I want you to accept that money as a peace-offering, and let us be friends," the old man concluded.

Kaum was greatly touched with the old man's candid confession and liberality, and, regarding it as a token that the Spirit of God was working with him, offered a silent prayer that he might be led into the Kingdom. Quietly and sympathetically, he acknowledged the old man's thoughtfulness, and, thanking him for his kind offer, said to him, "If I take your money, the money cannot wash your sins away. Give your heart to Jesus, and He will take away all the bad words and bad thoughts from your heart."

The old chief still insisted on Kaum taking the

Midst Volcanic Fires

money; but the only reply he made was: "You give your heart to Jesus, and it will need no gifts of money to cement our friendship." With these words the two men parted, and Kaum proceeded on his way to Wilir.

There was no sleep for Wunberang that night. He sent his wife to Isaiah, one of the Christians of Konkon, to ask him to come and tell him about Jesus. The old man, too, was anxious to break his caste, and have done with heathenism, and expressed a wish to eat food with Isaiah. But Isaiah knew something of the past history of Wunberang. He knew how he had persecuted the Church of Christ, and wasted it. He knew that he was angry with all the Christians, and had tried to compass the death of James Kaum. Not unnaturally, he thought that this was another of Wunberang's traps to catch him, and so refused to go. Isaiah sent the poor wife back with the sarcastic message that the trap was too open, and that he was not quite so easily caught. Wunberang felt sorry when he heard the footsteps of his wife returning alone, and again asked her to go and request Isaiah to come at once, as he was sorry for all the evil deeds he had done to thwart the progress of the Gospel. Isaiah went this time; and as soon as the old chief saw him, he expressed his great delight, remarking, "I want to give my heart to God. I am sorry for all the evil work I have done and all the evil words I have spoken." Isaiah went over the life of our Lord with him, and presented to him the saving truths of Christianity. To Isaiah was given the joy and privilege of leading the weary,

An Island Heroine

sin-laden soul into the kingdom. Wunberang became a Christian, and since he made the vow of allegiance to Christ he has never faltered nor looked back. He has been a faithful and consistent convert, and to-day he is one of the pillars of the Church in Konkon.

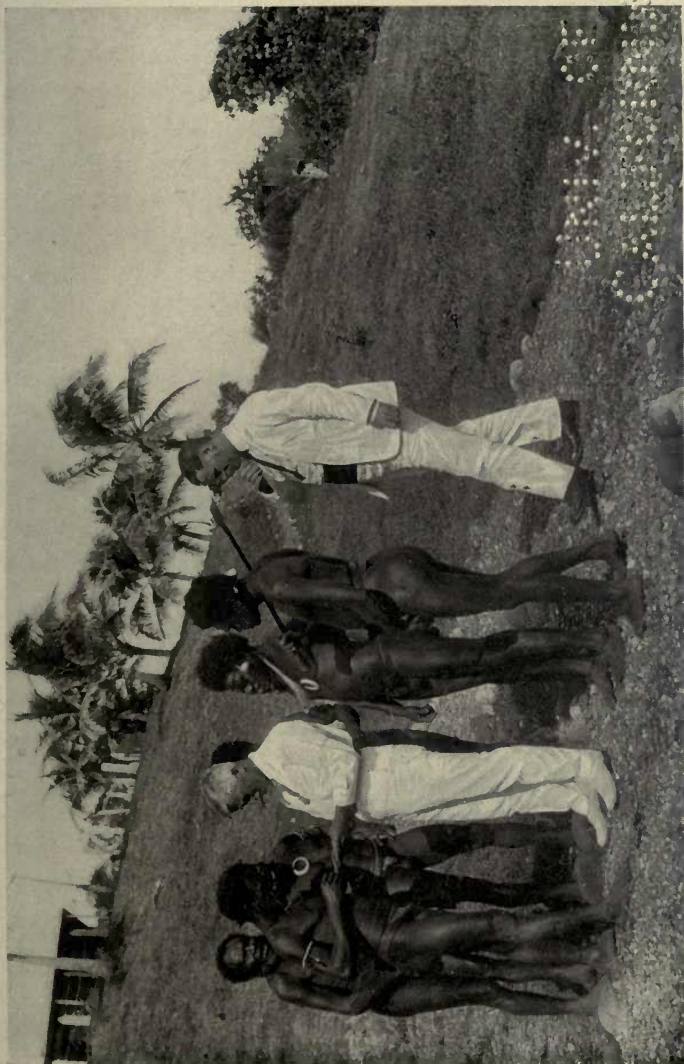
James Kaum still continues his good work among the people of north Ambrim. His method with the young converts is that of the eagle with her young. He stirs up the nest, and forces them to fly. During a recent visit to Wilir, I made arrangements for the settlement of two of the converts whom he had been teaching and training with a view to the Church's ministry. The district is crowded with heathen villages, and, instead of two, dozens of teachers are necessary to overtake the work of evangelization.

Rebecca, like a true heroine, continued to take her share in the work until the inroads of her terrible disease made further service impossible. On the last occasion when I visited Wilir before her death, she was found occupying her accustomed seat on the door-step of the church. She would not enter among the people, and yet she would not absent herself from the worship of God's House. This practice she continued until death came as a happy release. Rebecca, the leper, did a great work for Jesus among the people of Wilir, and her name will long be held in affectionate remembrance by the Christian converts. She fought the good fight of faith, she finished her course, and God, the Righteous Judge, awarded her the crown.

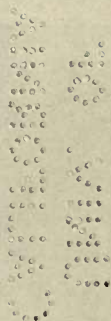
CHAPTER IV

AMONG THE HEATHEN

A DISTANCE of sixteen miles separates Samio from the village of Wilir. The country between the two villages is rugged and broken and the journey the most exasperating and toilsome in all Ambrim. Numerous gorges intersect the high land and form a never-ending succession of razor-backs. Climbing and descending all the time, we must have traversed three times the actual distance between the villages. There is no level ground, and on the summit of the ridges we could stand with one foot on either side of the watershed. The streams were all swollen with heavy rains, and we experienced considerable difficulty in fording. These river beds were at one time lava streams, and over the polished stones torrents of water now rushed with great force. At one time our path lay over the slippery stones of the river bed, at another, along the ledge of a precipice overlooking the sea where we had to cling to roots and projecting shelves of rock to maintain our footing. To increase our difficulties, the rain descended in tropical downpours, and we struggled on like drowned rats. Between the showers the sun shone out, and disclosed the beautiful nature of the country through which we passed. East Ambrim is the land



NATIVES ADMIRING PHOTOGRAPHS OF THEMSELVES.



Among the Heathen

of the fern tree, and the gullies, clothed with the shady fronds, formed a landscape of grace and beauty.

Nearly the whole Christian population of Samio, carrying our goods and chattels, accompanied us. The people of the small village of Fangbang—a half-way house—knew of our coming, and made preparations for our reception. Mr Weir and I lodged in a small grass humpy, which had evidently been designed to keep people humble. Its low roof was the chief drawback, and many times during our short stay were we penalized with a bump on the head for attempting to stand straight. But the natives, in view of our visit, had made some improvements on our humble abode and contrived to make it as comfortable as possible. A box did duty for a table, and for want of a table-cover a loin-cloth had been thrown over the box, in the centre of which stood a bottle of wild-flowers. The Samio folks were quartered throughout the village, and received great kindness at the hands of the Fangbang people. Soon after our arrival, a Samio man came to us with a huge slice of native pudding, and recommended it as the finest sample of its kind he had tasted. But tastes differ. Mr Weir sampled the mixture, and found it composed largely of fern leaves. After a few bites he laid it down with the remark, "Queer tack." I could not summon courage to tackle it.

When we were encamped at Fangbang two heathen men came by night—Nicodemus-like—to inquire the way of salvation. Mal Goror and Makitoro were leaders in heathenism, and were responsible

Midst Volcanic Fires

for much of the strife and mischief that prevailed on Ambrim. With the white feathers waving in their bushy heads, the pigs' tusks jangling on their naked breasts and arms, and an old blunderbuss in the crook of their arms, they were the typical savages of South Sea Island romance. Their faces and bodies were smeared with paints of fantastic colour, and from their savage and repulsive appearance they might well have come from a cannibal feast. They were by no means the sort of company one would choose for nocturnal visitors; but their appearance belied them. They harboured no evil intentions. They were weary of a life which afforded no satisfaction, and they longed for something better. Recognizing the hopelessness of heathen worship to satisfy the longings of the soul, they came to inquire from the missionaries the truth of the Gospel. "Their hearts," they said, "were soft to the Christian worship, and they wished to break caste." For years neither of them had eaten anything common or unclean, or partaken of food with people of an inferior rank. To eat with women was the unpardonable sin of their caste. We directed them to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, and assured them that in His worship they would find abiding satisfaction. That night they broke with their past, and, as a token of sincerity, they partook of food with us and with some of the men and women of the village. They committed their lives into the hands of Christ, and, praying for guidance and strength, they promised allegiance to Him as Lord and Master.

Among the Heathen

Next morning, Mal Goror accompanied us to our meeting, and by way of showing his interest took a seat beside us on the platform, appearing in the same costume, or rather, want of costume, in which he introduced himself on the previous evening. Old Mal belonged to the company of the great unwashed, and the pungent smell of oil and paint with which his body was smeared attracted large numbers of bluebottle flies. Mal did not seem to mind, and we did our best to keep smiling. Once, when I tried to scatter the pests, the old man, with delightful euphemism, remarked, "Too many butterflies." On parting from old Mal we expressed the hope that when next we met he would by that time have learned the premier place which cleanliness held in the Christian religion. Our intercourse should then be more agreeable.

During the year a number of converts in the village had drifted back into heathenism, and the greater part of our time was spent in personal dealings with the backsliders. The glamour and brightness of their new faith had passed into the light of common day, and, losing sight of Christ, the toils of heathenism again clasped them in their embrace. Shedding their faith, they also shed their clothes. With their heads ornamented with croton leaves and their bodies smeared with paint, it was difficult to believe that only a few months before they were professed members of a Christian community. In some instances we were successful in restoring lost faith, and had the joy of beholding the prodigal souls returning from the wild into the safety of the fold; but we had

Midst Volcanic Fires

also some very sad and painful cases to deal with. A few converts, after owning allegiance to Christ, and tasting the good Word of God, deliberately turned their backs on the life of new obedience. One man excused himself on the plea that he had acquired the taste of grog, and it had gained the mastery over him. He confessed that he would part with anything to get it. Only a year before he was one of a band of converts who made a request for baptism, and, had he been true to his vow, would have been a member of the class preparing for baptism. But experiences of that kind taught us to lean on God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." In our intercourse with the backsliders, as well as with the heathen, we invariably found something lacking in the look upon their faces. They might be dignified and gracious and kind, but they lacked that light in their countenances which we call soul. That was because the Light of the World had either not come into or disappeared out of their lives. It is the Spirit within which makes joyous faces.

On our way to Wilir we touched at the heathen village of Nuvha, where we were received with great suspicion. Since early morning we had been on the tramp, and arrived at Nuvha tired and hungry. As soon as greetings had passed between us and the chief, we told him we were going to have dinner on the village square. The suspicious old man imagined that our purpose was to get him to eat food with us, and in that way force him to break his caste. Instantly, he told us that we would have

Among the Heathen

to clear off the village square if we wanted to dine. We tried to convince the chief that crafty tricks had no place in our thoughts, but the old man was obdurate, and would not listen to reason. Giving up all thoughts of food, we told him we would like to take a census of the tribe, as we were anxious to ascertain the entire population of the island. Again the old man was furious. "What business had we with the names and number of his people?"

For a time it seemed as if we were up against a stone wall when the position was turned in a very comical way. As we squatted on the ground beside the inexorable old chief, a small naked boy sidled up to Mr Weir and asked him to show his artificial teeth. Mr Weir readily complied, and in an instant fear and bewilderment were in every face. Nobody was more terrified than the old chief himself. He sat gaping as Mr Weir toyed with his teeth; and then, turning to me, he said, "And what about you?" No sooner had he spoken when I let mine drop out of my mouth. The old man was visibly terror-stricken, and with gaping mouth looked into the puzzled faces of his tribesmen for an explanation of the mysterious affair. Lifting up his voice in the speech of Ambrim he said that the gods had come to them in the likeness of white men.

In the meantime, the chief's son, a young lad with a fine open face, approached his father, and asked him not to be angry with the missionaries. "They are our best friends, and have come to help us." But the old chief no longer needed to be coaxed, and he was prepared to let the missionaries

Midst Volcanic Fires

have anything they pleased. Approaching in a lordly way, he requested us to have dinner on the village square. We, on our part, were starving, and so were all the members of the mission party, and no second invitation was needed. By the time the meal was over we knew each other better, and had become quite intimate with the chief and his leading men.

Friendly relations being now established, the initiative in talking passed to us, and the state of affairs which the census of the tribe revealed formed the basis of our conversation. Nuvha is one of the villages on Ambrim where the inequality between the sexes is out of all proportion to the population. The chief knew perfectly well that the males far exceeded the females, but had taken no pains to find out the exact number; and when told that in a tribal population of one hundred and forty-five there were thirty-five more men than women, no one was more surprised than he. We asked him what had become of the girls, and in asking that question we knew we had our finger on the open sore of heathenism. They made no attempt to conceal things, but frankly and openly confessed some of the sins which reign in the heathen world, the existence of which was making for the depopulation of the race. We proceeded to give the chief and his counsellors a lesson in eugenics, and, considering their former hostile attitude, it was amazing to notice how meekly and mildly they listened to our reproofs.

It is of no use to talk of South Sea Island natives as children of the sun, children of nature, and what

Among the Heathen

not. Missionaries who live in the islands and are going out and in amongst the natives see quite another side. They dwell in darkness and the shadow of death and in the still more awful shadow of life. They are steeped in superstition and ignorance, they are haunted by the dread influence of evil spirits, they are dying of the curse of heathenism. What they need is the salvation of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Broaching the subject of Christianity, we spoke to them of Christ and the concerns of the soul. We told them of the one true God, who made all things and who loves all people, and of how He sent His Son to change our sinful hearts and give us new hearts. The worship of a higher power was not alien to their natures. In a corner of the village square on which we were seated stood the ancestral images of the tribe. Those carved figures had only recently been renovated, and their groomed appearance gave every indication that a well-appointed worship was maintained. We directed the attention of the natives to the God who made heaven and earth, and who is worshipped, not with images graven by art and man's device, but by the humble and sincere heart. In urging them to accept of Christ as the hope of the village, we felt that our words did not fall upon deaf ears.

The conversation became frank and open on both sides, and the heathen themselves recognised the futility of idol worship to check the growing evils of Ambrim and inspire its people with a new hope for the future. We, on our part, welcomed the

Midst Volcanic Fires

opportunity of impressing upon the natives the need of a Saviour to restore their waning vitality and infuse them with a new spirit. Very attentively did they listen to the message of hope we brought them; but only old Billy, the under chief, had anything to say in reply. With passion and evident conviction, he acknowledged the unsatisfying nature of heathenism and heathen worship. Their lives, he declared, were a monotonous round of play, play, play, and they became tired of it, and longed for something better. Like their brethren in civilized lands, they were intoxicated with materialism and pleasure, and had no time for higher interests. The claims of God and of their higher nature were brought before them, to many of them for the first time, and we pleaded with them to give their lives into the charge of Jesus, who alone could fill their empty vessels with lasting content. The words spoken on the village square of Nuvha got home into some hearts and brought forth fruit in after days.

The Gospel has already made wonderful changes in reclaiming the heathen tribes of the New Hebrides; and if the downward process of the heathen, still remaining, is to be arrested, it can only be by the regenerating influence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. That Christ can reclaim, and give a new start and impulse to degraded human nature, an incident like the following will show:

From Nuvha we made our way to Wilir, the headquarters of James Kaum; and as the village stood in the midst of a large, heathen population,

Among the Heathen

and formed a convenient centre for reaching the surrounding tribes, we pitched our camp there, and made arrangements for a prolonged visit.

That evening our camp was invaded by two detachments of naked, painted savages, all armed with clubs and muskets, and yelling at each other in angry, threatening tones. That a bitter feud existed between the two factions was evident, but amid the din and excitement it was difficult for us to ascertain the cause of the trouble. At length, after endless questionings, we learned that a company of young savages had seized an old man, named Telegraf, and had tried to murder him with a view of kidnapping one of his wives, the youngest of the harem. The savage instincts of the natives contrived to give the old man a cruel, lingering death. Instead of killing him outright, as they might easily have done, they carried him to a lonely part of the bush, and, after binding him and torturing him, left him to his fate. Two days afterwards, a search party, attracted to the spot by the sound of moans, found Telegraf more dead than alive. For a week his life lay in the balance; and then, on regaining consciousness, the horrible plot was disclosed. At once there was an uproar amongst his fellow tribesmen, and a cry for vengeance on the perpetrators of the outrage.

Mr Weir and I felt that the young savages deserved to be birched, and we told them so. But, of course, action of that nature was outside the province of the missionary, and through the medium of persuasion and entreaty we had to try and restore order. After

Midst Volcanic Fires

much trouble we eventually succeeded in effecting a reconciliation between the two parties, and before leaving the village we managed to induce Telegraf and one of his captors, a young man called Hillel, to abandon heathenism and give Christ a trial of their lives. Both men joined the school of James Kaum at Wilir; and such good progress did Hillel make that on a succeeding visit, three months later, he made the request, with the approval of his teacher, to join the catechumen's class with a view to baptism.

Telegraf's faith, unfortunately, was like the seed sown in the stony ground. For a time he was zealous and enthusiastic; but the lure of heathenism and, above all, the thought of parting with his surplus wives, choked the good seed of the Kingdom, and he went back to his heathen ways. But Hillel's faith was like the good seed, sown in the good ground, which brought forth abundantly. During the year of his probation he witnessed a good confession, and consistently followed the gleam. When the day of his baptism arrived he publicly acknowledged Christ as his Saviour, and, in a short word of personal testimony, pledged allegiance to Him as Lord and Master.

With him were baptized several other young men, and, as they stood in front of the large congregation, it was a joy to behold their strong, virile figures, freed from the dark inheritance of the past, and entering with Christ upon a new life among their Christian brethren. Standing under the trees, on the outskirts of the congregation, was a number of Hillel's friends, watching their old companion take

Among the Heathen

the irrevocable step and cross the stream which was to cut him off so completely from them and their heathen ways. Nature seemed to be offering her choicest gifts from among the children of those romantic islands to be sanctified and devoted to the service of Christ. In watching the freshness and simplicity of the scene where Christ was claiming those young lives out of the dreary waste of heathenism one felt that those new accessions were coming to enrich His Kingdom. Three years have passed since Hillel took the great step, and, during that time, he has never faltered, and still remains a living witness to the keeping power of the new Master, whose he is and whom he serves.

During our encampment at Wilir, we visited the villages of Konkon and Fawnwar, and came into touch with the grand work begun by Rebecca, the leper girl, and continued by James Kaum, the travelling evangelist. Eager and impulsive, Kaum is all on fire for the progress of Christ's kingdom. It is the Living Christ dwelling in him that makes him such a spiritual force in the community. We spent ten days with him visiting the converts and confirming the infant churches. But only a fringe of the district has been touched by the Gospel, and the campaign among the heathen villages made us realize what a vast amount of work remained to be done.

By way of garnering the fruits of the evangelistic campaign a series of meetings for the promotion of Bible study was conducted in the district. Four meetings were held per day—first, a sunrise prayer

Midst Volcanic Fires

meeting at 6 a.m., then two meetings, at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., for instruction ; and an evening meeting, at 7, for singing and prayer. The native converts from the distant villages stayed on the station, and, with their Scriptures and hymn-books as constant companions, they gave the village the air and appearance of a miniature Bible Convention. A spirit of expectancy pervaded the meetings, and the atmosphere was congenial to the free working of God's Spirit. As far as possible, we avoided the temptation of thrusting anything distinctively European upon the natives. Our aim was to preach the faith once delivered to the saints, to teach the native Church to stand upon its own feet, and to build their own fabric upon one broad and enduring foundation. The longer one ministers to a church of an alien race, the more one realizes that a religion which is to endure must take into account the inalienable rights of individuals and communities to develop their own life. With this object in view, the native Christians were invited to engage in intercessory prayer. Many converts have still to learn that the men and women who do most to establish Christ's Kingdom are those who spend as much time in prayer as in bustling activities and visible labour. In those meetings we had the same experience as is often borne home upon workers in Christian lands—that for the promotion of holiness and re-dedication we are absolutely dependent upon the influence of God's Spirit. Possibly, in the foreign field, we realize this more. The people with whom we are brought into contact are alien in thought and

Among the Heathen

language, and we are driven back by sheer weakness on the primal source of strength.

That there should be no divorce between ideal and applied Christianity, we carried about with us a medicine-chest, which was a symbol of practical Christianity. Following in the footsteps of the Master, who healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease, we tried to show that the Church of Christ stands for the relief of suffering and the raising of the down-trodden, and that the expression of God's Spirit in human souls is only real and divine when related to life.

Besides a medicine-chest, we found that the exigencies of the work likewise demanded a tool-chest. After the meetings at the school village of Makam, where a series of telling addresses had been given by Mr Weir on the responsibility of the native converts to carry the Gospel to the heathen, Alex. Makekon, the teacher, told us that the village tank was leaking, and asked us to solder it. As we had no tools in our kit, we asked him if he thought the missionaries were "sacred men" who could mend tanks by magic, and took pains to explain to him that the tinker's craft required solder and acid and a soldering-bolt. But there is a bit of the canny Scot about Makekon, possibly by reason of long association with natives of that country. He knew, as well as we, that the tank could not be repaired by magic. A few days before our arrival he had sailed across to the Island of Pentecost, and from the missionary there had obtained the necessary implements. Diving into his house he brought out

Midst Volcanic Fires

a small bag of tools, and, with stinging precision, laid the solder and acid and soldering-bolt at our feet. After this, further parley was unnecessary, and we set about the job at once, though we did not imagine what a big thing we were tackling. We found the tank leaking in several places, the iron dirty and rust-eaten, and the soldering occupied half a day. Several times, during the job, we felt sorry for ourselves, and comforted each other with the thought that Paul, in the midst of his evangelistic labours, engaged in tent-making, and that reflection made us realize that, in breaking-off preaching and teaching to mend tanks, we were in a great succession.

In one of the houses adjoining the church at Makam, a baby had arrived, and, in the absence of Mrs Frater, the Missi had to go and present his respects to the little visitor. Lifting a mat from a bundle by her side, the young mother disclosed the tiniest mite that ever breathed. I was surprised to see the skin so fair, and remarked that it was more like a white than a black baby; whereupon Makekon, the teacher, explained that all native babies, for the first few days of their lives, were of a very light colour, but that they soon became shining black pickaninnies.

Woang, the mother, asked for a name, and I at once suggested "John," the name of their own missionary who had gone to New Zealand after the destruction of the hospital. The father, however, thought there were too many "Johns" on Ambrim already, and asked for another name from the missionaries' country. I gave "Donald."

Among the Heathen

"Tonal," said the father, smacking his lips, and pronouncing the name like a Skye Highlander. "Ah, that is good!"

The mother repeated "Tonal," and she too declared it good.

Alex. Makekon announced to the crowd that had assembled outside the house that the baby's name was Tonal, and I heard Tonal, Tonal, Tonal pass from lip to lip.

I deemed it wise to correct the pronunciation, and informed the father that the baby's name was not "Tonal," but "Donald." He did not seem to detect any difference. Whereupon Makekon interposed, and explained to the bewildered father that the name was not "Tonal," but "Tonal." After that I gave up in despair.

When about to leave Makam on our return to Wilir, Tango, one of the Christians of the village, approached us and said that he would like to make a confession. He appeared a miserable object, and, from the guilty look on his face, we knew that he was in trouble. His enemy was what, in civilized lands, is called strong drink. In Ambrim it has the same name, its strength is the same, its curse is the same. Acting on natives with no balance of mind, it speedily transforms them into madmen.

In the New Hebrides the sale of intoxicating liquors to natives is forbidden by law; but there can always be found unscrupulous white men—almost always Frenchmen—who, for the sake of exorbitant profit, are willing to defy the terrors of the law. Tango visited the cutter every time it

Midst Volcanic Fires

anchored in his passage, and procured the poison. He knew that it was getting the better of him, and he strove to curb his appetite. Once before he confessed his failing, and left the church with the firm resolve that never again would he touch strong drink. But such is the weakness of the flesh that he fell again.

"Tango," I said, as soon as I took in the situation, "you are allowing your old enemy to kill you."

"Missi," he said, "I don't want to. I want to give it up, but the devil in my heart is too strong."

We re-entered the church for a prayer meeting, where several others joined Tango in a confession of weakness. Earnest prayer was offered to God for strength to overcome the temptation of strong drink. From the Word of God I gave them a promise, and asked them to trust God to slay the devil within their hearts. They all made a public stand, and left the church with the "will to conquer" through faith in Christ.

On the following day there was another diversion from the routine of preaching and teaching; and, however unlike the dramatic and humorous incidents of the day may have appeared to the work usually associated with an evangelistic campaign, it brought us into close touch with the heathen natives, and in this way enabled us to gain their confidence. Long before daybreak our camp was disturbed by a large party from the wild and warlike tribe of Falebur, every member of which carried firearms of some sort. The heathen population of Ambrim is equipped with a strange and varied assortment of ancient snider

Among the Heathen

rifles, without which no one ever thinks of travelling, and which are infinitely more dangerous to the marksman than to his target. With their painted bodies and frightsome-looking weapons, they presented an ugly appearance, and for a time we wondered on what sort of business they had come. They did not look the kind of company one would naturally select for early-morning visitors. Hillel, the chieftain of the clan and the spokesman of the party, was a picturesque savage. With the white feathers waving in his bushy head, an amulet of pigs' tusks jingling on his naked breast and arms, an old blunderbuss, cocked and loaded, in his hand, he looked a frightsome figure in the doorway of our hut.

But the wild and barbarous appearance of Hillel's clansmen belied them. They entertained no evil intentions, and had merely come to consult the missionaries about an inter-tribal quarrel. The heathen know that they are as welcome at the mission station as are the Christian natives. Very often, out of respect for the missionary, the heathen will borrow clothes before visiting the station; but Hillel excused himself on the plea that the suddenness of their visit gave them no time to bargain for the loan of garments. Hillel's story was soon told: Hani, his youngest wife, had run away and taken refuge in the village of Licon; and as they were afraid to approach a hostile tribe by themselves, they wished us to accompany them, and, if possible, secure the return of Hani.

Leaving the meetings at Wilir in the charge of

Midst Volcanic Fires

the teacher, Mr Weir and I accompanied the wild and picturesque deputation to Licon. The ordinary bush track was by no means a safe place for a long line of people armed after the manner of our travelling companions. There was no danger of treachery. Neither of us had the slightest fear of the natives, but we entertained an uneasy feeling about the erratic and clumsy firearms they carried. The great ambition of the Ambrim savage is to possess a rifle of some sort ; and as his pride in the weapon usually impels him to carry it loaded and at full cock, it can be readily understood that the most welcome visitor stands a fair chance of being accidentally shot. So long as the path lay along the well-trodden track which skirts the Ambrim coast-line we raised no objections ; but when we began to climb the steep face of a hill, with a rough and tangled track, we thought it time to institute inquiries about the muskets. Hillel thought that we were suspicious of him and his clansmen, and indignantly scorned the insinuation. We soon assured him that we entertained no distrust of them, but had a very great distrust of the weapons they carried. The men immediately before and behind me had each an old blunderbuss which might have done service in the Crimea. Both were loaded and at full cock. "To be ready for pigeons," they explained. But with such uncertain weapons we reckoned that the members of our company ran a far greater risk of being shot than the pigeons. On inquiring if any one ever got accidentally shot, the chief, in quite a jaunty way, replied that occasionally a gun went off

Among the Heathen

and killed a man. We had no wish for accidents of that kind to happen on the journey, and so asked the men to favour us by emptying their muskets. The remainder of the journey was completed without mishap.

We found the village of Licon deserted. The whole population, with the exception of a few sick folks, were busy in the fields. Hillel beat the village drum in a peculiar rhythmical style, which was a signal to all within range of hearing that visitors had arrived and were waiting on the village square. The first arrivals were not long in making an appearance, and, in about half an hour, nearly the whole tribe had assembled. They had a good idea who the visitors were and on what business they had come. But there was no bitterness or ill-feeling shown. Besides greeting the missionaries they shook hands with the entire party from Falebur, and in that way made a friendly atmosphere which enabled us to conduct the negotiations without let or hindrance.

Hani's father came forward as his daughter's advocate, and explained the reason of her flight. Hillel, her husband, like many of the gentry of heathen Ambrim, had a plurality of wives; and Hani, imagining that she was the drudge of the harem and out of favour with her lord and master, ran off to the shelter of her father's home. Hani, too, spoke out, and without fear or shyness exposed the ill-treatment she had received from the other members of the household. The wily Hillel professed to be greatly surprised at Hani's story, but he readily agreed to the suggestion that he should

Midst Volcanic Fires

give her in marriage to another man. Hani, however, did not wish Hillel to choose a husband for her. She already had her eye on an engaging young savage, and, with just a touch of bashfulness, revealed the man of her choice. An exchange of pigs, which is the marriage ceremony of heathenism, was soon arranged, and Hani departed to the home of her new master.

Hillel and his wild clansmen accompanied us a considerable distance on our return journey. He was greatly delighted with the result of the negotiations; and from words he let drop we suspected that the cunning rogue was not in the least anxious about the return of his wife, his sole dread being the loss of the payment of the pigs. We parted at the cross-roads near his village, and, in endeavouring to express his thanks, the good-natured savage paid us rather a doubtful compliment: "Missi, you good fellow man, you all the same as brother belong me."

On the way to our camp we had to pass through the village of Bulibul. We had no intention of breaking the journey there, but in the centre of the village was a sight which arrested our attention. In a large house, with open sides, was a company of women plaiting dress-skirts. In the middle of the company stood a bright little girl of about ten years of age, while her mother with a pair of scissors was trimming the edges and putting the finishing touches to her daughter's attire. From the mother we learned there was to be a dance in the evening, and she was preparing her daughter for the ball.

Though the grass skirt was the only article of

Among the Heathen

dress the women wore, the adornment did not end there. With a paint brush, dipped in red ochre, a scarlet line was made over the forehead and nose and across the chin. The rest of the face was blackened with a preparation of black oxide of manganese, which they purchased from the natives of Malekula. The hair and head had been anointed with lime, and were perfectly white. Several women were present who had completed their fancy-dress toilet. In their ball rig-out, those damsels were far from prepossessing, and one was at a loss to understand the tastes and the mentality of even savage men who could regard such monstrosities as attractive and engaging partners.

That night we did not require to be told a ball was in progress. The dancing-ground was about half a mile from our camp; and what between the beating of the drums and the shouting of the dancers the night was a streak of misery. In the bright moonlight they danced to their hearts' content. The ball was the culmination of a series of heathen ceremonies in which they had been engaged during the week.

The small Christian communities that lay scattered around Wilir occupied much of our time during our encampment there. Since the departure of Dr Bowie, carelessness and licence had become prevalent, and, consequently, there was a good deal of backsliding and frequent irregularities among the church adherents. The conditions were much the same as existed in the early churches when the strong and ardent spirit of the Apostle Paul was removed. The

Midst Volcanic Fires

inequalities of Christian life and conduct were just the same in Ambrim as they were in the churches of Ephesus and Corinth. We found courage and self-sacrifice co-existing with a low sense of purity and truthfulness. All the Christian communities of north Ambrim were surrounded by a rampant heathenism; and unless the first enthusiasm of the converts was maintained, the danger was lest the call of the wild again entered the blood and they returned to a heathenism sevenfold more deadly than before. Special services of intercession were held for a revival of faith and love and zeal among those who were already Christian, and repentance for such as were openly sinning. Under the guidance of the Divine Spirit the campaign proved of great value in establishing and confirming the faith of the converts and in restoring conviction to many of the lapsed. Christian living became more real, and the converts manifested a greater interest in advancing God's kingdom among their fellow tribesmen.

One of the most beautiful and vivid touches of the religion of Christ we witnessed was the transformation it made in the presence of sickness and death. During our encampment in the village of Wilir we attended the sick-bed, and latterly the funeral, of a little girl in one of the Christian villages. The tenderness and sympathy which the little maid received during her illness were very great, and her funeral was as solemn and orderly as could be desired. We buried her in the clear sunlight, but the ransomed soul had gone to a land that is fairer than day.

Among the Heathen

As if by way of contrast, we had another picture presented to us a few days later—a man lying in the last stages of consumption in one of the heathen villages. During the last few weeks of his life he was utterly forsaken. His friends and relatives had become tired of his prolonged illness. When last I saw him he was lying in the shade of his house; while his friends, only a short distance away, were preparing for a heathen festival, and giving him not the slightest consideration. The heart of the heathen world is singularly callous to the appeal of sickness and suffering. It is to Christ that people in Christian lands owe their Homes and Hospitals and the precious mission of sympathy and tenderness.

On the way to the village where the consumptive was lying we came upon a heathen burial in the lonely bush. I had never before been present on such an occasion, nor do I wish ever again to see such a sad and depressing spectacle. The grave was dug in the centre of the village, and around it was gathered a group of naked, painted savages. On the outskirts of the group was a number of women and children weeping and wailing. No prayer was offered and no word of resurrection spoken. Some relatives went forward to the open grave and, throwing in a handful of earth, bade the deceased good-bye. But to them there was no joy of reunion. The body was committed to the grave with no sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. A burial with no thought of Christ and no hope of immortality is to proclaim man's kinship with the beasts that perish. Our message was not

Midst Volcanic Fires

for the dead, but for the living. So, letting the dead bury their dead, we gathered the men and women in a corner of the village square, and spoke to them of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. In the solemn circumstances in which we met we were given an attentive hearing, and were afforded a great opportunity of acquainting them with the Saviour who died for them and who rose again and is alive for evermore.

After our informal meeting we had an interesting conversation with the heathen chief who came to consult us about a tribal quarrel which threatened to divide the village into two warring camps. Embracing the opportunity, we broached the subject of the Christian religion, and told him of the Gospel of peace and goodwill, the proclamation of which had brought us to Ambrim. Many years before, when visiting a neighbouring island, he had heard the story of the Gospel from the lips of a native Christian; but the truth failed to find a lodgment in his darkened soul, and the message was speedily forgotten on his return to the idolatrous worship of his tribe. The ancestral images, beautifully carved and painted, stood in the sacred inclosure, and he had unwavering faith in their worship. We told him again of the great and good God who is not worshipped through images but by the sincere and humble heart, and of the means He had appointed whereby human souls might come into fellowship with Him. But the heathen chief could only conceive of a good God as far off and powerless. The only spirits in which he was interested were

Among the Heathen

evil spirits, and worship to him was simply an attempt to appease or deceive them.

It is a great mistake to imagine that the heathen are longing for deliverance. Indeed, in many widely scattered Ambrim villages we found people who boasted of being free and thought that the acceptance of the Gospel would bring them into bondage. It is no easier to win converts in the South Sea Islands than in any other place. Churches are located in various centres; but the glamour of heathenism has so blinded the eyes of the people that they view with supreme indifference, and sometimes with suspicion, any effort made to uplift them.

Here is a man, hard at work in his plantation, tilling the ground in the same primitive way that his forefathers had done for untold generations. He is a man of about fifty years of age, and with him are his two wives. One of them is about the same age as himself; but the other is a bonny lassie, of about fifteen or sixteen summers, who had only recently been purchased. The women were dressed in grass skirts—the fashionable attire of the island; and the man, in island fashion, too, had his naked body smeared with paints of fantastic colour. Approaching them we addressed a word of greeting: the women gave a smile of welcome, but the man had nothing for us but a grunt. He was a leader in heathenism, and had no time for teacher or missionary. Ignoring his attitude, we continued to address a few words to the women, in the hope of engaging them in conversation; but the more we spoke the more industriously did he make the dirt fly. His timid

Midst Volcanic Fires

wives were too afraid of their lord and master to do more than smile as we departed.

Further afield, within the confines of the Metamble tribe, we came upon the village shrine where, possibly for hundreds of years, the natives had been doing worship to idols—the work of man's hands. In a corner of the sacred inclosure was a party of naked heathen engaged in the erection of a well-carved and gaudily-painted image. One of the men had acquired a higher caste, and the image was the symbol of his new rank. Here, where we were in touch with the soul of heathenism, we were prepared for a cold reception. But the men laid down their tools and chatted with us in a friendly way. They did not, however, want the Gospel with its message of peace and goodwill, but were quite content with their heathen worship. Throughout our entire campaign we did not meet a single soul who wanted to be troubled with the Gospel until the Gospel began to trouble him. But when the Gospel did take possession of the soul, the results produced were marvellous. The converts were led out of a land of thick darkness into the clear, sweet light of God's goodness and love.

One morning, when the Ten Commandments were the subject before the Bible Class, there occurred at Mount Benbow an outburst of fire which must have reminded many of the converts of what took place at Mount Sinai when the Commandments were first given to mankind.

I had left the camp in the early morning to visit the village of Fanla, where there is a large settlement

Among the Heathen

of heathen people living on a mountain-ridge near the volcano. Overhead, the sky was a lovely blue, without a cloud. The bush was quiet and still, and there was not a breath of wind to disturb the leaves. Suddenly, without any warning, the silence was broken by a roar of thunder which made the island reel. Instantly, all eyes were turned on Mount Benbow; and there, in the light of the morning sun, were tremendous volumes of ash rolling out of the volcano and ascending to an extraordinary height. Ambrim's dreadful artillery was in action. The rapidity with which the ash and cinders were shot out turned the volcano into a huge hydro-electric machine and generated great quantities of electricity. Around the dense cloud over the volcano the lightning played, flash following flash in rapid succession. With every flash the air reverberated with thunder. The ash shot up into the air in a straight column, and then spread out in all directions like a gigantic umbrella. In a short time ash and cinders began to fall. In the district around the volcano, day was turned into night. We had the greatest difficulty in making out the native who was walking a few yards ahead of us. Covering the land, like a mantle of snow, the ash obliterated all paths, and it was more luck than good guiding which brought us to our destination. The people were too excited, and the look of things too threatening, to think of anything else but the safety of ourselves and the people. While talking to the chief I got hit on the eye with a falling cinder. A teacher accompanying us interposed with the

Midst Volcanic Fires

remark that the volcano was slinging stones, and counselled a retreat homewards. The rest of our company dispersed in different directions to look after their own families.

We retraced our steps to the camp, with the cinders falling about us like hailstones. Fortunately, the violence of the outburst was of short duration, though the dust continued to fall all day. We reached the camp black as chimney-sweeps. Our hut was covered with volcanic ash. Everything in the hut was smeared with it. We breathed it, and ate it, and swallowed it.

The frequent outbursts of the volcano had become a real trial to the faith of the Christian population. They asked the same sort of questions that timid souls asked about the war. Why did God who controlled everything permit such evil? The Christian natives, with no idea of the operation of natural laws, were quite at a loss to account for the outbreaks. The heathen got over the difficulty by ascribing volcanic activity to the anger of the spirits, and in times of danger they propitiated them by offerings. The Christians were taught to believe that no evil spirits could control the forces of nature, but they were unable to assign calamities their right place in the natural sequence of events. In Christian lands, the natural instinct—and it has become so by years of prayer and discipline—is at once to turn to God in every event of life; and through the valley the Christian passes with the song of the Psalmist on his lips, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." But the heritage which the

Among the Heathen

native of the New Hebrides has derived from the past makes it difficult for him to regard calamities in this light. It will need a long process of education and training for him to trace God "riding upon the storm."

In the course of our journeys across Ambrim we frequently came upon traces of bygone eruptions. In a creek near one of our camps there had been unearthed a strange marking on an old lava flow which, after being buried for generations, possibly for centuries, had been uncovered by the big floods which swept the lava channel. It is the shape of an adult leg and foot engraven in the solid basalt, as if, in the long-forgotten past, some human being, in his or her anxiety to escape from the volcano, had been caught in the devouring flow and left the impress of his body in the plastic lava. Numbers of people visited the spot; and the human mould, with its mute appeal, coming like a voice from the past, stirred their hearts and imaginations.

CHAPTER V

STORMING THE HEATHEN CITADELS

TRAVELLING in the islands is very uncertain during the hurricane months. The barometer must be the constant companion of everyone whose business necessitates long journeys by sea, and, on the first scent of danger, the wise will betake themselves and their crafts to a haven of safety. Nearly all the settlers in the group lay their vessels up during the hurricane seasons; and certainly this method saves a great deal of trouble and anxiety. But the demands of a widely-scattered mission district precluded us from adopting that plan and compelled us to take risks. Fortunately, the launch was not heavy, and, in cases of emergency, could be brought ashore without much difficulty.

In the midst of one evangelistic campaign we had the launch at anchor in front of the mission station in Paama, and everything in readiness to proceed, as soon as the mail steamer passed, to storm the heathen citadels in the Craig Cove and north Ambrim districts. On the morning of the steamer's arrival the barometer made a sudden swoop downwards. All nature was smiling, and there was nothing above the horizon to suggest that the weather conditions were about to be reversed.

Storming the Heathen Citadels

To the keen disappointment of a number of native Christians of Paama who were accompanying us to assist in the campaign, we decided to wait until the afternoon, in the hope of an improvement in the barometer. The weather prophets and the old "sacred man" of Paama said that the white man's weather-glass was "gammoning." But, instead of rising, the barometer continued to fall; and when, in the afternoon, I intimated that the Ambrim trip was off, and that the launch with all its cargo was to be brought ashore, bewilderment was to be seen in every face. And certainly, to the natives, whose weather calculations were made from the appearance of the face of nature, the action of the missionaries must have looked very strange.

That evening the natives went to sleep with the gentle murmur of the land breeze crooning amongst the leaves of the trees that overshadow their rustic dwellings. By midnight they were all awake with the howling of the gale. They recognized the familiar sound: a hurricane was upon them. The noise of the wind and rain was deafening, and the hurricane blasts, as they swooped down the gullies, approached with a roar of thunder. The sea rose rapidly; and when morning dawned, the breakers were curling their white tops and descending on the beach in mountains of spray. The angry wind was lifting the sea in sheets, and driving the watery flakes before it like the drift in a Highland snow-storm. On the coral reef to the south of the mission station which formed the anchorage ground of the launch, the big rollers of the Pacific were breaking in clouds

Midst Volcanic Fires

of snow-white foam, and no launch would long have survived the violence of the gale.

In the early morning, as I stood on the verandah of the mission house, and watched, with a strange fascination, the giant rollers approaching the shore, I was startled by the noise of creaking timber, and, for the moment, it seemed as if the mission house were being torn from its foundations. The hurricane had lifted the roof off one of the outhouses, and hurled it with terrific violence against the mission house, only a few feet from where I was standing. Before striking the house it crashed into a new tank which had just been completed, following the destruction caused by the earthquake of the previous year. When I saw the tank going, I did not know whether to laugh or cry; but it made me realize that mission committees that are responsible for the upkeep of work in islands that are ravaged alternately by volcanoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes must accept disaster, not as the abnormal, but as the normal condition of things.

When it was apparent to everyone that the hurricane was subsiding, Meilato, the old sacred man, appeared on the beach with all the strange paraphernalia of his trade, and performed some weird incantations to arrest the wind and sea. Whether or not the Christian natives still believed in him it was difficult to say, though they all made a pretence of laughing at his queer antics. But, at any rate, it was evident that Meilato's faith in himself was fast waning. His eye caught me watching his movements, and, in a moment of weakness, the old

Storming the Heathen Citadels

fellow admitted that it was easy to stop the wind, but that Missi had the secret of starting it. The superstitious old man seemed to believe that with the help of the barometer I had succeeded in making the hurricane, and evidently regarded me as one of the white members of the "sacred men" fraternity who knew how to do things. Doubtless, too, he thought that if he possessed the secret he could levy no end of blackmail from a credulous people. I got the barometer, and tried to explain the methods of its working; but all natives, Christian and heathen alike, find it almost impossible to understand the operation of natural laws. To them a spirit is behind all the processes of nature, and the old wizard declined to believe in anything else than that the barometer was controlled by magic.

The practice of sorcery seems to be prevalent among all races whose religion is animistic. Accounts that one reads of customs and practices prevalent in Africa are almost identical with those of the New Hebrides. One cannot live long in the islands without realizing how much the people are swayed by the occult power of the spirit, ranging from the spirits of plants and animals to the spirits of individuals and to a vague belief in the existence of a Great Spirit. The South Sea islander is profoundly impressed with the idea that nature is, like himself, alive, and animated by a conscious soul.

The tendency of the rising generation is to revive certain of their old superstitions and graft them on to the virile Christian vine. Why evil should happen under the reign of a good God is one of the

Midst Volcanic Fires

problems that baffles them, and they take refuge in the philosophy of their fathers. In its reach after the universal quest of mankind—the Something beyond and outside of himself—the race has evolved a multitudinously-peopled spirit world. The ordinary processes of nature, which are instinctively recognized and understood by the European, are, to the natives, enigmas which reveal the hidden hand of the spirits. Natives do not understand the operation of natural laws. The hurricane, the earthquake, the volcano, and the other destructive forces of nature are due, they think, to the agency of some malign, invisible power. In face of the destructive forces of nature, man is helpless, and so he must treat nature in the same way that he would treat a tyrant who is stronger than himself. A tyrant is appeased with bloodshed or offerings of some kind, and destructive nature has to be appeased in the same way. Even sickness, or pain of any kind, is not regarded as natural. For a pain in the back or in the chest a native will cut himself with a knife—not to drive out the sickness, but to let out the sickness demon. Even the advent of medical science has not been able to deliver the native from the power of those ideas. One can readily conceive what terrible power must have been wielded by the old witch doctors, who interpreted the mind of the spirits and explained the cause of their wrath.

The greatest temptation to backsliding among adherents, who have for ages been the prey of unthinking superstitions, comes in a time of serious illness. Among the heathen of Ambrim the treat-

Storming the Heathen Citadels

ment of sickness is intimately bound up with superstition. Nobody ever gets sick from natural causes. An offended demon has sent the sickness. To appease the demon is, therefore, the first and most necessary step to be taken in treatment, and no means of cure is complete without a sacrifice of some sort. So the witch doctor is called in. Now, when sickness comes into the house of the new adherent, it is well that skilled treatment should be within his reach, otherwise the impulse is to consult the old family physician. But, knowing well what such a course involves, the newly-baptized convert will resist the temptation. Should the illness become serious, then, after the superstitious manner of the islands, a crowd of heathen will throng the house and offer suggestions as to the remedies applicable in such cases, and so recourse is had to the medicine man. If he fails, it is possible the backsliders may seek restoration to church fellowship; but if he should chance to succeed, and take credit for the cure which was really effected by the healing processes of nature, the whole village is hardened against Christianity. After an experience of many years among the native races of the New Hebrides, I can bear witness to the way in which efficient medical aid to the people in sickness may turn what might have been an occasion of falling into a very sacrament of grace, drawing out all that is best in their simple and childlike faith.

On the termination of the hurricane the motor-boat was again launched, and, in the calm sea and beautiful weather that usually follows in the wake

Midst Volcanic Fires

of a hurricane, we made the journey to Craig Cove in a little less than four hours. On our arrival off the coast of Ambrim we found that the same atmospheric conditions which gave rise to the hurricane had made the volcano restive, causing a series of violent eruptions, which were smothering the north end of the island in dust and ashes. As we sailed into Craig Cove the land presented a repellent appearance, gasping under the thick volcanic ash which had dried up every green thing, except the long, sinuous line of she-oaks which marked the Ambrim coast-line.

We remained a week at Craig Cove, and during the entire period the volcano continued to belch forth a steady downpour of ashes, making life as miserable as it could possibly be. But so accustomed had the natives become to that kind of existence that the meetings and arrangements were carried through as if there were no volcano and no falling cinders. In front of our camp a game of football was played with a hundred players on either side, who looked more like African negroes than copper-coloured Melanesians. For so long a period had the Christian natives been looking forward to our visit that they simply refused to allow the volcano to interfere with the carrying out of the missionaries' programme or mar the hallowed enjoyment of fellowship and intercourse with kindred souls.

At the close of our visit a big farewell service was held, when the natives, to mark the occasion, decked themselves in their Sunday clothes, and, following their example, I donned a white suit. The service

Storming the Heathen Citadels

was in the open air ; but on this occasion we had no need of the kindly shade of the spreading chestnut tree, under whose leafy canopy we usually had our village meetings, for the black smoke of the volcano lay as a thick pall between us and the fierce rays of the sun. At the beginning of the service the congregation presented a very smart and a very creditable appearance, but, as the service proceeded, the clothes of the worshippers took on a darker hue. By the time the benediction was pronounced my white suit had vanished ; and if a visitor had suddenly appeared on the scene he would have said that a chimney-sweep was conducting the service.

We were never so glad to get away from any of our camps as from Craig Cove. After breathing and chewing dust and ash for a week, and with the roar of the volcano ever in our ears, the tension began to get on our nerves. Occasionally, too, the volcano would copy German tactics, and use gas : at such times the smell of sulphuric acid was almost unbearable. We did not care to leave before our programme of meetings was completed, in case of creating a panic amongst the natives ; but it was a glad release to escape to the comparatively clear air of the heathen citadels on the north-east coast. On the morning of our departure from Craig Cove we found that the canvas hood which covered the launch had collapsed under the weight of ashes that had fallen during the night.

During our former visit to north Ambrim the storming of the heathen fortress of Fanla was interrupted by a sudden outburst from Mount

Midst Volcanic Fires

Benbow, the showers of ash and cinders from which made us beat a hurried retreat homewards. But in the interval the teachers had sought every opportunity to gain an entrance into the village. It is a strong heathen centre, and the influence of the tribe throughout north Ambrim is paramount. Peter, the teacher of Fanreru, had succeeded in having occasional services in the village, and other converts had embraced every opportunity of watering the good seed of the Kingdom which Peter had sown. A small section of the people had declared themselves favourable to the settlement of a teacher for the introduction of Christian worship, but every effort they made was thwarted by the old heathen chief. Learning that the opposition of the chief was weakening, we opened our new campaign in north Ambrim by a visit to Fanla, to ascertain what prospects there were of purchasing ground as a site for school and teacher's house.

As usual on such occasions, a considerable number of converts accompanied us, and our numbers swelled as we passed through the Christian villages. A part of the track lay along the sea-beach. Opposite the Roman Catholic Mission we passed a number of the French priest's native neophytes fishing on the reef. Standing on coral rocks out in the water, they were equipped, not with rod and fishing-line, but with bows and arrows. It was strange to watch those youthful archers perched on the rocks, with poised bodies, and with bow and arrow drawn, in readiness for the unwary fish that happened to come their way. Not often do they catch small fish in

Storming the Heathen Citadels

this way, but occasionally a big fellow is speared, which provides a tasty meal for the fishers.

Passing the boat-landing of Harimal we found the beach strewn with broken timbers from a wrecked boat. On making inquiries we found that the cutter of the Fonting tribe had come to grief on the night of the hurricane. The gale had come as unexpectedly upon Ambrim as upon Paama; and when, during the night, the natives rushed down to the anchorage to save the boat, it was to find that the big seas had already driven it ashore and battered it to pieces on the jagged rock. We felt sorry for the Fonting people in their ill fortune, as they had obtained the boat as a means of escape from Ambrim in the event of another big eruption.

A steady climb brought us to the village of Fanla, which is situated on a mountain-ridge within view of the volcano. The village we found very dirty and full of flies. The children came out to meet us, and conducted us to a seat in the centre of the village, where we were soon surrounded by a laughing, shouting mob of naked, brown kiddies. In Fanla there is no village green, the ground being covered with the dust and ash of the volcano, and the constant tread of the natives has reduced it to a powdered dust.

The people were as low and degraded as one could meet; but that they were capable of better things was shown by the improvement that had already taken place in those who had been influenced by the teaching of the Gospel. The squalid condition of the place was self-evident, and could not escape the

Midst Volcanic Fires

notice of even the most casual observer. The nakedness, the accumulated dirt, the savage ornamentation, the unswept village, all combined to tell their own story. And for the missionary who lives among them, camps in their village, hears their conversation, inquires into their customs, the outward appearance was but the index of the inward thought and life.

The people were very friendly, and some one proposed that we should go to the part of the village where a *manki* ceremony was being celebrated. In the elevation of the natives from one caste to another a *manki* ceremony is made, when elaborate images are reared and the requisite number of pigs killed. We were indeed anxious to see the *manki*, and the offer was no sooner made than accepted. A short walk brought us to a cluster of wretched, dilapidated houses, certainly more fit for pigs than human beings. Indeed, the houses for the pigs and for the people were all mixed up together, and it was difficult to distinguish the one from the other.

The sacred ground of the village, however, presented a very picturesque appearance. Croton trees, of every variety of colour, were growing; while an imposing array of *tivabas* or images, adorned with grotesquely-carved figures, studded the sacred inclosure. The house in which the *manki* was erected was the best in the village. Two men guarded the door, and, without showing any signs of displeasure, allowed us to enter. They followed us into the house, and, with evident satisfaction, answered all the questions we asked. The place was dark, the only

Storming the Heathen Citadels

light that entered being from the narrow doorway. As soon as our eyes were accustomed to the dim light, we saw all the objects of heathen worship and dread ranged round the house. The most conspicuous figure, of course, was the *manki*, and the whole end of the house was given up to its display. The image stood about four feet high, and was painted with very bright colours. It was double-faced, and all the parts of the body were carved with disgusting realism. We were glad to escape to the open air, and the two attendants seemed relieved also when we returned to the village.

The natives had all assembled, and were waiting for us on the village square. They were all heathen, and only a few wore clothing. Like other savage tribes, the bodies of the men were adorned with ornaments, and those of them who had been participating in the *manki* celebrations had plumes of croton leaves waving in their bushy heads. Necklaces of beads and pigs' tusks were freely worn. The men had their faces and naked bodies smeared with paints of fantastic colour—the fashionable attire of the island; while the women, in island fashion also, were dressed in short, grass skirts—a style of attire to which the women of this country are rapidly approximating.

Pharaoh, King of Fanla, was among his subjects, and I seemed to detect a friendly look in his savage eyes. But when we came to bargain with him for the purchase of a piece of land as a site for church and school, his heart was again hardened. He was out for plunder. However, we could be stiff-necked,

Midst Volcanic Fires

too; and rather than pay an exorbitant price at the bidding of an implacable old heathen, we were prepared to abandon Fanla, and wait for a more convenient season. But the old rogue backed down, and before our departure from the village he tried to make amends for his extortion. His son came forward to apologise for the old man, and, in a gleam of unconscious humour, declared his father was as fond of money as a white man. We did not quite know how to take the young chieftain's apology; but we soon perceived that the stigma was not meant for us personally, but spoken rather as a characteristic of the race to which we belonged.

The experience of former missionaries had taught us to respect native law regarding land purchase, and our title-deeds are now fully and carefully made out. Native law discriminates between the land and the trees which the land carries. The former may belong to one man and the latter to another. When a missionary in the New Hebrides wishes to purchase land, the trees must be specifically mentioned in the agreement, as they were by Abraham in the purchase of the field of Machpelah from the sons of Heth. If this stipulation be not stated, the trees and the fruit remain the property of the vendor, and the purchaser will find himself unable to clear his own land without exciting the displeasure of the people, while the previous owner will come to gather the fruit the buyer regarded as his own.

Sitting in the village of Fanla, and taking stock of all sorts and conditions of the people, we recognized that the greater part of the material on which

Storming the Heathen Citadels

our Church had undertaken to work was as low down in the scale of humanity as it was possible to be. Again and again, we found ourselves wondering if true believing Christians could be turned out of such raw, ugly material. It reveals no lack of faith to say of the ordinary savage that there is little hope of turning him into a very high type of Christian. Though many of our best teachers hail from this class, it is nevertheless true that the average native recruited from heathenism is content to live on a low plane of life, and that the most we dare expect from him is the knowledge that one true God lives and reigns, that He distinguishes between good and evil, and that He sent His Son to save the world. Indeed, it is a great matter even to accomplish this; and, to those who know the native in his degradation, the wonder is all the greater. But the hope of the islands lies with the children. If we can have the children in our schools to teach and train, then the product will be more in accordance with the Scriptural idea of what a Christian should be. Nevertheless, we gain inspiration to strive for the very lowest when we remember that many of our most faithful converts were themselves savage and heathen. The best proof of the suitability of the Gospel to the natives of the New Hebrides is to be found, not in the number of nominal Christian converts, but in the quality of those who have really been made new creatures in Christ.

The real significance of our visit to Fanla and the other heathen villages of Ambrim was this: that those poor souls had thrown themselves upon our

Midst Volcanic Fires

mission that it might do its best for them. They brought their dirt, their ignorance, and their poverty that the Church might wash and teach and enrich them. We promised the chief and people of Fanla to settle a teacher in the village who would open a school and declare the saving truths of the Gospel. It meant, amongst other things, additional expense and responsibility for the parent Church; but was it not the highest privilege of the Christian Church to join with its Head in bearing such burdens?

Even among the heathen races of the New Hebrides God hath not left Himself without a witness. In spite of the degradation and gross superstition connected with their heathen worship, the people possess customs and individual characteristics not wholly bad. There exists a dim, undefined consciousness of a great, unknown God who created the world and all animate objects. But this knowledge is too hazy to beget worship. God is too far away to take any interest in them. He is an absentee God, who, after making the world, has left it to its own devices. Another point of contact which the Christian missionary can use in the proclamation of the Gospel is the vague, undefined belief the natives have in the after-life of the soul.

In many of the heathen villages there are a few souls who are sensitive to the Divine Impulse and who might almost be regarded as waiting for the new revelation. These souls readily associate themselves with the messenger of the Gospel, and are the

Storming the Heathen Citadels

class from which the early converts are drawn. The proclamation of the one true God, who made all things and loves all people, flashes upon their dark minds like a penetrating shaft of light, and henceforth life is never the same. The message awakens an echo within their hearts, and they respond gladly to the influence of the new religion which satisfies the longing of their souls.

When encamped in the village, an earthquake took place which was one of the most severe, and certainly the longest, we had experienced in the islands. A few seconds before the tremor occurred the natives felt it approaching. With their bare feet in direct contact with the earth they seemed to be sensible of a vibration, as of an electric current, and they stood awed and silent for the tremor to materialize. The earth waves were long, like the roll of the ocean, which was an indication that the centre of the disturbance was a considerable distance off. The houses and trees and tanks swayed to and fro; but with the long, regular earth roll they had time to regain their equilibrium, and no damage was done. We discovered afterwards that the centre was under the island of Paama, where great destruction was wrought. There the earth waves were short and abrupt, like the waves of a choppy sea, and the poor people had a nerve-trying experience with their houses dancing underneath them.

Stormy weather set in during our visit to Fanla, and, owing to the torrential rains, we were obliged to take shelter in the house of the under-chief, which he very kindly gave us. The house was

Midst Volcanic Fires

divided into two apartments by a reed fence drawn across the middle. One apartment formed the sleeping quarters of the chief and family, the other was our camp. A small erection, made from bush timber, served the triple purpose of bed, table, and chair. Around us were collected as many natives as could get squeezed into the house. In front of us was the inevitable collection of naked babies, some tumbling about in the volcanic ash, some smacking each other, and some earnestly studying the contents of our provision baskets. Behind the children was the patriarch of the village—a man of great age, with grey hairs and furrowed cheeks, while his face bore evident traces of a former cannibalism. Around him were gathered the men and boys. Outside the door were the women and girls, who were afraid to sit close to their lords and masters. Some of the young girls were pretty, with their large dark eyes; but life had been hard on the older women. Heathenism had had no pity upon them, and there was no disguising the wrinkles that oppression had furrowed upon their cheeks. Old age to a heathen woman is only hateful and repulsive.

Apart from the fact that we are carrying out the Lord's command, I do not think a stronger argument in favour of mission work could be obtained than the great change it makes in the life of women. Nothing else proclaims so loudly the depth to which the people have fallen as the condition of their women. Many of the rank evils of heathenism have, in the course of the ages, gathered round her. The abuses begin in childhood, when she is taken



AMBRIM WOMAN.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LIBRARY

Storming the Heathen Citadels

from her mother's home and given by her hard-hearted father to the man who offers him the greatest number of pigs. She has the work of the household to do, she has the plantation to tend, she has the copra to carry to the trader, often from a long distance, while behind her stalks the lazy husband with the inevitable musket over his shoulder.

To crown the degradation, there existed throughout Ambrim the iniquitous custom of women kneeling in the presence of men. During our first visit to south-east Ambrim, soon after our arrival in the islands, we noticed several instances of women walking on their knees, but no attention was paid to the practice. We regarded the habit as due to the inborn indolence of the native. On a later occasion, however, the practice was brought so vividly before our eyes that we had no difficulty in identifying it as a foul heathen custom.

The men had all assembled for morning worship, but for some reason the women appeared late. They arrived in a body; and, as soon as they approached the men, down they flopped on their knees and proceeded to crawl, like abject suppliants, to their seats. On questioning the men about the practice, I could at first get no information. They hung their heads in silence and shame. At last, one man volunteered the information that it was the custom which had always prevailed among them.

A few days later, when visiting the village of Utas, on the occasion of a united prayer meeting, Taltaso, the teacher, informed us that the custom was, as we thought, a foul heathen practice. Although he

Midst Volcanic Fires

had made constant protests against the continuance of the practice in the Christian villages, his efforts were unsuccessful. That afternoon, in the service in the Utas church, when representatives from the other Christian villages were present, a solemn and serious appeal was made to the men for the adoption of a heroic and chivalrous attitude to the women. In plain language, too, they were told that fellowship with Christ and the continuance of the practice could not abide side by side.

The usual native light-heartedness was not manifest that day. To many the appeal came as a great surprise. So low and degraded was their idea of women that few seemed to think that there was anything wrong in the continuance of a practice which had been in operation among their fathers for countless generations. Others, again, knew it to be wrong, but from want of thought, or indolence, had taken no steps to bring the custom to an end. But on that day they were brought to a parting of the ways. A long conference followed, and they decided to abandon the practice. Never again did I witness another example of the offensive habit in any of the Christian villages.

The heathen natives are so exceedingly unmoral (not necessarily immoral), and so wedded to the past, that it is difficult to get them to see anything very bad in long-established practices. "It is the custom of my people," a heathen chief once said to me; and he fancied moral ideas as a foolish fad of the foreign missionary. The passage from heathenism to Christianity is a slow process, and was aptly described

Storming the Heathen Citadels

by Taltaso, in a meeting of teachers, "We must be patient, for the Word of God is a new thing to our people, and they have a long way to go."

Considerable time, doubtless, will elapse before even the Christian native will give the women due consideration or regard them as on an equality with themselves. The men have so long regarded themselves as superior to the women that they find it hard to part with the notion. Yet these women are often far more intelligent than their husbands, and certainly less lazy and selfish.

It was the cry of a bygone generation that the great need of the heathen world was a conscience. But a long acquaintance with heathen races only deepens the conviction that their greatest need is Christ, and only through His Spirit working in their hearts can conscience become operative. He, and He only, is able to overcome the trend of heredity, lead the soul to break with its past, and become Christlike in its attitude to its fellow men and women. The forces of evil in the heathen world are impregnable unless Christ changes the heart. In a word, it is the Gospel that can effectually root out and destroy the gigantic evil of heathenism.

While we were encamped in the village of Makam I had occasion to visit the adjacent island of Pentecost. A narrow strip of sea six miles wide divides Pentecost from Ambrim; and yet the two islands, while possessing a general relationship which extends to language and weapons, have characteristics so distinct as to indicate they were peopled from different stocks.

Midst Volcanic Fires

In Pentecost there is a strange and almost uncanny division of the people, quite unlike anything which prevails in Ambrim or Paama. The population is divided into two great classes called *Tabi* and *Buli*, in both of which descent is traced through the mother, and whose members may not marry with another of the same class. The unwritten law of the land is that a man belonging to the *Tabi* class must not take as his wife a *Tabi* woman: he must marry some one from the *Buli* division. In the same way, a man belonging to the *Buli* class must not take as his wife a *Buli* woman: he must marry some one from the *Tabi* division. The children born trace their descent through the mother, and belong to her division of the population. As a result of this strange class distinction, the mother's brother is considered a closer relation of the children than their own father. In the inheritance of property a man's belongings do not naturally go to his own offspring, but to the children of his sister.

In Ambrim and Epi there is no such division of the people, and descent is traced through the father. His property, too, is inherited by his own children. It is strange why such differences should exist in neighbouring islands. Perhaps, some day, when the relationship of the languages and customs is better understood, it may be possible to trace the origin of those people, and connect them with the outer world. In the meantime, a fog of mystery enshrouds their beginnings.

On my departure from Pentecost I ran across to the village of Ranon, in Ambrim, and stayed over the

Storming the Heathen Citadels

week-end in order to have the Sunday services with the people. Morning church was held in a grove of cocoanut trees, near the station of a French trader. As I had sent out an invitation on the Saturday evening to the surrounding villages, there was a good attendance; and the service, though marred by an unusual kind of interruption, was bright and hearty.

The cattle of the French trader, to the number of 150, were grazing in the vicinity of our meeting place, and, attracted by the bright dresses of the women, many of them strayed uncomfortably near. As the cattle approached, I could notice an uneasy movement in the congregation, and, in anticipation of danger, many of them quietly sidled up to the tall cocoanut trees. At length, an old bull, with branching horns, left the herd and advanced to the outskirts of the gathering. Instantly, there was a general stampede; and men, women, and children, like so many monkeys, ran up the tall cocoanut trunks. Only a handful of people remained seated. I did not think of it at the time; but, with the preacher standing on an old box, and the members of his congregation hanging like leeches to the trunks of the trees, I must have cut rather a sorry figure. However, the interruption was not of long duration. The herd laddie was in the congregation, and he quickly got up and drove the unwelcome visitors away.

A walk of about an hour brought us to the heathen village of Bokor. We found the entire male population of the tribe on the village square, and every man

Midst Volcanic Fires

had his face painted. They presented a hideous and fantastic spectacle. No two men had their faces painted in the same way. At first, we imagined that it had something to do with the different grades of the caste system; but the fact was, they were in mourning for a chief who had died a month before, and the style of paint decoration was left to the caprice of the individual. The more fantastic the colouring, the deeper was supposed to be the mourning. The time allotted to mourning for a chief was nearly up, and they were looking forward to the sacrifice of a number of pigs in a few days, to bring to an end the dreary formalities of court mourning.

Savage and revolting as was their external appearance, they gave us a hearty reception. Beneath the paint and grease of their naked bodies beat human hearts. A chubby little fellow of about two years of age wandered on to the square on which we were seated, and, approaching too near the edge of a dangerous embankment, there was an instant rush by several men to rescue the little toddler. Mr Weir and I found a seat on an idol which had fallen from its pedestal, and, with all those beauties squatted around us, had a free and easy conversation. We found the fallen Dagon an appropriate topic by which to introduce the message of the Gospel. In the square stood a number of carved idols which for many years had received the worship and homage of the people. We endeavoured to convey to them the hopelessness of heathen worship when a strong wind, during the night, could remove an idol from its

Storming the Heathen Citadels

place, and be found in the morning, broken and bruised, lying face downwards on the ground. One of the men referred to the fallen idol as the "god of Ambrim." We recommended them to trust in the God who made heaven and earth, and who is not worshipped with graven images—the work of man's hands—but by the humble and lowly heart.

Our conversation was interrupted by a sudden downpour of rain, and at once there was a stampede to the *namal*, the clubhouse of the village. The naked savages were as afraid of the rain as the members of the mission party, who wore clothes. The *namal* was a long, narrow building, and had communication with the light of heaven only through two small openings at either end, which served as doorways. In the centre of the building was a huge fire which lit up the interior. It was somewhat weird and eerie to be jammed in a house, packed full of savage-looking fellows, while the reflection of the fire on their painted faces made them even more fierce and grotesque looking. But the smoke and foul air were too much for us; and, after enduring it for a quarter of an hour, we were glad to escape into God's clear air.

When about to leave the village a man came forward with a very strange grievance. He complained that his two wives were constantly quarrelling, and, no matter what he said or did, the quarrelling continued, and he could get no sleep, night or day. Could we do anything to help him? We told him that it was contrary to the law of God for one man to have two wives, and specially so on Ambrim,

Midst Volcanic Fires

when there were so many men who could not get wives. We suggested that the easiest way out of the difficulty would be for him to part with one of his wives, and let her get married to another man. That night *our* rest was disturbed with a squealing of pigs passing in procession in front of our camp. Bogneim had taken our advice, and had sold one of his wives for ten pigs to a chief of a neighbouring village, and the procession of squealing pigs was the payment being transferred from the village of the buyer to that of the vendor.

On our departure from Bokor we met a number of men from the island of Pentecost who had come to assist the people in their heathen ceremonies and to carve new images. Those agents were as diligent in disseminating the influence of their cult as we evangelists were in the spread of the Gospel. We met them on several occasions on our travels among the heathen villages, and we were made to realize that idol worship was all in all to the superstitious natives. But we afterwards discovered that the lure of heathen worship was as nothing compared to the infatuation of money. Two ethnologists, one from Switzerland and the other from America, visited Ambrim, and, in the course of their scientific investigations, bought up from the natives large numbers of heathen images and curios of all kinds, for which they offered big prices. The people parted with their best and most finely-carved images. Money, of course, was a new thing to them, and they were readily infatuated with it; but there was nothing with which they would not part to

Storming the Heathen Citadels

obtain it. They even opened graves, and sold the skulls of their dead. Possibly, after all, the love of money is a greater idol than any of the grotesque figures identified with heathen worship.

The love of money, too, is taking possession of many of the converts, and is even colouring their ideas of heaven. Owing to the heavy depreciation of the French coinage, the franc is very unpopular among the natives, and they insist on payment for their produce in English money. Recently, in one of the Christian villages, a dying man had a vision of heaven, and what impressed him most was the fact that the streets were lined with gold. On relating his vision to me I was at first inclined to imagine that his vision was but a reflection of what the seer of Patmos saw, had not the South Sea Island dreamer significantly added that in heaven there was no French gold—all was English.

From north Ambrim we made our way to the heathen village of Palimae, on the south coast, where Tungan, the teacher, was holding the fort against the forces of a strongly-entrenched heathenism. Of late, signs had not been wanting that the people were relaxing their adhesion to pagan worship, and we were encouraged to believe that an evangelistic campaign among them would greatly help in breaking down the barriers of the heathen stronghold.

Many months before, in one of the villages of Paama, a missionary conference was being held around a camp fire in the centre of the village square. Hungai, the teacher of Lalembu, had just

Midst Volcanic Fires

returned from Palimae, and was giving an account of his experiences. "It is of no use," he told his fellow-tribesmen, "to attempt to convert the heathen of Palimae: they care for nothing but pigs and the worship of idols." But one of the listeners was not so easily convinced. "Were we not, a few years ago, just as heathen and as wicked as the savages of Palimae?" The speaker was a convert named Tungan. Every one around the camp fire that evening knew that Tungan would volunteer to go as an evangelist to Palimae, and by common consent he was regarded as the right man. Next morning he informed me of his decision, and expressed a desire to begin work as early as possible. Four days later, his friends and fellow-tribesmen assembled on the beach of Paama to wish him God-speed as he set off with me in the launch for Palimae.

The Palimae people soon showed us that Tungan was not wanted. The old chief held up his hands in horror and amazement at the idea of a teacher coming all the way from Paama to convert him, the leader of the heathen worship in the Port Vato district, and advised him to return home at once. Tungan replied, quietly but firmly, that he had come to preach to him and to his people the Gospel of God, and had no intention of returning home. Permission to build a house near the village was angrily refused. The old chief ignored every request made, and at last refused to engage in conversation with us. Several days later I returned to Paama without having gained either permission for Tungan to preach or a site for a dwelling-house

Storming the Heathen Citadels

and mission station. Most men would have been only too pleased to return home with me; but Tungan, having put his hand to the plough, would not turn back. Before my departure I arranged with Hungai of Lalembu that Tungan should lodge with him, and use his station as a base of operations for attacking Palimae.

The Sunday following, Tungan, accompanied by Hungai, held an open-air meeting on the village square. The old heathen chief resolved to thwart the efforts of the teachers, and arrayed himself in the most hideous fashion of heathenism, his arms and legs adorned with pigs' tusks, his face painted black and red, and his body smeared with grease. In this array he began to dance, and presented a most grotesque figure. As one of the sacred men of the village, he thought that this guise would influence the spirits to help him in overthrowing the Christian worship, and, in order to drown Tungan's preaching, he maintained a never-ending succession of blasts on the conch shell. The old man gave Tungan no quarter, and, as the people of the village were afraid of him, they continued to ignore both the teacher and his message. Several weeks afterwards I returned to Port Vato to ascertain how it fared with Tungan; but I found him still lodging with Hungai, and the strong fortress of heathenism still without a breach in the walls.

For several months before the evangelistic deputation arrived in the Palimae district, lawlessness and disorder had become widespread among the heathen villages, and there had been several murders as a

Midst Volcanic Fires

result of a vendetta between the Lalinda and Bonka tribes. The people of the entire district were tired of the constant warfare, and they seemed to recognize that the visit of the missionaries, carrying the Gospel of Peace, would be the first thing to give rest to the troubled community. The teachers sent us word of the changed conditions, though we were not prepared for a welcome from the heathen chief who had been for such a long time a thorn in Tungan's side.

In the villages around Port Vato we saw heathenism in its most odious and revolting colours. Several things combined to make the state of the heathen appear more appalling—the contrast with the Christian villages and the grandeur of the country through which we passed. The slopes of the hills were clothed with the luxurious vegetation of the Tropics, in which beauty, grandeur, and wildness were fantastically blended; while the ocean, dotted with islands, was seen stretching away in boundless majesty, until it appeared to embrace the heavens in the distance. But it was the land of a dark and degraded people, and the home of superstition. All else was loveliness. Man alone was vile.

We had not been long encamped at Port Vato when we learned that the heathen chief had no desire for the worship, except on his own terms. To give up heathenism was a cost for which he and his people had not bargained. He was anxious for the introduction of school and Christian worship simply as a means of bringing the vendetta to an end. His attitude was much the same as that of the atheistic

Storming the Heathen Citadels

Emperor Frederick, who favoured religion as a means of keeping his German subjects quiet and contented. But we knew too much of the inveteracy of evil to put a premium upon it by countenancing it within school. The old chief would fain have regarded God as the same shadowy kind of being as their own spirits—a colourless being of an easy goodness, tolerant of evil. But the old chief and his people were heathen, dead in trespasses and sins, and with no consciousness of their need of a Saviour. It is difficult to believe how great is the incapacity of these children of Adam for fellowship with God, and how low, and with what long-suffering, must the eternal God condescend to lead His children to Himself.

The longer we live amid heathen surroundings the more convinced do we become of the accuracy of Paul's diagnosis of heathenism. The "vain imaginations" are still to the front, the "foolish heart" is still "darkened," the "creature" is still honoured rather than the "Creator," and the "things that are not fitting" still retain their place of pre-eminence. But the victory of the Gospel is as sure and certain now as it was then, and we have the faith to believe it.

It was gratifying to visit the village of Lalembu, where Hungai was stationed, and to mark the changes that had taken place. The men who used to meet us with painted faces and bodies were now found clothed and in their right mind. The village had been transformed and cleansed, and new men and women had sprung out of the savage environment.

Midst Volcanic Fires

A new value had been given to life and a fresh hope to existence. What made the change appear more striking was the shifting of the entire village. A new site had been chosen, in the centre of which stood the school and teacher's house, with the dwelling-houses of the local natives built around. The village life was begun anew, with new outlook, new energies, new hopes.

The mission school introduces a new era in heathen lands. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, it can renew and transform man, no matter what may have been his antecedents and however discouraging his surroundings. Outside the Gospel of Christ there is not another power in the world that can accomplish such a change.

The meetings in the village of Palimae and surrounding district were hearty and responsive, and inspired with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Tungan and Hungai were able to extend the field of their operations beyond the confines of their own villages. To the delight of Tungan, some of his own people abandoned heathenism and joined the worshipping party, or, as Tungan expressed it, "broke their agreement with Satan." Tungan, moreover, succeeded in gaining the confidence of his own village natives and in winning their recognition and respect. The younger people had been anxious, for some time, to break with heathenism, but had not the courage to withstand the heathen chief, who was joined to his idols, though it was not likely that he could have kept them in bondage much longer. The individual dealing was productive of

Storming the Heathen Citadels

much joy and also of keen disappointment. Some gave themselves joyfully to Christ, while others had no sense of sin and felt no need of a Saviour. But the work was full of life, and we were conscious that the Spirit of God was working in the hearts of the people. One most hopeful feature of the campaign was the numerous instances we met with where prejudice against the Gospel was giving way to conviction of its truth.

The whole credit, under God, for the Christward movement in the Port Vato villages and for bringing the natives as humble learners to the feet of Christ belongs to the teachers, Tungan and Hungai, who so long and so bravely endured the opposition of the heathen. The Lord of the harvest Himself had owned the labour of His dusky servants, and crowned it with rich blessing.

Four of the teachers in north Ambrim belong to the south coast, and they accompanied us throughout the campaign in their native villages. Caleb, the teacher of Harimal, is a native of the village of Malver, and it was a great joy to notice the interest he took in his old friends who were still in the darkness of heathenism, and with what eagerness he pleaded with them to give their lives into the hands of God. During our visit to Malver he introduced his brother—a naked heathen—to us, with the request that we should speak to him of the claims of God. He himself retired to a corner of the village square, where, squatted on the ground beside an old heathen woman, he pleaded with her to become a Christian, and acknowledge Jesus Christ as her Lord and Master.

Midst Volcanic Fires

To us it was more than an ordinary pleasure to deal with his brother. Naked and repulsive as he looked, he had a kindly face and sparkling eyes, and we soon learned that his face was an index of his heart. Among all heathen tribes we found a few, with a natural aptitude for goodness, who seemed to be waiting for the Divine impulse to direct their lives into the proper channel. Bong of Malver was one of these rare souls, and it was a pleasure to talk with him about the cardinal truths of our religion. Patiently and prayerfully we told him of the great and good God who made us and who sent His Son into the world to take away our evil hearts and give us new hearts. He listened attentively to the Gospel message, and, in response to the pressing invitation of his native brethren, he decided to cut adrift from heathenism and trust Jesus as his Saviour. But coming to Christ presented no difficulties to a sincere soul like Bong, and he readily gave Him the devotion of his heart. Before our departure from Malver he took the first step in his new life, and broke caste, thus making a definite rupture with heathenism. Caleb, his brother, offered him a piece of roasted yam, of which he partook; and then Bong gave part to some women and men of an inferior rank, and so symbolized his entrance into the great brotherhood, the members of which are all one in Christ. We left Bong and the converts of Malver with the prayer that through faith in Him that is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, they might remain steadfast to the end.

Storming the Heathen Citadels

On our return to Paama we found a scene of desolation awaiting us. The earthquake we experienced during our visit to Fanla was of exceptional violence in Paama, and wrought great havoc all over the island. The distance from north Ambrim to Paama is fifty miles, and, when a little more than half way, the steersman of the launch drew our attention to numerous rents and landslips which scarred the mountain-sides. As we approached we could see newly-formed cliffs round the north end of the island, which looked as if a big railway cutting were in progress. We conjectured that something unusual had occurred.

The first thing we noticed on going ashore was that the water-tanks had either burst or been thrown over. The house was in a state of confusion. The shelves had been emptied, and broken jars and bottles with their contents lay scattered over the floor. The medicine-room floor was a queer mixture of broken bottles, tabloids, castor-oil and other liquid medicines.

The church buildings sustained the greatest damage. Throughout the island were some fifteen churches which the native Christians, entirely at their own expense, had erected, with timber and iron brought from Australia. These buildings were all more or less damaged, and one collapsed entirely.

The natives themselves had a great fright. They were still in a state of consternation when we arrived. The initial shock, which was the worst, threw them in all directions. The ground underneath them danced, and, being unable to move or run away, many of them could do nothing but scream. The

Midst Volcanic Fires

crash of the landslips terrified them, and made them imagine that a volcano had opened in Paama. The mountains behind the mission station were rent and torn.

The centre of the disturbance must have been under Paama, as the shock was comparatively light in Ambrim and Epi. Across the channel the natives of south-east Ambrim could see the cliffs of Paama falling into the sea, and the clouds of dust rose like a fog, obscuring the island from view.

In heathen days the natives believed that an evil spirit dwelt in Ambrim volcano, and, every time an eruption or an earthquake took place, the spirit was supposed to be angry with them. After an earthquake like that through which they had passed, they would have climbed to the lip of the crater, with bunches of cocoanuts on their backs, and thrown them in as an offering to appease the wrath of the evil spirits. On that occasion, at the morning prayer meeting, God was thanked that no lives were lost. Thus, through difficulties and countless interruptions, God's work goes marching on.

CHAPTER VI

SAINTS AND SAVAGES

SOUTH SEA ISLAND travellers have depicted the character of the natives in very unfavourable colours, and, consequently, Europeans have visited the group in the belief that they took their lives in their hands. While no missionary would seek to minimize or disregard the cruel and treacherous nature of the natives when first they emerge into the light of history, there can be no doubt that the result of the first impact of civilization was to intensify the cruelty and vindictiveness of their savage natures. The horrors and misdemeanours of the sandalwood traders, who invaded Erromanga with drink and firearms in 1828, form a black chapter in the history of Britain's dealings with the islands, and much of the hostility and ill-will shown to the early missionaries and travellers was due to the misconduct of unscrupulous traders and labour agents. John Williams and Bishop Patteson were murdered, not because they were missionaries, but because they belonged to the race of white men who had so often dyed the shores of the islands with blood.

The history of Christian missions in the New Hebrides proves that the natives are not inaccessible to the claims of morality and religion, and that,

Midst Volcanic Fires

when once their confidence has been gained, they are docile, friendly, and hospitable. With the exception of north Malekula, the missionary of to-day can move about, without let or hindrance, among savage tribes with as great freedom as among the Christian villages. Life, on the whole, is safer in the New Hebrides than in Great Britain. The heathen now recognize the missionary as their friend; and, although they may not wish to be troubled with the Christian religion, they invariably consult the missionary in all difficulties and intertribal feuds. This changed attitude on the part of the natives gives the present-day missionary much greater freedom, and opens avenues of usefulness closed to the early missionaries, upon whom fell the burden and heat of the day.

Many people question the wisdom of missionaries spending their lives in the South Sea Islands among races who can never count much in the history of the world. They consider that missionary operations should be confined to the higher types of people whose influence will be worth more. But people would talk less in this strain if they recognized the beneficent change which takes place with the coming of Christ. A new value is given to life. Compared with their heathen neighbours, the Christian natives are the hope of the future, and it is a joy to witness the heartiness and virility of their Christian life. Throughout the islands, movements are, undoubtedly, in progress which indicate that the forces of custom and prejudice, which have so long held sway over the people, are giving way. In spite of the weakness

Saints and Savages

of her forces and the greatness of the obstacles which confront her, the Church of Christ is making progress, and we cannot believe that the progress is merely numerical. If ever a missionary has any doubts as to the reality of genuine, spiritual life in churches whose members have only recently been garnered from heathenism, these doubts always vanish in the fellowship of the Communion. The universality of the Gospel, the suitability of Christ to meet the need of each human heart, the reality of the oneness of the Body of Christ—all these truths are brought home to him in a new light, and make him realize that even the savages of the South Sea Islands can be made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

During our visit to the villages on the south coast of Ambrim, a heathen carnival was held about five miles from our camp, and we availed ourselves of the opportunity of witnessing the wild riot and confusion which characterize these festivals. For white men to intrude upon the sanctity of a heathen ceremonial would have meant, once upon a time, the risk of being put into a cannibal pot. But we had no such dread, nor had any one of the converts who accompanied the mission party.

All the roads leading to the village were crowded with heathen people who wished to participate in the carnival. From all over Ambrim they came, and some had been travelling all night. Long before we reached the village we could hear the beating of drums, becoming ever louder as we ascended the mountain-ridge. At first, Mr Weir and I thought

Midst Volcanic Fires

that some youngsters were amusing themselves, but the trained ears of our travelling companions had no difficulty in recognizing the familiar sound : it was dance music. Four drums of different size and tone were being manipulated, and so harmonious was the combination of sounds that we had to confess to a sense of delight in the rhythmical notes produced. Whatever might be the questionable practices the drummers were abetting, they had certainly ears with the true note of music. Several roads converge near the village, and on each of them armed sentinels were placed to prevent intruders without passports from approaching the dancing ground. The sight of two missionaries at the head of a long line of Christian natives disarmed suspicion, and all were allowed to pass without question.

A bend in the track hid the whole scene from our view until we were quite close to the dancing ground. The spectacle was, indeed, wild and fantastic, and quite unlike anything I had seen before of the seamy side of island life. Around a cluster of drums and heathen idols a big crowd of naked, painted savages were dancing. Their faces were hidden behind ghoulish masks, and, with their bodies smeared with paints of fantastic colours, the men presented a wild and repulsive appearance. The whole company was keeping step to the vibrant beating of the drums; and every few seconds, making a sudden halt in their wild dancing, they joined in a weird and savage yell.

In a corner of the village square was a coterie of

Saints and Savages

the leading men of the district having a drinking carousal all on their own. They had secured a supply of contraband gin; and the fiery spirits, acting on their unbalanced minds, speedily transformed them into demons. Brandishing clubs and tomahawks in the air, they were a menace to themselves and to the community. This was the saddest part of the pagan spectacle. It is a shame that lawless French traders should be allowed to carry on a trade which is ruining the natives and is doing more than anything else to hasten the depopulation of the islands.

The whole crowd was in a state of the greatest excitement; the women and children, with naked and painted bodies, indulging in the same carnival of riot and excitement. They had been engaged all night in the revelry of the heathen festival, and were too excited to take any notice of the mission party. For a time we looked at the fantastic spectacle in the hope that an opportunity would present itself of engaging some of them in conversation, but they continued their wild dancing without even recognizing our presence.

Much of the merriment was, doubtless, harmless enough, and no true missionary would seek to repress the joyous instincts of the natives or try to curb innocent mirth and laughter. But the heathen festivals pander to the lower instincts of the natives, and have a degrading influence. Indeed, the more intimately one becomes acquainted with heathenism the more hideous does it become. It is pitiful to see those who might be the children of God, and

Midst Volcanic Fires

dwelling in peace and love, so much the children of the devil, and dwelling in fear and constant bondage. With a sigh of relief we left the pagan exhibition, where "only man was vile," and escaped into the beauty and grandeur of the Ambrim bush.

On our departure from the festival we made a detour to the camp which led us through the heathen village of Lalinda, where the high chief had committed suicide a short time before. A picturesque savage, Malmaloon had been for two generations the mainstay of heathenism in the numerous villages around Port Vato. His influence was paramount, and nothing of importance in the district was ever done without his knowledge and consent. The village where he lived was only a mile from the Port Vato mission station, and during our periodical visits we had many opportunities of meeting the old chief. Far above the ordinary native in intelligence, and though subject to fits of violent passion, he was a man of generous instincts. Tall, handsome, and well built, he might well have been selected as the type of the noble savage of South Sea Island romance.

The village of Lalinda, which formed his headquarters, like all the other villages of the district under his sway, was a conglomeration of dirty hovels, more adapted to the housing of pigs than human beings, and a veritable hotbed of disease. In the open ground around the houses were to be seen women and girls, walking on their knees, terrified lest they should be found standing erect in the presence of the men, their lords and masters. This coterie of villages formed Malmaloon's world, and

Saints and Savages

about the big world beyond Ambrim he cared nothing. Indeed, he had a repugnance to everything foreign. No shirts or European clothing ever adorned his back; his acquaintance with foreign goods never got beyond gin, guns, and tobacco.

The new religion was anathema to him, and he cultivated heathenism with all the fanaticism of an Indian fakir. Though invariably courteous and considerate to me, he evinced the bitterest hostility to missionaries of his own colour. On all occasions he listened stoically to what I had to say; but I never made any headway, and, on leaving his village, he would dismiss me with the etiquette of a court usher. But from the day I first met Malmaloon, many years ago, I could never say he wavered in his allegiance to heathen worship, and certainly he never gave us the slightest encouragement to prosecute mission work among the members of his tribe. The occasional services which were held in his village were always in spite of Malmaloon, and the teachers and converts who conducted the services recognized that they ran a very grave risk of being shot. Our Lord's injunction, "Watch and pray," had literally to be followed during a service in the village, and the report of a musket very frequently gave the notice to quit.

I had entertained great hopes that Malmaloon would one day lay down his arms of rebellion and surrender himself to Jesus Christ. Had he, in his usual whole-hearted fashion, stepped over the border into the new hinterland, he would have made an earnest and picturesque advocate of the new religion.

Midst Volcanic Fires

But our hopes were doomed to disappointment, and death claimed him in his heathenism. For several weeks an abscess in the leg prevented him from moving about; but so great was his aversion to the teachers that he spurned all their efforts of help and medicine. Elaborate incantations were made on his behalf by the sacred men to exorcize the demon which was supposed to have laid hold of him; and, disappointed with the failure, he applied the barrel of his rifle to his mouth, and, manipulating the trigger with his toes, blew his brains out.

Suicide is such an uncommon thing among the natives that his tragic death caused a great sensation. From far and near the heathen came to wail for the dead chief. The teachers again came forward and suggested that a religious service might be held at the grave. But the old heathen had left instructions that he was to be buried according to the fashion of his fathers. Large companies from the surrounding villages filled the air with loud wailings, dancing round the dead body like so many furies, and indulging in the most revolting excesses, while muskets were fired and sea-shells blown with a deep sepulchral sound to frighten away the spirits.

The island of Ambrim, like other islands in the New Hebrides, is in a state of transition; but there is one thing that has not changed—the power of the devil. Lalinda, the district where Malmaloon held sway, is set in one of the beauty spots of Ambrim; but so abandoned have the people become to the grosser forms of heathenism that the natural beauties of the place get distorted when seen through the

Saints and Savages

perspective of degraded human nature. The sense of the constant presence of an incarnate evil power tarnishes the splendour of God's earth. Every beam of sunlight, every vision of tropical splendour, seemed to intensify the degradation of a people living in darkness. Amid the luxuriant foliage of the bush, on the well-worn paths leading to the villages, we met the sacred man, with his kit of tools, slouching along to some house of mourning to perform his weird incantations. In a dirty, ill-kept house we found him mumbling some meaningless words as he mixed his mysterious concoction of spiders' webs, roots, and dried leaves to keep the evil spirits at bay. But so profound is the trust in his power, that we see men and women parting with their all to secure the benefit of his sorcery.

One of the most difficult tasks of the missionary is to overthrow witchcraft and implant within the native mind a commonsense view of sickness. Among the natives the treatment of sickness is infinitely bound up with superstition. An offended demon has sent the sickness. To appease the demon is therefore the first and most necessary step to be taken in the way of treatment.

At the village of Vamandi we had a painful illustration of the difficulty of eradicating a belief like this. On the outskirts of the village was buried a man who, in life, was supposed to have encompassed the deaths of many people by means of witchcraft, and, somehow or other, the people got it into their heads that the fact of his body being buried near the village made his spirit still potent

Midst Volcanic Fires

for mischief among them. The natives determined to rid their village of the dread power. Opening the grave, they dug down to the body, and, placing a charge of dynamite beside it, blew the grave to pieces and scattered the body to the four winds.

But amid all the superstition and darkness there was a ray of light and hope. About a mile from Malmaloon's stronghold was a small grass shed where regularly assembled a church of about thirty souls. The future belonged to them. Massing, the teacher, and his faithful few had held on against great odds. On several occasions, individuals from Lalinda, dissatisfied with their mode of living and longing for something better, had joined them, and, since the baleful influence of Malmaloon had disappeared, the little band of Christians was gradually increasing.

The longer we are engaged in mission operations in heathen communities the more do we learn that the work is of God and not of man. In the villages around Port Vato we could see the Spirit of God operating on the souls of men and women, bringing them into touch with Divine Truth, leading them to attend religious services, and finally to become members of the Church. In contrast with the squalor and wretchedness of villages like Malmaloon's, one was pleased with the relief which the order and progress of the Christian village afforded. Cleanliness and work and sanitation are proclaimed as part of the religion of Jesus Christ; and the contrast between the heathen and Christian villages provides evidence that it has not been proclaimed in

Saints and Savages

vain. But the task is not easily accomplished. Dirt and indolence are handmaids of heathenism. To transform a people, naturally sensual and lax, leading lives as empty and aimless as the animals in the village compound, can only be done with infinite pains and effort and when backed by the expulsive power of a new affection. Indeed, it is at this point where physical exertion comes in that native inclination and Christian obligation often come into open conflict.

Work is not a besetting sin of the natives, nor have economic conditions compelled them to recognize the necessity of labour. The power of initiative comes very slowly to them. Idleness has, for centuries, been a magic word, and to rescue them from their primitive environment is a task which will not be accomplished in a day. The new teaching has infused a new spirit and vitality into the sluggish current of their lives. The missionaries have been the pioneers of industry as well as religion, and their example has been an inspiration to the natives to attempt better things. In many instances, the innate indolence of the natives is slowly giving place to industrial habits, and they are rapidly becoming useful citizens. The teachers trained at the mission institution are nearly all good carpenters, and can build and furnish with their own hands comfortable dwellings; and by their example they are able to impart a conscience into the realm of labour, and to deliver it from the contempt which the heathen attach to it. While it is true that the Christian conception of work is far from being realized, the

Midst Volcanic Fires

converts are gradually recognizing that brains and strength and time are God's gifts, and given to be used. A spirit of self-reliance and self-respect is awakening, and the prevalence of this spirit makes their well-wishers hopeful for the endurance of the native race. For the existence and usefulness of the native Church, as well as for the material progress of the islands, it is essential for the native to acquire two gifts—the power of initiation and the power of sustained action. Till he gain these, the native, in Church and business, must lean on others. In the Christian villages the Church has succeeded, not only in leading men and women into the paths of spiritual light, but in transforming the life that now is into a happy and useful existence.

In our travels we invariably found the old people the most difficult and obstinate and unsatisfactory to deal with. They are true blue conservatives, and are firmly wedded to the past, shrinking from any step which will lead them into unknown ways. But, occasionally, the voice of God is heard by them in an unmistakable fashion, and they give a ready response to the Divine summons. The life-history of the old converts who were baptized during our tour on the south coast of Ambrim would give food for thought to those who are incredulous about foreign missions and the power of the Gospel to raise savage races. Some of them could neither read nor write, but could give a wonderfully clear reason for the faith that was in them. Remembering the old days of witchcraft and heathenism, they realized better than the younger generation the change that the

Saints and Savages

Gospel had brought into their lives. One of the rules of our mission requires that an adult convert, before being baptized, shall be able to read the Bible and Catechism. But an exception has sometimes to be made, and old Maitai, of the village of Bombamio, was baptized without any test but the profession of her faith. Two years of instruction had failed to make her a scholar. One after another, teachers had done their best, but, in spite of all their efforts, she was still unable to master the alphabet. She had tried hard, and could repeat the Creed and Commandments, but read she could not. Nevertheless, the Spirit of God had opened her heart to the truth, and in her life she was bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit. As soon as her name was called, without fear and without hesitation she came forward to the platform and, in baptism, confessed her faith in Christ.

Taso, the chief of Asi, was another convert received into the fellowship of the Church without the mission making its rule about reading a condition of baptism. When Joseph, the teacher, began work at Asi the chief opposition to the progress of the Gospel came from Taso and a few old men who clung to their heathen ceremonies, loving the darkness rather than the light. On the occasion of a former visit to his village, when we were discussing the situation with the people, those old men seemed to hang in the balance, weighing things old and new. Taltaso, our travelling evangelist, stepped up to Taso, the leader of the opposition, and asked, "What is it that keeps you back from Jesus? Is it

Midst Volcanic Fires

the worship of graven images ? ” Taso confessed that it was the lure of heathenism. Taltaso quoted to them the words of our Lord about people who loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil ; and then, turning to the chief, pleaded with him to trust in the Lord and abandon idol worship.

Taso, the cannibal chief and high priest of heathenism, at length surrendered and severed his connection with heathenism. His conversion made a great commotion in the district. The sacred men of the heathen villages were so much upset at the thought of one of their college going over to the Worship that they instigated a campaign of persecution against him. But, amid all the mocking laughter and trouble, he stood firm. All who knew him as a bigoted, sacred man, fiercely opposing the preaching of the Gospel, could scarcely believe that the humble, kindly follower of Christ was the same individual. His teacher said that the old wizard was his right-hand man, striving to bring all the people of his village and neighbourhood under the influence of the Gospel.

Though the old man could neither read nor write, he could say with the man born blind, “ One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see ” ; and, as of old, a confession like this confounds the wisdom of this world—East and West alike.

“ Do the natives of the New Hebrides pass through the same process of conversion as people in the homelands ? ” is a question that has often been asked. During the evangelistic tour we found that the

Saints and Savages

native converts came under the influence of the Gospel in two ways: by the process of individual conversion and by mass movements. In districts where the caste system prevails, the mode of approach to God is, of necessity, by personal conversion; but for the great majority of the people the method of conversion has proceeded along lines of mass movements. These are movements among the people, when a whole tribe will abandon its heathen worship, and all the members, from the chief downwards, will begin to attend church and school for Christian instruction. It is difficult to explain these movements; but the essential feature seems to be a belief, taking hold of an ignorant and superstitious people, that Christianity holds out better prospects than they could expect from their old heathen worship. The doctrine of the One True God, who made all things and who loves all people, first flashed upon some individuals in the tribe with the distinctness of a Divine message, cleansing their thoughts and actions; and others have followed their lead, without quite realizing all that the change implied.

One has to recognize, too, that converts won in this way do stand the test. Of course, in the large Christian districts through which we passed, there were many cases of backsliding to be dealt with; but, nevertheless, it said much for the healthy tone of the Church that there were comparatively few serious lapses from grace. We came into contact with villages where, years ago, the people left heathenism and embraced Christianity; the converts, in some instances, uprooting and destroying the ancestral

Midst Volcanic Fires

images of the tribe which had been worshipped from time immemorial, but they had remained true to their faith.

Masses converted in this way throw a big burden upon the Church, as they have to be evangelized and shepherded and taught the cardinal truths of Christianity. Some of the most active workers in the native Church have been won in this way. Among them have been men literally devil possessed. Into these men's hearts the Spirit of Christ has entered, the love of God has burned, and they have become powers for good in the community.

The great temptation of the native converts who embrace Christianity under the influence of mass movements is, undoubtedly, the lure of the past. In days of stress or trouble, or of some mysterious visitation, they are prone to invoke the old spirits and charms, if, perchance, the weight of their influence may be added to that of the Lord God. They try to have safeguards from both sides of the stream, and, like the children of Israel, they remember the gods of Egypt. One need not wonder, therefore, that occasionally there is a recrudescence among the faithful of their old animistic beliefs and superstitions. The unseen threads which bind them to the past are not all snapped, and again and again they feel them tugging at their hearts. The temptation becomes more persistent from the presence of the heathen around them inviting them to recross the stream and return to their old life of fear and superstition.

To the first generation of native converts the call

Saints and Savages

of the blood will prove the hardest temptation they are called upon to bear. Many of them, indeed, are never free from the sinister shadow falling across their path. Their faith in God is assailed by the dread of evil spirits and by the sights and sounds that used to be omens of evil. It is hard for them to believe that, day and night, they are in the presence of Christ, and not of evil spirits who peep and mutter at them from trees and mountain caves. Even in our best and most faithful converts relics from the past are found. They know their weakness, and pray to God for help in their conflict with the powers of darkness. Throughout the campaign special emphasis was laid on this temptation to which the native converts are so liable, and on the necessity of keeping in constant touch with Christ as the only remedy.

Many of the native Christians, from whose lives outsiders might find it difficult to construct an apology for Christianity, are really those whom we reckon the greatest triumphs of the Gospel. One evening we were requested to visit an old man lying in the extremity of weakness. In his early days, and, indeed, until he was quite an old man, he had been a leader in heathenism and a violent opponent of the Gospel. But a change took place, and he lived to repent of the injury he had done to the Christian cause. As soon as we entered the house we saw that Aulumatu was dying. He was perfectly conscious, and answered all our questions in an intelligent manner. As we sat beside the bedside of the old man, and in the flickering light of the candle beheld

Midst Volcanic Fires

his face, withered and haggard and stamped with the image of his former heathenism, and as we listened to his vague, but sincere, assurance of faith in Christ, we felt that, in this brand plucked from the burning, the grace of God was reflected with a resplendent glory.

“Now, Aulumatu,” I said, before leaving him, “you have not long to live, and what is your hope in the presence of death?” With his eyes fixed, as if looking on some unseen person, he replied, *Nindemcatuko, Asupu Yesu* (I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus). *Inau tisa, ka nindemcati Yesu* (I am a sinner, but I am trusting Jesus), were the words with which he bade us farewell.

Men and women who have grown old amid the corruptions of heathenism are subject to innumerable temptations. Their lives have been spent amid such utter depravity, that it is difficult for outsiders to realize the stern conflict they have to wage to maintain the Christian profession. It is one prolonged struggle with the allied forces of evil. But God has revealed Himself to their dark and struggling souls. Their faces are set toward Him, and one day they shall be like Him.

During Aulumatu's funeral the volcano in Ambrim burst out with a terrific roar, and covered the ground with a thick layer of volcanic ash. The cinders and ash fell so thickly that it reminded us of a hail-storm, with gritty pebbles instead of icy particles for the hailstones. During the singing of the hymn, at the service around the grave, our books were covered with the black, volcanic ash. Our clothes,

Saints and Savages

too, were coated with the ash, and we resembled a company of coal-miners.

In all the Christian villages of Ambrim our hearts were cheered with the signs of progress that were visible. The constant accessions to the ranks of the Church were a spur and stimulus to missionaries, teachers, and adherents. But what to us was most surprising was that, amongst so many converts recently recruited from heathenism, there were so few cases that called for discipline. The native Christians felt that they were not a forlorn hope but a conquering army, and that the land was being claimed and won for Christ.

One of our most gratifying visits was to the village of Melrongrong, which one is inclined to call the most Christian of the Christian villages of Ambrim. The chief is a strong personality and a tower of strength to the Worship, but withal a humble, devoted follower of Christ. Lefan, an old house girl of Mrs Bowie, lived there, and she attended most assiduously to our needs. Mr Weir and I had had a heavy day's march under a scorching sun, and arrived at the village tired and weary. Imagine our delight when, a few minutes after our arrival, Lefan appeared with two cups of tea and arrowroot biscuits! Where the biscuits came from we did not inquire: it appeared too much like looking a gift horse in the mouth; but the tea and biscuits could not have been more welcome had they dropped from heaven. The two meetings at Melrongrong were accompanied with great blessing, and we instinctively felt the presence of God's Spirit. 'The

Midst Volcanic Fires

closing meeting was also a testimony meeting, when an opportunity was given to any of the converts who cared to give expression to their faith in Christ. It was a delightful surprise to see so many eager to speak a word of testimony to the saving and keeping power of their new Master, and to notice the fervour with which they commended Jesus to their fellow-islanders. In the singing of the hymns, and in the warmth of the prayers, we had no difficulty in discerning the bounding pulse of the worshippers. Here, where faith and hope illuminated their lives, there was no indication of wavering or backsliding, but rather of renewal and refreshing and abounding in the work of the Lord. These were the things angels desire to look into.

The churches in the neighbourhood of Melrongrong were very active in carrying on propaganda work among the heathen communities with which they were surrounded. Since his settlement as teacher of Melvat, Taso and his co-workers made regular visits to the heathen villages. The tribe of Melvat is the centre of a strongly entrenched heathenism, where the natives in the scattered villages breathe the air of pagan worship. The whole population lives and thrives on the rites and cruel practices connected with heathenism. During our visit to the village the son of the chief died suddenly; and the father, suspecting that a neighbouring chief had wrought witchcraft on his son, sent out three tribesmen to kill him. Stationing themselves in a dark part of the bush where the chief had to pass on the way to his plantation, they

Saints and Savages

waited their chance. As the unsuspecting native approached, the three men fired. Only one bullet struck him, and it passed through the shoulder. After emptying their muskets the men took flight, and the wounded chief at once recognized them. When dressing his wounds, he stated, in reply to our inquiries, that he had worked no witchcraft and harboured no evil designs towards either father or son. Such an incident made us realize the state of insecurity in which the heathen pass their lives.

In the midst of this welter of heathenism lived the small Christian community of Melvat, with Taso as its leader, seeking to extend the influence of the Christian religion. They were face to face with the primeval forces of evil. In such a community the real evangelists are, not the European missionary, but the converts of the native Church. More and more did we realize that the extension of the Gospel must be the work of the local Church. The task of the foreign missionary is to lead, inspire, and, in some measure, control; but his work is in vain, unless the native Churches become the true converting agents.

Possibly, if a visitor from abroad were to visit Melvat, and see the building where the local Church worships, he would be overcome with a feeling of intense disappointment. It is made of materials that lie to hand, from which all the houses in the village are constructed. It can boast of no architectural style. The passing tourist might possibly dub it "Early Barbarian." But it is a church; and the people sitting upon the rough benches—

Midst Volcanic Fires

sixty or seventy in all—constitute, for the village of Melvat, that which God knows as the Body of Christ. The neighbouring trader, who traffics in contraband gin and firearms, describes them as “a lot of niggers gathered to sing hymns, who would be much better employed in clearing his plantation.” The teaching of the schools, in his judgment, puts ideas into their heads which do more harm than good. But by means of such humble churches as Melvat God is reconciling the island of Ambrim to Himself.

Our meeting and church services were very different from the quiet and formal services of a home congregation. In the New Hebrides no mother ever thinks of staying at home because of her baby. The little mites always form a part of the congregation, and not infrequently make themselves heard. An evangelist who is easily upset need never come to the New Hebrides. During the Sunday afternoon service in Melvat the atmosphere in the church was stifling. There was not a breath of wind to mitigate the heat. The congregation evidently felt the weight of the atmosphere as much as the preacher. Looking down on the people from the platform, one saw nothing but the waving of fans. Every woman seemed to have one, and the men used their hymn-books to create a circulation of air. The babies were more than usually restless, and mothers kept on the trot throughout the entire service—movement everywhere, instead of order and stillness. An itinerating evangelist in the New Hebrides soon learns to proceed amid countless interruptions.

Saints and Savages

Our first night in the village of Melvat will always be memorable on account of a plague of fleas that infested the house in which we slept. Owing to the risk of infection and the dread of fleas, we had made up our minds to avoid native houses. But we arrived at Melvat in a downpour of rain, and were glad to get shelter anywhere. The teacher had accepted, on our behalf, the hospitality of the Christian chief's house. It was a well-ventilated house of two apartments, separated by a partition of reeds. Mr Weir and I occupied the inner apartment, while Massing and three of the porters occupied the outer. Possibly the rain may have driven the pests to take shelter in the house, but the two apartments were swarming with them. They gave us the time of our lives. In the middle of the night I rose and found Mr Weir asleep, with his boots on, his stockings over his trousers, and his sleeves tied. He seemed to be hermetically sealed. Only his face and hands were exposed. I followed his example, and lay down again. But unfortunately, instead of keeping them out, I locked the pests in. It was a night of misery and agony, and, but for the steady downpour of rain, we would have camped under the trees.

The natives in the front apartment slept as little as we did, and were up before dawn. I asked Massing how he slept, and, pointing to his arms and legs, he replied, with unnecessary euphemism, "Oh, Missi, the stinging Billies!"

Everywhere we went we found the young children of the islands as afraid of the foreigner with the

Midst Volcanic Fires

white face as are the children of the homelands of the nigger with the black face. There also, to frighten the little ones, mothers have the same old story adapted to island use: "The white man will catch you!" The missionary has a white face, and, in remote villages, is regarded by the children as one of the dreaded foreigners who seek to carry them away and do all sorts of imaginable things to them.

When travelling to one of our meetings in a lonely part of the Ambrim bush we met a party of women who were returning from a bread-fruit festival. To compensate for all the lean years through which Ambrim had passed, nature had restored the balance by an extraordinary crop of bread-fruit. Every woman was laden with well-filled hampers of beautiful bread-fruits. After halting a few minutes to exchange a word of greeting with them, we proceeded on our journey, when, all of a sudden, whom should we meet but a bevy of little girls who had fallen behind, all of them carrying baskets of the prized bread-fruits. As soon as they caught sight of the white faces of the foreigners, down went the bread-fruits, and the little mites made a rush into the bush, crying aloud, "Woe is me, mother! Woe is me, mother! The white man has caught me!" No Robin Hood ever spread such panic among the children of the woods as did the sudden appearance of a white face among the little ones of the Ambrim bush. We were about to make an attempt to pacify the young folks, but, on the first sign of approach, they became frantic, and we realized

Saints and Savages

that the kindest thing we could do was to let them reach their mothers without any interference from us.

On our arrival at Harimal we found that Caleb, the teacher, had mapped out a fairly large programme of work among the heathen villages with which he was surrounded—a kind of Cook's tour round north Ambrim. Only a year before, Caleb and his wife Lefan were installed in this heathen stronghold, and we were gratified to notice the success that had attended their efforts. Where before was nothing but hopeless heathenism, there now stood a little church, a monument to progress and growth in life. A goodly number gathered to hear the proclamation of God's word, but we were attracted most of all by the large number of children Caleb had succeeded in drawing to his school.

In front of the mission house at Harimal was an extensive lagoon, where the youth of Caleb's school engaged in that most exciting and most enjoyable of sport—surf-riding. At the close of one of the meetings, when an unusually big sea was breaking on the reef, the lively youngsters made a straight line for the beach and plunged into the surf. The long stretch of coral reef which forms the lagoon faces the open ocean, and against this immense barrier the giant rollers of the Pacific are ever breaking in long ridges of silvery foam. On this rolling switchback we watched the natives, both young and old, enjoying to their hearts' content a blue-water joy-ride. To us it was a source of never-ending delight to watch the woolly-headed islanders, at one time breasting the waves, and then to see them

Midst Volcanic Fires

being carried shorewards in the onward sweep of a great roller.

The surfers provide themselves with boards about four feet long and tapering to a point at one end. Very carefully is the selection made, for the whole art of surfing consists in the skilful handling of the surf-boards. Starting from the beach they usually wade across the shallow patch until they reach the broken water, where they take up their positions on the surf-boards. Lying flat on the boards they use the feet for propelling and the hands for balancing. As soon as a big roller has spent its force they set off and in the lull between the breakers advance to meet the next one. They do not ride it, but, as it approaches, they dive into the green trough, and, allowing the roller to pass over them, they reappear on the other side, struggling seawards, to meet the next one. Again, they make a plunge into its bosom to avoid the surging crest, and, reappearing on the further side, they prepare to mount and ride the next one, which is the roller selected to bear them triumphantly ashore. Now begins the exciting stage: in the trough of the sea they manœuvre for position, so as to ride successfully the rolling switchback which is advancing in an avalanche of fury. Mounting the roller with the surf-board in a slanting direction they reach the crest, and, at the exact moment, dexterously turn the tapering end shorewards. Then they career ashore in a maelstrom of foam. With their boards balanced and pointing shorewards, the rush of water shoots them forward as if shot from a gun; half-dazed, but in an

Saints and Savages

ecstasy of delight, they soon find themselves in the broken water whence they set out. Standing erect for a few minutes to shake the water off their dripping bodies, like ducks after a shower of rain, forth they go again.

Occasionally an error of judgment is made, and the surfer, losing his balance, fails to turn his board at the psychological moment. No second chance is given. He falls helplessly into the trough of the sea, and, parting company, the surfer and his board are sent rolling unceremoniously ashore.

While encamped at Harimal we distributed amongst the natives the Gospel of Mark and a Hymnal, which Dr Bowie had translated into the language of north Ambrim. The joy of the people was unbounded at reading the Word of God in their own language. In the village compound could be seen little groups of inquirers, each with Gospel in hand, assisting one another to spell out its meaning. The natives of the New Hebrides have the reputation of being the greatest liars on earth; but, when they received the Word of God in their own language, they said, "This is the Truth of God." Possibly the greatest blessing conferred on the natives by the mission is the translating and printing of the Scriptures in the common tongue of the people. Even if by some untoward event the islands passed out of British hands—a contingency which every friend of the mission would deplore—the natives would have as a light to their feet the Word of God, the greatest treasure with which any people can be blessed.

Midst Volcanic Fires

In our tours among the heathen villages of the Harimal district we found, as in other heathen centres, that the chief opposition came from the old men who were wedded to idol worship. In many cases they had attained the highest grade of caste rank; and the dread of losing their place of power, reached only by dint of great sacrifices, formed the chief obstacle to their breaking with heathenism and joining the worshipping party. The sacred men, too, imagined that the spirits would be incensed against them for their desertion of heathenism, and that they would at once adopt means to encompass their deaths. We reasoned with them, and tried to show how foolish and needless was their alarm; that they had only to look round and behold what had taken place in the villages that had abandoned heathenism to feel assured that not only had no harm overtaken the people, but that the change was for their material, as well as for their spiritual, good.

Heathen natives are everywhere keenly alive to the power of the spirits, and especially the evil spirits. No one need ever think of attempting to convert them to a belief in the non-existence of the devil. Among the heathen the devil is very potent for mischief, and to the worship of evil spirits is due the distorted vision of the people. What in Christian lands is counted good is there counted bad, and *vice versâ*. They put darkness for light and light for darkness. They readily believe an imposter and habitually suspect an honest man. They form a society, intensively conservative, suspicious of everything, new or unknown, with little or no

Saints and Savages

desire to become anything else than their fathers had been. Lying is almost universal, and a lawyer can get all the witnesses he wants at a few pence per head.

And yet these people are not wholly bad. Indeed, it is the good in them that gives the Gospel a chance of working; and that they are capable of better things is shown by the transformation that has taken place in the lives of those who have been influenced by the teaching of Christ. Religion has become a real thing to them, and not a matter of form or ceremony. To the missionary it is a joy and delight, as well as a rich reward, to behold their earnestness and devotion and to view the spontaneous way in which they bring into their daily lives the teaching of the Bible. It is a great privilege, indeed, to be the instruments in teaching the Gospel to such seekers and in leading them out of the darkness of heathenism into the clear, sweet light of God's Goodness and Love.

The Ambrim tour was brought to an end by our visit to the east coast village of Lalembu. Many tokens of Divine blessing accompanied our efforts; and, whilst there was a substantial numerical increase, the spiritual life of the entire community was quickened. There was a growing eagerness to hear the Word of God and an endeavour after a better life. In some of the heathen villages, where the opposition was great, the increase was comparatively small; yet, when one takes into account the bondage with which heathenism enslaves its victims, and the consequences of making profession of a new faith, it will be readily seen that each

Midst Volcanic Fires

convert represented a struggle and a victory of no ordinary kind.

To the efforts of the teachers a great part of the success of the evangelistic tour was due. The hope of the future, under God, lies in the small Christian communities the teachers have gathered around them, which have not only embraced the Gospel themselves, but know it to be so good and precious that they desire to hand it on to those around them. Daily intercourse with them revealed new traits in their character, and we felt it to be a great privilege to have them associated with us in the evangelization of the islands.

Though called teachers, their work is very varied. The longer one deals with a native race just emerging from barbarism, the more one realizes that their education lies more directly in their passage from dirt and idleness to cleanliness, diligence, and method, than by learning to read and write. Of course, it is essential that they should acquire the arts of reading and writing; but the point aimed at in the early stages of their training is the general effect to be obtained affecting their habits and mode of life. It is delightful to watch how, by degrees, a sense of something wanting in themselves is created. A great step is gained when first they see that there is something better than idling and untidiness and thoughtlessness. In the education of the natives we try never to dissociate the two sides of education. Improvement in tribal conditions and orderliness go hand in hand with knowledge of God and progress in religious instruction.

CHAPTER VII

THE WINNING OF PAAMA

WHEN passing through Australia in 1900, on our way to the New Hebrides, Mrs Frater and I received from Mrs John G. Paton the intimation that we had been appointed by the Mission Synod to the oversight of the islands of Paama and Lopevi. We had not so much as heard the names before, and, procuring a map, Mrs Paton pointed out the islands with which we were to be so long associated—lying off the north coast of Epi. At the same time, she informed us of the savage nature of the people and the unenviable reputation they had earned for hostility to Europeans, and of how the Rev. Thomas Smaill, of Epi, after experiencing the greatest difficulty in gaining a footing, had at length, by dint of hard toil and an indomitable will, succeeded in settling six teachers who broke the rough ground and prepared the way for mission settlement.

Three months later, in October 1900, Mrs Frater and I landed on the beach of Paama, not without a few misgivings, amongst a large crowd of natives, some clothed, some naked, all of whom showed the cordiality of their welcome by carrying our goods and house timber over the shingle and black sand to the site selected for the mission station. On the

Midst Volcanic Fires

following day the boats had finished their work; and, as the island steamer sailed away, we turned, like many before us, to face a new and unknown future, and help in solving a problem which had already cost many tears and prayers—the problem of winning Paama for Christ.

It was a great joy and encouragement to us, when, on the departure of the steamer, the chiefs and people whom the teachers had influenced, approached us, and expressed their pleasure at our arrival, and, as a token of goodwill, indicated that they wished no payment for the work they had done. Besides carrying our goods, they had cleared the site for the mission station, burned two pits of lime, and provided us with housing accommodation. Their voluntary services were a tangible mark of appreciation of our presence in their midst, and we offered heartfelt praise to God for the gracious providence that had followed our way. The condition of the natives of the six villages where the teachers were working presented a magnificent testimony to the value of native agency. The influence of their Christ-like lives, perhaps far more than their teaching, had not only radically changed the character of the villages in which they were living, but had penetrated and permeated the heathen villages, and had created the amazing spectacle of all Paama stretching out its hands to embrace Christ. At our first service one hundred and four natives were present; it was great cheer, as well as a happy omen, to hear them render in their own tongue three hymns with which we had been familiar

The Winning of Paama

from childhood, and which had been translated by Mr Smaill into the language of the people. As the natives, with radiant faces and jubilant voices, rolled out the strange words,

*Yesu lelecati ro vilhili,
Supal ahago musilu pogien,
Metimal malokoluk ro va bilhili,
Ire, ire vasi re bilhili,*

Mrs Frater and I felt a responsive chord re-echo in our hearts, and, in our own mother tongue, joined in the glad refrain :

Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light,
Like a little candle burning in the night.
In this world of darkness, so we must shine,
You in your small corner and I in mine.

Paama is one of the smallest and one of the loveliest islands of the New Hebrides group. It was one of the striking objects that burst upon the eye of Captain Cook, the great navigator, in his voyage of discovery across the Pacific. Set in opal-tinted waters, and clothed with the luxuriant vegetation of the Tropics, it presented a beautiful spectacle with the primeval bush stretching from the water's edge to the summit of the mountains. Every advantage of soil and climate had been bestowed upon it. The groves of bread-fruit and cocoanut trees around the villages were themselves almost a sufficient maintenance for the population. Nature in her most bounteous mood had profusely endowed the lovely island with all the elements of material welfare.

Midst Volcanic Fires

Its seventeen villages were inhabited by a strong and virile race, numbering nearly two thousand souls, and presented an attractive and promising field for missionary operations. The crowd of Christian and heathen natives which greeted us on landing afforded ample material from which to estimate the nature of our undertaking and the grandeur of the results which its success would yield.

The natives of Paama, like the other natives of the New Hebrides islands, were very superstitious, the spirits of their departed ancestors being the chief objects of reverence. They believed in a great Creator, who made all things; but they did not worship Him, nor did they consider Him worthy of praise or worship. He did not concern Himself about them: He was too far away. They had images made out of wood, some like themselves, others like animals. These were their gods. They trusted them to protect them from sickness, from death, and from disaster, but expected no direct blessings from them. They believed in witchcraft, to which they attributed all evil and misfortune, and which they counteracted by charms. They sent for witch doctors if any one was sick, who, with many incantations, drove out the evil spirit or pointed to some person as the witch who was the cause of the mischief.

Separated from Paama by a channel of four miles is the lofty cone of Lopevi, with its active volcano. The natives believed that an evil spirit dwelt within the volcano; and, every time an eruption took place, the natives imagined that the spirit was angry with

The Winning of Paama

them. To appease its wrath, the sacred men sent up periodically to the lip of the crater, 5000 feet above sea-level, numbers of young fellows with loads of cocoanuts to throw into the volcano as a peace-offering.

In spite of the beauty of their surroundings and the material blessings they enjoyed, the inhabitants had fallen to the lowest depths of degradation. Prior to the advent of the teachers, with their message of peace and goodwill, war, anarchy, and bloodshed were universal. One tribe dared not visit another for fear of being killed. Licentiousness was without limit or restraint of shame, and, under the accumulated influence of the vices which prevailed, the population was declining. Soon after our landing an incident occurred which lifted the veil of mystery hanging over the dark history of the island, and revealed, as by a flash of sunlight, the state of terror and insecurity which prevailed.

At that time the *kanaka* traffic between Australia and the islands was in full swing; and one day, while we were engaged in building operations, a labour ship from Queensland arrived and anchored in the open roadstead near the mission station. Amongst the returned labourers on board was a native of Paama. On the departure from his native island, six years previously, Paama was wild and savage, and he was glad to escape from the menace of the blood feuds and intertribal wars which ravaged the land. A residence of six years amid the peace and security of civilization made him afraid to return to Paama; so, before leaving Queensland, he made

Midst Volcanic Fires

arrangements with the captain to be landed on the island of Santo, where he would be under the protection of a missionary. But on the arrival of the labour ship at Paama, he learned, to his great surprise, not only that there was a missionary resident in Paama, but that many of his old companions had abandoned heathenism and were attending Christian worship. This information led Apok to review his plans, and, instead of proceeding to Santo, he at once expressed a wish to be landed on his native island. His fellow-villagers lost no time in acquainting me with Apok's desire, and requested me to speak to the captain. I at once went on board, and, on explaining the circumstances, the captain readily agreed to the native's request.

A conversation with the captain disclosed many facts and incidents about the early history of Paama. An experience of many years in the *kanaka* traffic had made him intimately acquainted with all the islands of the group; and he assured me that, until the commencement of mission work by the native teachers, there was not a more dangerous island than Paama. The natives were always engaged in deadly intertribal wars, and entertained a bitter enmity to the white man. No boat could approach the shore without the greatest care and vigilance being exercised. Bullets and poisoned weapons very frequently welcomed the visitors.

The captain's story gave us not only a glimpse of the state of Paama under heathenism, but was a fresh revelation of the power of the Christ whose Gospel we had come to proclaim. With our own

The Winning of Paama

eyes we had seen how, within the short compass of a few years, it had, in the school districts, obliterated blood feuds and hostile boundaries. Anarchy and the attendant evils of heathenism were still rampant in the heathen villages ; but the contrast between the Paama of past days and the state of peace and security which the Christian villages enjoyed through the teaching and preaching of God's Word was to us the best witness of the universal appeal that Christ makes to the hearts of men. Riper experience served only to confirm our early impressions. Wherever heathenism reigns, the spirit of lawlessness prevails, and the primary change which invariably accompanies the introduction of Christian worship is the establishment of peace and order.

Daily experiences soon made us recognize that the old Gospel was as potent and as true to its transforming record in the New Hebrides as it was in the Apostolic age. The classic story of Paul's conversion was being paralleled in the history of our own converts. In the village adjoining the mission station a native teacher was proclaiming the Gospel of peace and love to a group of his fellow-islanders. A notorious man, the chief of the district, and a terror to the neighbourhood, was passing by. He was a bold, hardened leader in all iniquity. He paused and listened, and that wondrous message reached his heart. Toa, the intrepid warrior, there and then embraced Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. The heathen chief who would yield to no power on his native island yielded himself to God. A new affection filled his heart, and it produced one

Midst Volcanic Fires

of the most wonderful changes that could take place in a human life. Once Toa had a passion for skulls, now he had a passion for souls.

Ever afterwards, Toa proved himself a valiant soldier and a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. But, perhaps, the most impressive evidence of the change which the Gospel has wrought upon him and his fellow-villagers is the appearance of the public square where, in heathen days, they had their iniquitous feasts and revelled in their hateful dances. It is now covered with a lawn of beautiful green grass; and in the centre of the square, where once stood the altar of stones for the sacrifices, there now stands a Christian church.

During the first few weeks of our residence in Paama the building of a dwelling-house was our first duty, and occupied most of our time. Regular services were held in the villages adjoining the mission station, but no attempt was made to visit the distant villages until the completion of the mission house. A few weeks after our landing, while we were still engaged in building operations, the chief and tribe of the heathen village of Luli paid us a visit to make a request for the appointment of a native teacher to begin Christian instruction in their village. The Rev. Mr Smaill turned to Weiwato, a native carpenter from Epi, who was working beside him on the scaffolding, and threw out the challenge to go and work for Christ at Luli. Weiwato accepted the challenge in the spirit in which it was given, and in the days to come proved that he could help in the building of broken lives

The Winning of Paama

as well as in the building of houses. His ready acceptance of the call to Luli enabled us to comply with the request of the tribe, and, as soon as the house was completed, we set off for the "induction" of Weiwato.

Luli is situated on the windward side of the island, and faces the open waters of the Pacific. The shore is rocky, and only on very calm days can a boat enter with safety through the passage to the landing-place. On the land side it is accessible only by climbing the steep and lofty ridge of hills which separate it from the villages on the leeward side of the island. But so precipitous and arduous is the climb that the natives, rather than face it, prefer to wait until the passage by sea is practicable. On the day arranged for the journey to Luli, the deputation appointed to accompany me assembled at the mission station; but, from the state of the weather, it was evident boating was out of the question, and that there was no alternative but climbing. The natives were unanimous in saying that the climb was not meant for "any mere white man," and tried to dissuade me from going by enumerating the difficulties and dangers of the road. But I was not born in Scotland for nothing; and, maintaining a "quiet sough," I asked them to lead on. I determined, before the day was done, to teach them a lesson in mountain-climbing, so that never again would they speak disrespectfully of the walking and climbing capabilities of the "mere white man."

At first our journey was over the well-beaten track between the villages, where walking was easy

Midst Volcanic Fires

and delightful. But we had no sooner passed Lironissa than the climb began in earnest. Scrambling up the face of cliffs, holding on to roots and branches, dodging through the thick bush amid vines and trailing creepers, we maintained our course until we reached the summit of the mountain, when some of the company lay down, uttering ejaculations of surprise at the rapid pace Missi had set, and exclaiming, *Na mesai houlu!* (I am dead beat). But the descent on the Lulip side was the part of the journey most trying and dangerous. The path lay along the face of a precipice; and in some places the ledge was so narrow that, in looking down, nothing could be seen but jutting crags and the frowning waters of the ocean, several hundred feet below. At this part of the journey, I am afraid, I hindered the progress of the company. With his bare feet, the native was a sure-footed animal, jumping from crag to crag like an antelope, while I could only crawl, holding on by every rock and root that came in my way. But by the end of the journey Missi had acquitted himself to the satisfaction of everyone, and never afterwards were any doubts raised as to the possibility of Missi accompanying them on an expedition.

But our reception from the chief and the people of Luli repaid us for all the pains we had taken to be present at the settlement of their teacher. Owing to its isolated position, the people of Luli had few visitors, and consequently the arrival of our party created a great stir and excitement in the village. The people, with their primitive mode of

The Winning of Paama

life, were a source of great amusement to me, and I was evidently as great a wonder to them. More than half the people had not seen a white man before. The marks of civilization had not invaded this out-of-the-way village, and the people were following the same primitive mode of life as their forefathers had done for countless generations. My belongings were a source of wonderment to them. One came forward and examined my clothes, another my shoes and stockings, while a third, of an inquiring turn of mind, thrust his hand up the leg of my trousers. My braces completely puzzled them. They discussed their function for quite a time, and, when all had aired their opinions, I took off my coat and set their doubts at rest.

At night, when it was time to retire, they procured a large bundle of native mats and were proceeding to make up a bed for me, when I interrupted them and told them I carried my bed in a handbag. When I took out a hammock, and slung it between two poles, their surprise knew no bounds. But they were inquisitive as well, and would not go away until they saw me in my strange sleeping-place.

Weiwato's induction was held in the newly constructed school-house, and was very impressive. Being the first time a service had been conducted in the village, it was like unfurling the banner of the Cross and taking possession of the place in Christ's name. Every inhabitant of the village was present, and, what was most remarkable, the old men who had been leaders in heathenism joined in the service. It was with more than ordinary pleasure I told them

Midst Volcanic Fires

the sweet story of old, of the Redeemer who died to save them.

Early in the evening, Apokmanu, the chief of Liro, one of the deputation who accompanied me, came into my tent; and from the slow, hesitating manner in which he began to speak, I knew he had something important to say. He confessed that he was afraid to accompany me on the following morning to the heathen village of Lulip Natano. It was one of the villages in which he had made havoc in his heathen days; and, as the people had long threatened vengeance, he was afraid that at last they would put their evil designs into execution and wreak their vengeance upon him. His tribe had tried to dissuade him from undertaking such a perilous journey, but he would accompany the missionary at all hazards. But now that he was approaching Lulip his courage failed him, and he would gladly have agreed to remain behind. This knowledge, however, made me the more anxious that he should accompany me and procure, if possible, a reconciliation between the two tribes. So, before retiring for the night, I arranged that the chief of Luli, who was on favourable terms with the people of Lulip Natano, should accompany us on the following day. I thought his presence would secure for us a favourable reception.

As soon as we approached the confines of Lulip Natano, I noticed that the movements of Apok became very strange. His whole body was in a state of nervous excitement. His eyes gleamed like those of a hawk, scrutinizing every shrub and tree

The Winning of Paama

where an enemy might be concealed. He dodged from tree to tree, carefully examining all around before he made the next spring. All his movements were calculated to remind one of the time when, with club and musket, he himself hunted his fellow-islanders. He was like a savage on the warpath. But he had ample reason to be afraid. His deadly enemy was lying in wait for him. His quick eye detected the head of his foe appearing above the tall grass, not fifty yards away, as he was preparing to fire. Apok remained under the shelter of a tree, and shouted to his old enemy that he had ceased fighting, and had come with the missionary to tell them about the true God. So saying, he stepped aside from the shelter of the tree, and, exposing his body, told his enemy to fire, if he wished to kill him. But there is honour even in savages. He refused to fire; and as he was preparing to retire into the thickness of the bush, the timely intervention of the chief of Luli was the means of bringing him into our midst. With the white feathers stuck in his bushy hair, pigs' tusks jangling on his naked breast and arms, and an old blunderbuss in the crook of his arm, he looked the typical savage of South Sea Island romance.

As he approached, Apok sprang forward and shook hands with him. A reconciliation was made between the two chiefs. Thanking God for the merciful deliverance of Apok, we proceeded to the village of Lulip. Only two men were in evidence: they were the sentries, and the rest of the people were hiding in the bush. The empty village was the

Midst Volcanic Fires

manner in which the natives expressed dissatisfaction with unwelcome visitors.

However, Apok and his newly-found friend went off in search of the hiding natives, and, as the story of Apok's singular experience circulated amongst them, they were not long in putting in an appearance. In the meantime, I unfolded a roll of Scripture pictures, and began to speak to the people. One by one they returned from their hiding-places, and stood in amazement, gazing at the Gospel pictures. I was afforded a great opportunity of telling them of the great and good God and of how He sent His Son to save them. They listened attentively, and at the close of our informal service, it was particularly affecting to see Apok shake hands all round with his former enemies.

That service was the beginning of Christian worship in the village of Lulip Natano; and, until the settlement of a teacher, Apok continued to visit the tribe, to proclaim, in his humble way, the message of the Gospel.

In this and other ways Christian influence asserted itself as a power working for peace and righteousness among the villages of Paama. The ferocity of intertribal warfare was restrained and the barbarities of the past diminished before our eyes. "When the Worship came among us," said an old chief, "we were the sons of the devil; we knew nothing—nothing but war, war, war." Cut up into tribes and clans, the heathen were always at war with one another, tribe with tribe and village with village. Quarrels arose, sometimes by the

The Winning of Paama

people of one tribe trespassing the boundary-line of their neighbours, sometimes by acts of plunder on the cocoanut and bread-fruit trees, sometimes as a result of family intrigue, jealousy, and enmity. Those quarrels often resulted in serious and desperate conflicts, in which the warriors engaged with the utmost cruelty and bitterness. But the preaching and teaching of the Word of God acted as a strong antidote; and, as the circle of Christian influence increased, the range of heathenism became correspondingly smaller. The movement developed spontaneously, village after village being brought in, as much through the influence of the communities that were already Christian as by any effort of our own.

There could be no more eloquent or impressive object-lesson of the power of the Gospel than that which Christ gave as He lifted those poor, ignorant, and degraded people. Very often, when the natives were seen in their ignorance and degradation, we wondered if they were capable of reformation or worth saving. But they were men and women, with hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, sins to be forgiven, and souls to be saved. Deep as they had sunk in the mire of sin and heathenism, they were capable of being transformed into sons and daughters of God.

Mission work upon Paama was favoured with the presence of a few men of strong, upright character, and they exerted a powerful influence for good among their fellows. Indeed, so much were we impressed with the nobility of their lives that it seemed an almost inconceivable thing that only a few years

Midst Volcanic Fires

before they were savage and cannibal, hunting in the bush for the lives of their fellows. But the preaching of the Gospel produced great changes. When Christ was lifted up, men and women were drawn to Him; and when they were drawn to Him they were emancipated from the power of evil, and raised to a new plane of moral and spiritual life.

A desire for baptism sprang up amongst the converts; and as they were following a course of life in harmony with the religion they professed, I had no hesitation in taking the necessary steps to form a catechumens' class. Intimation was made in all the school villages that those who really loved the Lord Jesus, and were anxious for baptism, should meet to form a candidates' class for a year's instruction. In response to the invitation, nearly two hundred came forward. Like Gideon's host, the number was greatly reduced before the end of the year; but the work of sifting and instructing and praying with so many earnest souls shed a hallowed influence over the time of probation.

Many of the men who attended the class were polygamists; and it was very interesting to notice how, without any advice from us, they gradually abandoned the hateful practice. Perhaps one of the most unmistakable evidences of the wonder of Christianity was the change which its unique teaching concerning marriage produced upon the habits of a polygamous people. In Paama, as everywhere else in the islands, the natives recognized no limitation whatever to the number of wives a man might possess. Wives were a badge of

The Winning of Paama

distinction, and gave a princely *éclat* to the household. Next to an unlimited ownership in pigs, an ownership in wives was the summit of a man's ambition.

When the change from heathenism to Christianity was made, the element of heathenism which lingered longest was an unwillingness on the part of the men to part with their surplus wives. The first man to take the step had been a notorious character, and his action created a great sensation throughout the district.

Soon after our landing, the Rev. Mr Smaill took an opportunity of pointing out a man who was the evil genius of the district. His furtive look and scowling eye revealed his character. He was gifted with more than ordinary intelligence, but his talents had always been used on the side of evil. His last outrage, committed shortly before our arrival, was the shooting of two men who had joined the Worship; and the manner in which they had been done to death revealed the utter depravity to which paganism can sink. Yet this was the man who first, among the Paama converts, took the bold step of parting with his second wife for the sake of the Gospel, and thereby breaking one of the links which bound him to heathenism. He was brought into contact with God in a way in which many people obtain their first vision of Him—through illness. One ray of light pierced through the darkness of his soul, and made of him a new creature. The bitter venom of his hatred was driven out by the expulsive power of the new love which filled his soul.

Midst Volcanic Fires

His first act was to summon the people of his own village and the neighbouring village of Lironissa, to make a confession of his past outrages, and ask their forgiveness. And, then, he crowned his confession by a renunciation of polygamy. "Jesus," he said to me, "has been speaking to my heart, and I do not wish to remain in darkness any longer by having two wives"; then, mentioning the number of pigs he had paid for her, said, "I give her away for nothing."

Such an unexpected event evoked from the converts a spontaneous and heartfelt thanksgiving to God for the courage and faith which enabled Maki to take the decisive step. His example proved an incentive to others to snap the chains of heathen bondage, and come out wholly on the side of Christ. In spite of the difficulties with which they were surrounded, many of the people were indeed seekers after the Light and Truth. The full light of day did not come all at once: there was first a gradual dawning. Conviction of sin, as usually understood, was not an experience of the native convert. But there came the gradual awakening of the soul, without fuss, without fear, without pain, without great distress. It was the way of the Holy Spirit in the awakening of the natives of Paama.

Much to the disappointment of the people, only twenty-two members of the catechumens' class were accepted for baptism. Our aim was, not so much to receive large accessions to the membership of the Church as to permeate every part of it with the Spirit of prayer, and to seek guidance to ensure

The Winning of Paama

genuine Christian life in the converts; being convinced that, as the work was deep and strong and of the Holy Ghost, we should see Christ's kingdom coming with power. On the day appointed for the first baptismal service the twenty-two native converts presented themselves to profess their faith in Christ, and to acknowledge allegiance to Him as Lord. It was a memorable day for the people of Paama, and will not readily pass from their memory.

All the newly-baptized converts were present at the Communion, and formed a Christian Church in Paama. It was one of the most impressive services ever held in the island. From all the Christian villages came large crowds; and the congregation of over seven hundred adherents that assembled to witness the first celebration of the Communion was deeply moved by the Spirit of God. One could not fail to be impressed with the earnest, reverent demeanour of the people. All classes and ages were represented. The young, with life before them, and the old, scarred men and women, grown old in the service of sin—all united in peace and love to show forth the Lord's death "till He come." No power but Divine grace could have convened such a meeting in Paama, or, indeed, in any of the islands of the New Hebrides. The church accommodation was too limited, and the service was held in God's great temple, under the shade of the trees. In front of the congregation was the Communion table, with the sacred elements, and around it were seated the twenty-two native converts. These were the

Midst Volcanic Fires

first-fruits of the Paama mission. The bread and wine were symbols that it was for *their* redemption that Christ died. It was also to *them* that Christ said, "This do in remembrance of Me." The native Christians of Paama obeyed Christ's injunction, and, in doing so, joined hands with His Church throughout the world.

Not the least memorable part of the day was the thankoffering on behalf of Ambrim Hospital. The Paamese had always borne a reputation for stinginess, but the entrance of Christ into their heart unloosed their purse-strings. The collection amounted to £7, 14s. 9d., made up of 585 coins.

The post-Communion service on the following day gave full expression to the feeling of thankfulness which pervaded all our hearts. It was also a farewell service. Four of the native Christians had volunteered for foreign service, and were leaving that day to become teachers in Ambrim. The Paama Church thus became, at its very inception, a missionary Church.

One of the teachers had his mettle tried within a few months of his settlement, and he came through the ordeal unscathed. From the outset the heathen were infuriated against him, and they took the first opportunity of wreaking their vengeance upon his property. During his absence from the village, at a teachers' conference, they burned his house to the ground, destroying his books, clothes, food, and everything he possessed. The first intimation the teacher and his wife received of the wanton outrage was the sight of the smouldering ruins. But

The Winning of Paama

this dastardly act had precisely the opposite effect the heathen anticipated. The teacher's zeal and courage shone more resplendent than ever. Even the adherents of the Worship imagined the blow would prove too much for their teacher, and that he would leave his work. But he soon assured them that the mere burning of his house and property would not make him flinch from his post, and, as he was at Hindu as the servant and evangelist of Jesus Christ, and at His command, there he would remain until his Master told him to quit.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WINNING OF PAAMA (*continued*)

THE formation of a church meant the re-creation of Paama. Small as its membership was, it exerted a widespread influence over the whole community. It was the little leaven leavening the whole lump. A church member was a marked man. The heathen expected something very different from him because of the religious profession he had made. Especially among the large number of Christian adherents he exercised considerable influence which brought about noticeable changes in many directions. Sins which were formerly universal became exceptional, and, what was once regarded as natural and unavoidable, came to be considered a grave offence. Infant marriage, which was once the rule, almost entirely disappeared. Stealing, which prevailed in every village, became exceedingly rare. A public conscience grew up among the people, and they gave increasing evidence of a desire to lead purer and better lives.

It was the invariable practice of the native Christians to hand on to others the blessings they themselves had received. Each convert in turn became a missionary to his fellows. Unhampered by the language barrier, and by the still greater



EVANGELISTS OF PAAMA.

0
 1
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7
 8
 9
 10
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26
 27
 28
 29
 30
 31
 32
 33
 34
 35
 36
 37
 38
 39
 40
 41
 42
 43
 44
 45
 46
 47
 48
 49
 50
 51
 52
 53
 54
 55
 56
 57
 58
 59
 60
 61
 62
 63
 64
 65
 66
 67
 68
 69
 70
 71
 72
 73
 74
 75
 76
 77
 78
 79
 80
 81
 82
 83
 84
 85
 86
 87
 88
 89
 90
 91
 92
 93
 94
 95
 96
 97
 98
 99

The Winning of Paama

barrier of being a foreigner, the native convert could present the Gospel freed from the strangeness of which the European missionary could not divest it. This explains the reason why the native teachers make such good evangelists to their own people. The native, too, is an individual of many relatives, all of whom are interested in his affairs, so it becomes one thing or the other: either he wins them over to his faith, or he suffers persecution at their hands. Possibly, most of the mission converts throughout the islands come under the influence of the Gospel in this way, and, certainly, in the island of Paama the great measure of success which accompanied our efforts was due to native agency. Every Sunday, bands of converts, whose hearts had been kindled by Divine love, visited the heathen villages, and conveyed to their brethren in darkness the knowledge of God's love. In spite of bitter opposition, and occasionally at the risk of their lives, they persevered in their efforts until the whole island had embraced Christianity.

In connection with the establishment of church and school in the village of Aulip, a strange side-light of heathen life was revealed. A corner of the veil which hid their guilty past was lifted, and gave a glimpse of heathen wickedness, revolting to contemplate.

A few days before the new teacher's settlement, four men from the Christian village of Tahalu called at the mission station, and requested that, before the people of Aulip accepted the Worship, they should make reparation for the outrage they committed

Midst Volcanic Fires

upon them four years previously. They stated that they belonged to the deserted village of Ingalu, which was situated near the borders of the powerful tribe of Aulip. Their ground was rich in cocoanuts, and excited the envy of the Aulip people. One morning, before sunrise, the fighting members of the Aulip tribe surrounded the village of Ingalu. At the door of every hut were stationed savage men, with muskets and tomahawks, ready to kill the unsuspecting natives as they came out. With the exception of the four men who narrated the tale, the whole population was ruthlessly slaughtered. No woman or child escaped. The houses were all burned, and the bodies left unburied. The four men who escaped were hunted about the bush like wild-fowl, until at last they found a city of refuge in the village of Tahalu.

This tale revealed the cause of the hesitation the chief and leading men of Aulip had shown in their acceptance of a teacher. All the young people were anxious for the introduction of school, but the old men were persistent in their opposition. They knew that they could only secure a teacher on the condition that they restored the stolen property to the four survivors, and at first they were unwilling to entertain such a thought. But by the time the settlement of the teacher came round, the chiefs had all expressed their willingness to return the ground to the rightful owners. They had come to recognize that, if they were in earnest about their new faith, the first step on the road of true repentance was restitution. The four men were invited to

The Winning of Paama

visit Aulip as friends, and for the first time since the massacre they were able, without fear, to visit their old homes.

The opening of the new school-church at Aulip was made the occasion for a united gathering of the mission adherents. Every one of the ten school villages in Paama were represented. Mrs Frater and I arrived early on the scene, and, after examining the new school, took a stroll across the mission compound to where preparations were being made for a great feast to the visitors. Hundreds of natives were sitting round watching the preparations with hungry eyes. The heathen villages were represented, too; and although the heathen had borrowed clothes for the occasion, it was not difficult to distinguish them from the worshipping population. The natives of Tahalu and Foulili kept at a respectable distance from the others. They had only recently joined the Worship, and were too timid to sit near those with whom they had lately been at war.

But what a gathering! We could not look upon it without regarding it as prophetic of the dawn of a better day for the backward and primitive natives of Paama. Here was a company of nearly a thousand people accustomed to see each other only when face to face in warfare. The people on the north side of the island, though only a few miles apart from those on the south side, might have been living at the ends of the earth as far as communication with each other was concerned. When the conch shell was blown for worship, heathen as well as Christian natives joined in the service, held in the

Midst Volcanic Fires

shade of the village banyan tree. "Happy day, happy day" was the opening hymn; and it was, indeed, the expression of our hearts. The people departed to the different villages conscious of the awakening within them of a new feeling of kinship and unity towards those who formerly were bitter enemies.

Occasionally, we have had times of despondency, when, in spite of ourselves and the gracious promises of an Almighty Father, we grew faint-hearted in the midst of the work. The native sometimes appeared to be so formal in his religion, and so contrary in his ideas of right and wrong, that the faithless question obtruded itself: "Was it possible to build up these babes in the faith of Jesus Christ?" But if ever we had any doubts as to the existence of real spiritual life in the members of our congregations, our doubts always vanished when we joined with them in a united service at the opening of a new church. No one could look into their dark, dull faces, lit up at the thought of the Wondrous Love of our Lord, without feeling that they had entered into living union with Him.

In our journeys through the bush we were often surprised at the scanty knowledge the natives had of the roads outside their own district. One would imagine that in the island of Paama, where the natives are confined within a comparatively small area, every bush-track would be known to all. But frequently, when visiting villages, my fellow-travellers have told me that they were never in the district before. Under the reign of heathenism,

The Winning of Paama

the jealousy and enmity of one tribe toward another was so inveterate and widespread that the majority of natives never moved beyond the boundary of the district in which they were born. No value was given to life, and there was no joy in existence. With Christ came freedom, and the natives were amazed to find that they could go anywhere in perfect safety. The presence of a large crowd of people, drawn from villages that used to be at war with each other, was to them a constant wonder. The feature of heathen life which impressed itself most forcibly upon the native mind was its lawlessness, and the element in the Christian villages which they appreciated most was its peace and security.

It was gratifying to visit tribes, like Aulip and Tahalu, that for generations had been traditional foes, and mark the change that had taken place. The men who used to meet me with painted faces and plaited hair were now found clothed and in their right mind. Each village had been transformed and cleansed, and new men and women had sprung up out of a horrid environment of licentiousness. A new value was given to life and a fresh hope to existence.

What made the change appear more radical was the removal of the entire village. As soon as a tribe accepted the Worship, they started life afresh, and built a new village, always at some distance from the old. The teacher's house and school were placed in the centre of the cleared ground, and around them the dwelling-houses of the natives were built. There the village life was begun anew, with new outlook,

Midst Volcanic Fires

new zest, new hopes. In all the heathen villages into which the mission school entered, it introduced a new era, and was the maker of a new generation. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, the teaching and preaching of the Word of Life renewed and transformed men and women, however unfavourable their antecedents and discouraging their surroundings.

One thing specially noticeable in the life of the young Christian communities was the high conception they all held of the sacredness of the Lord's Day, the keeping of which was a difficult task for people whose daily lives were entangled with those of heathen neighbours, to whom Sunday was a common day. But perhaps the feature in their lives which revealed best the temper of the people was the prevalence of family prayer. Morning and evening, from different houses, the sound of prayer and praise was heard. The speech might be low and faltering, the petitions strange and unorthodox, but they ascended, we believe, as a sweet-smelling incense to God who looks upon the heart.

On every occasion when we visited the village of Aulip we were provided with some entertainment. Living there was a comical old man—jolly, kind-hearted, and brimful of laughter. His influence in the village, though by no means great, was always on the side of right, and he was a staunch upholder of the Worship. But he could not tolerate clothes. His body had been so long accustomed to nature's caressing touch that clothes only served to irritate his unshapely limbs. On every visit to Aulip, if we

The Winning of Paama

caught him unawares, he was in his simple and primitive state. But, out of deference to European visitors in the village, he was very punctilious about appearing in clothes of some kind.

On one occasion, however, his suit must have been at the washing. As we entered the village we saw Meilato, standing amid a group of men, clad in nature's garments. On catching sight of us he made a bee-line for his house. Imagine our surprise when, a moment later, he emerged from his hut wearing a tall hat and a smile—but nothing more!

Soon after the establishment of school in his village, Meilato paid a visit to the head station, and, from the large number of people that accompanied him, I inferred that he had come on business of importance. He was dressed in such a gay manner that I had difficulty in recognizing my comical friend. With good-natured bashfulness, and a merry twinkle in his eye, he informed me that he had come to be married. His fellow-villagers had decked him in borrowed robes—clothes from one man, hat from another, and boots from another. His suit of clothes had been made for a man of smaller dimensions, and with his bowler hat he could have passed for Charlie Chaplin. It was the first occasion on which he had worn boots, and he walked like a German officer practising the goose-step. During the wedding ceremony he was very restless and uncomfortable. His tight-fitting clothes evidently pinched him, nor did his boots add to his comfort. He gasped, he shuffled, he kicked. The end of the service came as a welcome relief, and he lost no

Midst Volcanic Fires

time in setting out for home, to shed his borrowed garments.

It is difficult for a visitor in the New Hebrides, who sees large and reverent congregations, to realize the patience and time and effort that have been expended in winning the people, and bringing them into the fold of the Church. One requires to accompany the itinerating missionary to the informal services held on the square of a heathen village, where can be seen the rough material out of which the worshipping native is made. The people are, at first, partly amused, partly frightened. The whole service is so new and strange to them that, as soon as the singing of a hymn begins, many natives burst out laughing. The distractions, too, are endless. A pig, perhaps, upsets the cooking pot on the fire, and half a dozen people will rush to save the contents. Visitors from another village may arrive, and immediately there is a buzz of conversation, amid which the speaker strives to make himself heard. In this way the service proceeds. After a short address, or rather conversation, explaining the Gospel story, the audience is dismissed, and the preachers proceed on their way. In some such way mission work began in all the villages where teachers are now stationed. A great deal has yet to be accomplished before the conquest of the islands is complete; but the teachers and adherents are digging away, laying the foundation of the City of God; and we realize that it is not drudgery to teach a handful of heathen people, and lead their feet into the paths of peace. Neither missionary nor teacher

The Winning of Paama

is spending his strength for naught. They are there as stewards and ministers to prepare the way for the coming of the King. Hungai, the heathen chief of Tapulai, boasted that he was king of Paama, and that he wanted heathen worship to be the worship of all the natives of Paama. Weiwato, the teacher, told him that Jesus was going to be King, and that they were working away, strong in the faith that Jesus would come to His own in all the heathen villages of Paama. It was a glorious inspiration, and the teachers and adherents felt its contagion. It made them realize that the true remedy for all the ills of heathenism lay in capturing the villages for Christ.

The village of Tapulai was the last to give its adherence to the Gospel of Christ. Ever since the settlement of teachers in Paama, the two chiefs, who ruled the village with a rod of iron, had been bitterly opposed to the advance of the Gospel, and did everything in their power to arrest its progress. But Christ crossed their path, and He produced a great change in their lives and in the lives of their fellow-villagers. Slowly and gradually the entire village cast off its ignorance and superstition and advanced towards a better and happier life.

With the establishment of Church services at Tapulai, there was Christian worship in every village in the island of Paama. Some men and women, of course, attended simply as a matter of form; but the great majority were simple, earnest, loving followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their regular attendance at Church services, their liberality, their

Midst Volcanic Fires

whole-hearted devotion to the Worship of God enabled us to claim the island of Paama for Christ. Thus, in less than ten years, through the effectual working of God's grace, the little island of 1800 inhabitants was led to give up heathenism, with its attendant evils, and embrace the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour.

In bringing about this result, the native teachers had a large share. In season and out of season they had been diligent in preaching the Gospel of God's grace. Their preaching and teaching of the Word of God had completely transformed the island, and changed a wild and lawless region into a peaceful and settled district. Men and women can now go about their work without fear of danger. Boys and girls can play and enjoy themselves without the dread of a revengeful neighbour shooting or carrying them off. Plantation work is undertaken in a more thorough manner than in the old days when there was no security. The export trade of the island has increased, and will continue to expand as the people learn that God has given them brains and hands and feet for work and service.

At the opening service of the Tapulai church there were several speakers. In the course of his address, Weiwato of Luli contrasted the Paama of to-day with the Paama he knew many years ago, when he accompanied Mr Smaill on his earliest visits. The teacher told that on the occasion of Mr Smaill's first visit they called at several villages, and met with a hostile reception. In a very graphic manner Weiwato described the interview Mr Smaill

The Winning of Paama

had with the Tapulai tribe. Mistaking the missionary for a Frenchman, the chief asked him to open a store in Paama, and supply them with tobacco, grog, and muskets. But the moment they discovered that Mr Smaill was not a trader but a missionary, they shouted, *Erovati missionary—wiwi, wiwi!* (We do not want a missionary—away, away!)

“Behold, I make all things new,” is a truth which was literally fulfilled before our eyes in the re-creation of Paama. All the villages underwent a complete transformation. The old Paama, with its low-roofed huts and reed walls and dirty villages, rapidly disappeared, and their places were taken by strong, commodious lime houses in healthy surroundings. The faces of the people revealed the change. There was no mistaking the appearance of the heathen native for that of the convert who had come under the civilizing influence of Christianity. With his shock of powdered hair, painted face, grotesque ornamentation, and amulet of pig’s tusks the heathen native was easily recognized. The Christian natives realize the new standing that Christianity gives them, and assume a greater freedom and independence in their intercourse with missionary and trader alike. The unscrupulous settler, whose aim is to exploit the natives, does not call it independence, but cheek. The contrast between the old and the new order of things is the best witness to the presence of God in the hearts of the people. But of all the changes that are taking place, the greatest is that which is being wrought in the hearts of those who are Christ’s, who have

Midst Volcanic Fires

the inward man renewed day by day through Him who is our Resurrection and Life.

The visit we made to Tavie, the model village of Paama, during the course of the evangelistic campaign, revealed the far-reaching nature of the change that had taken place in the environment of the tribe. On arriving at the boat passage we found a big sea rolling in on the beach. As there was a risk of getting our boat smashed on the rocks, we blew the conch shell, and awaited a canoe to take us ashore. In a short time the people assembled on the beach, and soon launched one of light build. A few of the mission party transhipped first into the canoe. The teacher, with the eye of an expert, watched his chance, and then, in a lull between the breakers, went bounding on to the beach, where the canoe was caught by willing hands and dragged to a place of safety before the next roller had time to overtake it. The teacher made three trips before the entire party was taken ashore.

We found the village wondrous neat and clean. In the middle of the large square on which the village is situated stood the school-church—a fine commodious lime building, with a raised concrete platform and table and seats of native manufacture. The dwelling-houses of the people were built in streets around the church. All the houses had lime walls, and, with their fresh coat of whitewash, were looking models of neatness and cleanliness.

The meetings in the Tavie village were accompanied with many indications of God's blessing. There was a spirit of expectation manifested. All

The Winning of Paama

were unanimous about the need of a spiritual awakening, and were anxious to put themselves in the way of realizing it. I acquainted them with the wondrous working of the Spirit in other parts of the world, and it revealed to them the immense possibilities of blessing lying at their own door. Every one recognized that the greatest need of the native Church was a more robust Christian life: not more elaborate methods of working or new appliances, or even new workers, but more life—the new life from God, inbreathed by His Holy Spirit. Prayer, earnest persevering prayer, prayer in secret, prayer in concert, asking for an outpouring of the Spirit was recognized as the immediate duty of the native Church. With such a high tone of spiritual life in the community it was natural that the spiritual uplift of the revival meetings should be correspondingly high. It was a joy and privilege, as well as a rich reward, to notice the earnest, devoted spirit of the converts and their settled habit of bringing into daily life the teaching of the Word of God. Religion was a real thing to them, and not a matter of form and ceremony. The sight, too, of so many people who, not long before, were savage and cannibal, filled with deadly hatred to one another, but now assembled together in meetings for the promotion of holiness, afforded an eloquent testimony to the transforming power of the Gospel.

The church has a strange flight of steps for an entrance to a sacred edifice, and, though unbecoming the character of the building, was a reminder of the troublous days through which the village had

Midst Volcanic Fires

passed. The steps are formed of man-o'-war shells. On inquiring how the shells came into the possession of the village, we learned that, many years ago, long before the advent of the mission, the people had murdered a white man, and, by way of punishing the murderers, a warship visited the island and shelled the village. No damage was done to either life or property. The shells never exploded, and, after lying for many years as a memento of former days, they were at last embedded into the doorway of the local church.

The evangelistic campaign was brought to an end by special Communion services in Paama and south-east Ambrim, which will not readily be forgotten by those privileged to be present. The Church in the Ambrim district—with a roll of 1100 members and adherents—had never at any time during its twenty years' history been able to support the thirteen teachers who ministered to the spiritual needs of the community. The collections varied very much from year to year; and though the Church, as a whole, contributed very liberally towards the maintenance of God's work, a certain sum had always to be drawn from the Teachers' Fund to supplement the freewill offerings of the people. In the mission field the difficulty with young converts is to keep the early fervour from gradually dying away; and there devolves upon the missionary the constant necessity of impressing upon the people their responsibility for the entire maintenance of God's work. Certainly, for some years previously, owing to the failure of the copra trade, the people of

The Winning of Paama

Paama and Ambrim were unable to contribute much for Church purposes. But, that year, King Cotton had showered upon them his wealth in an unstinted fashion. Ambrim and Paama were studded with fields of white cotton of exquisite purity and beauty; and, apart from its being a source of income to the natives, I could never pass through a cotton plantation, with the bushes covered, as if with delicate snow-flakes, without feeling gratified that the natives of the distant New Hebrides were doing their "bit" towards clothing the millions of suffering Europe. Cotton-growing, that year, proved a more lucrative employment than copra-making; and I could appeal, therefore, with confidence to the members of the various village churches for increased contributions towards the support of the native ministry.

There was an unusually large attendance at the Communion service. Not only was the church filled, but as many people were seated outside. In the middle of the service, when the Thanksgiving collection was announced, Meacoi, the chief of Penaboe, walked up to the Communion table and placed a bag containing £8 in front of me, with the remark, "That's for Maki Tabos, the teacher of Penaboe." Then Sahe, the chief of Wile, came forward, and, placing a bag of £8 on the table, said, "That's for Apok, the teacher of Wile." Chief followed chief in rapid succession, until all the thirteen chiefs of south-east Ambrim had deposited their bags, and there lay on the table £100, 15s. 6d.—the freewill offering of the Church of south-east

Midst Volcanic Fires

Ambrim, for the support of its native ministry. For the first time in its history the Church dispensed with outside aid, and became a self-sustaining Church of Jesus Christ. We trust that this state of things will not only continue, but that the Church will be led to contribute towards the evangelization of other fields.

On the completion of the Ambrim tour we returned to Paama, where the Communion was also celebrated. On this island—the most thickly populated in the New Hebrides group—there is a population of some 1800; but distances are not great, and it was quite convenient for the entire population to meet at the head station for the Communion. It was a great sight to see the fleet of canoes, laden with people, making their way along the coast to the mission station. It reminded one of the custom in old Jerusalem of the tribes going up to the House of the Lord. The attendance was large, although some native converts had given way to strong drink and were ashamed to appear. The big attendance was, doubtless, due to the fact that the Paama Church, like her sister Church in south-east Ambrim, was making an earnest effort to become self-supporting. The teachers' salaries, in accordance with Synod's resolution, were being increased, and more money than usual had to be raised. But the Paama people, like their brethren in Ambrim, had had a prosperous year; and, if only the readiness to give was present, they were well able to afford an increased contribution. The chiefs of Paama did not come forward and lay their offerings on the

The Winning of Paama

Communion table in the dramatic fashion of their Ambrim brethren, but they achieved a similar result. After the service, in the presence of the congregation, the offerings were counted, and there was universal joy and thanksgiving when the handsome total of £125, 10s. 9d. was announced—a sum which enabled the Church to pay the increased amount without outside assistance. The Paama Church thus became self-supporting; and, as it was my twenty-first year of service in the islands, it was fitting that the Church should that year attain its majority.

CHAPTER IX

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS IN EPI

AN evangelistic campaign among the islands of the New Hebrides is vastly different from the routine of the itinerating evangelist amid the amenities of civilization. Railway travelling is unknown, the conveniences of a modern hotel are lacking, no passports are available for crossing savage frontiers, and no Cook's tours to provide visitors with facilities for travel. Mechanical science, however, has brought within reach of the missionary an ideal means of locomotion—the motor launch; and, at all stations where they are in use, they have proved an invaluable boon.

On our departure from Paama to open the Epi campaign, our porters, with a view of avoiding the heat of the day, had our baggage on the beach at sunrise, for shipment to the launch. On such occasions we load our boat with a very miscellaneous cargo. Besides portmanteaux and boxes containing our food and personal belongings, we carry pots and pans, bed and bedding, and occasionally a few live goats. Were we to appear on a station-platform at home with such a mixed cargo we would be quite prepared for coolness on the part of our friends, many of whom, I am sure, would, like the Levite

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

in the parable, pass by on the other side. But when, as in island travelling, we had to live in native humpies for weeks on end, taking with us everything that we required, it was not possible to avoid the moonlight-flitting appearance of our baggage.

But inland travelling is still performed on foot, as in the days of Captain Cook. Every missionary can recall the tedious journeys he has made, scorched in the sun or drenched in tropical rain, while itinerating among the scattered tribes. The tracks that connect the villages wind through the virgin bush, and are usually so narrow that it is only possible to march single file. A native does not always take the shortest cut between two places. If a tree falls across the path he never dreams of clearing away the obstruction, but makes a bend round the tree. Even after the obstacle has rotted away, the native still continues to use the track round the place where the tree lay. Then a man may lay out a plantation across the track, and cause a long detour to be made round the fence with which the plantation is inclosed. One can thus understand how, in the course of years, a native track resembles the tortuous windings of a river.

Travelling on foot among the villages of Epi gave us abundant opportunities for wayside talks with a variety of people, and much of the success of the campaign was due to the informal methods employed. The usual idea of evangelistic work in the New Hebrides is that the missionary goes to the public square of a heathen village, and gathers round him a crowd of savages, to whom he preaches, and

Midst Volcanic Fires

there and then a certain number are converted and become good Christians. Possibly, such an impression has been formed from the methods practised by the Apostles in their missionary journeys. But there are radical differences between the conditions in Asia Minor and the New Hebrides. The Apostles baptized converts immediately after conversion, but in the New Hebrides such a course would be suicidal. Unlike the people among whom Paul worked, the natives of the New Hebrides had no knowledge of the true God, and no preparation for the message of the Messiah. On the contrary, they had such a distorted idea of God that no use could be made of it. They believed that the world was peopled with demons who desired to do them harm, and their worship was merely an attempt to placate or deceive the evil spirits. The idea of the one true God, who made all things, and who loves all people, was quite new and foreign to them, and upon this new basis the whole structure of religion had to be built afresh. They had to be taught who God is, the relationship in which they stand to Him, what He has done for them, how they may draw near to Him, and why they should serve Him. Only after this foundation has been laid is it possible to approach them with the message of the Gospel and the proclamation of God's love in Jesus Christ.

On emerging from heathenism, a convert is recognized as an adherent, and attaches himself to the nearest church, so that the Christians of the place may help him by council and prayer, and keep him from again becoming entangled in the yoke of

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

heathenism. We receive from the convert a promise that he will abandon the worship of idols, join in Christian worship, and endeavour to live according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. If, after a period of instruction, he is anxious for baptism, he is enrolled as a member of the catechumens' class. Then follows another period of probation and instruction, during which the eyes of the whole community are upon him; and if, at the end of the time, he has made good use of his opportunities, and has witnessed a good confession, he receives baptism, and is admitted into the fellowship of the Christian Church.

It is sometimes anything but easy to explain the motives which lead the natives of the New Hebrides to give up their old pagan customs and become worshippers of God. Purely material considerations do not count, for no material advantage is to be gained by an acceptance of Christianity. They become dissatisfied with their present condition and inspired with the hope of a better, freer life through the power of Christ. Weak, ignorant, and vicious as most of them are, when they give up heathen practices, they come, however blindly, to the school of Jesus to learn the lesson He is so ready to teach.

It is a great thing to lift a savage from the ground and turn his face heavenward. Only those who have first-hand acquaintance with it can realize all the degradation that is involved in heathenism. There is no nobility of thought, no faith in a higher power, no striving after higher and better things, but only

Midst Volcanic Fires

a dread of evil spirits. The native Christian is not perfect any more than we are. They have their defects, and at times the old leaven of heathenism manifests itself in sad relapses into sins of temper and uncleanness. But we know also that Christianity makes a great difference in their lives. It gives them faith in a Father's love, it gives them hope both for this world and the next, and it gives them the spirit of love and brotherhood. It makes them new creatures in Christ Jesus.

The evangelistic campaign among the villages of Epi was conducted on precisely the same lines as in Ambrim. Beginning at Burumba, the head station of my fellow-evangelist, the Rev. J. B. Weir, of the Tasmanian Church, we worked our way round the island, visiting every one of the fifty-eight villages with the same message of peace and goodwill. The tour occupied exactly a month, and, though the island is less than one hundred miles in circumference, we must have travelled three times that distance visiting the inland villages.

The conditions, however, which prevailed in Epi were very different from those in Ambrim. Among the villages of Ambrim we were face to face with a large heathen population and with only a sprinkling of Christian communities. In Epi we were dealing with professedly Christian villages, where large numbers of people had grown cold and indifferent. In the campaign in Epi we addressed ourselves, not only to the work of individual conversion and the renewal of spiritual life in the converts, but also to the work of building a native church in which alone

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

the people could find their true life and development. And as there is no such thing as religious revival without increase of missionary zeal, we encouraged the converts to undertake a greater responsibility towards the islands still in darkness. Our mission in Epi proved, indeed, to be a river of God, full of water, whose streams did purify and gladden other lands.

Our evangelistic tour among heathen and Christian villages impressed us strongly with the contrast between the two classes of natives. In the one was the raw, untamed savage, with waving plume and painted body, and in the other a community of natives, in whose transformed lives the influence of the Gospel was revealed. In their pleasing manners, their zeal for Christian worship, and the absence of heathen dress and savage practices, the Christian natives appeared to belong to quite a different race from their savage brethren. In every-day life one readily saw how they loved their children, how they respected the aged, how they ministered to the sick. In their Church life one noticed how earnestly they prayed, what fine addresses they delivered, and how well they knew their Scriptures. The contrast with the heathen was indeed striking, and, in the light of the many virtues enumerated, the reader may naturally ask, "What more is needed to run a Church and Christian community?"

But the missionary, while grateful to God for the great change in the lives of the people, recognizes that there is another side. The native Christian has the defect of his qualities, and some of the chief characteristics of Christianity are still lacking.

Midst Volcanic Fires

No true estimate of native character can be formed which ignores the influence of the climate and the power of heredity. The native has lived in the Tropics for thousands of years, his wants are easily supplied, and the desire to work is non-existent. The genial warmth of the islands and the ease with which the natives make a living tend to develop the twin vices of indolence and lust. The climate is responsible for developing an easy-going, shallow, and enervated type of Christian character; the very antithesis of the hardy, strenuous qualities developed in countries with grey skies. With all the stored-up energy of centuries spent in a cold, harsh climate, the European comes to the islands, and, in his eagerness to exploit their wonderful natural resources, loses patience with the leisurely methods of the natives. But the native, perfectly content with his lot, remains cold to all attempts to induce him to work; whereas training and a resolute will enable the foreigner to resist the temptations to ease and indolence.

We thank God for the good work wrought by the Gospel, but the missionaries realize how much still remains to be done. Were the natives of the purely carnal type that some people declare, no uplift would be possible. Multitudes of them have received the Holy Spirit in rich measure, as much, indeed, as their partly-developed natures are capable of receiving. But the missionary living amongst them readily acknowledges that they are still in a state of transition, emerging from the corrupting and soul-destroying bondage of blighted years.

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

The stupefying spell of past centuries is still upon them. Most, if not all, native Christians profess to despise heathen customs, such as dancing, bodily adornment, sing-sings, etc.; but the charm of those things still captivates them, and their imaginations are not yet free from the superstitions which enslave them. Witchcraft and a belief in the potency of evil spirits still exercise a malign influence, and there can be no sound outlook for any community whose religion has for a background the propitiation of evil spirits. Full emancipation can only be secured when the faith of the native Christian is rooted and grounded in God, and has no contact with demon worship.

In the course of our campaign we took great care that in the process of Christianizing the native we did nothing which would tend to de-nationalize him. The native can be reformed and become an earnest Christian and a useful member of society and still remain a South Sea Islander. It is difficult to dissociate them; but in a wise mission policy Christianity and civilization should never be confounded. The Christianity of the natives does not match well with top hats and blücher boots. It must be a South Sea Island Christianity. Island life and agriculture, the communal method of family relationships, the dusty indifference to progress and comfort—all are in direct opposition to the white man's standard of civilization, if not also to his standard of religion. Even in the suppression of native customs, however harmful, it is well for the white pioneer, whether of religion or empire,

Midst Volcanic Fires

to be able to see what lies behind the practice, so that he can deal with it sympathetically and intelligently. The wild savages of the New Hebrides are splendid fellows, with great possibilities ; but we shall only make them hangers-on of our civilization if we destroy their institutions and give them nothing in return. In its dealings with the natives, our mission has endeavoured to work on the principle of substitution and give them something better. It is of no use suppressing customs, however harmful and fantastic, and leaving a void in the native existence. Almost everywhere, as a result of mission teaching, there is a breaking down of beliefs in heathen superstitions, and this afforded us unique opportunities for sowing the seeds of truth as we wandered from village to village in the course of the campaign. In addition to his belief in a good God, the native has to be trained to lead an ordered, working life. At present he throws the burden of his existence upon the women, and work that requires a regular effort will be his salvation.

The meetings and church services in connection with the Epi campaign were full of encouragement ; and the steady, though slow, growth of the native Church made us realize that God has rich blessings to bestow upon His people. In some districts tribal feuds were causing disorder and restlessness, and were the result of causes that seemed so unreal to the foreign missionary. One cannot argue with people who believe in magic and malevolent spirits any more than with prophets. All one can do is to contradict them. In one of the disturbed villages,

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

I tried to reason with a native teacher about the folly of a Christian giving credence to such superstition, and asked him if he really believed that one of the old sacred men, by compounding mixtures of spiders' webs and lizards' heads, and then mumbling some strange incantations to the spirits, could harm any person. But his only answer was that witchcraft was effective with black people, and that white people could not possibly understand it. In the New Hebrides the disease is a spiritual one, and needs a spiritual remedy. Besides quoting the instances in Scripture where Jesus Christ cast out devils, we invariably referred the native Christians to a verse in the book of Numbers specially appropriate to converts living in a land where a superstitious terror of evil spirits fills the imagination: "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." The evangelistic tour among the superstitious villages of Epi impressed us with the conviction that the greatest of all messages the Church has to offer the native converts is the love of a Personal God and the assurance that they are not the sport of chance or magic. We felt, too, that sympathetic dealing and loving guidance, on the part of missionary and teacher, made it all the easier for them to believe in the message of hope we brought them.

In our wanderings we were gratified to see so many flourishing cotton plantations around the villages. The islands of Epi, Paama, and Ambrim were dotted with beautiful plantations of the fleecy staple. The natives are reverting to the old planta-

Midst Volcanic Fires

tion system, which was so dear to the heart of the American negro, and they are finding it more profitable to work in their own plantations than to indenture themselves for a period of years to the white settlers. The additional money earned by the people would enable the native Church to make a serious effort in the direction of self-support.

In most places on the face of the world to-day the problem which more than all others troubles mankind is the high cost of living. But in the islands where the campaign was conducted, nature was prodigal, and dealt out to her dusky children with a bountiful hand; and such troubles had not emerged, or, at any rate, to such an extent, as to vitally effect their mode of life. Ambrim and Epi were provided with a bountiful crop of foodstuffs, and the problem of existence did not concern them. "Take ye no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on," is a commandment the native literally obeys. Indeed, the native contentment with his lot, combined with his stoical fatalism, often strikes the bustling European as more or less tragical. It is not the high cost of living that affects them, but the high cost of dying.

In one of the villages we were requested to visit a chief who was reported to be dying. On reaching his house we found the women already wailing, and concluded that we were too late. The doorway and house were crowded with mourners, and we had to force a passage to the couch of the dying man. The first glance of his face did not strike us as that of

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

a dying man. Indeed, he was distributing his worldly effects, and had vitality enough to take an interest in the passing show. But he had made up his mind to die, and he seemed to feel that it would be a great disappointment to his friends if he recovered, and they had to return the goods. We were wicked enough to suggest that he was not seriously ill, and that, with the exercise of a little will-power, he would soon be all right. But the suggestion was distasteful to him, and, from the look on the faces of his friends, it was evidently distasteful to them also. The chief knew that his friends were expecting him to die, and he recognized it was the correct thing to do. Like so many of his race, imbued with the fatalistic instincts of generations, the old man displayed a wonderful capacity for dying, and slipped away, seemingly without any provocation.

The first meeting of the Epi campaign was held at Burumba, and from the native congregation the evangelists received a hearty send off. The aim we kept before us throughout the campaign was serious and practical. Besides providing an opportunity for prayer and mutual conference, we wanted to draw as close as possible the ties of love and sympathy which unite the foreign missionary and the native Church. We felt that we had prayers we wanted to offer together and experiences we needed to share with one another. We wanted, too, to review together our life and conduct, personal and corporate, and to ask ourselves how far we were fulfilling God's will in our daily lives.

Midst Volcanic Fires

Then, again, in certain villages there was a recrudescence of heathenism. The abundant life which marked the Church of the first converts had waned, and the present generation no longer showed the same desire for a whole-hearted allegiance to the service of Christ. Through the influence of God's Spirit we hoped to restore the waning life, and to induce the people to re-dedicate themselves, body and soul, to Christ their Lord as a living sacrifice.

Then, too, in all the village churches there was a large number of people who attended services, but who had no real desire for the Worship of Christ, and were the despair of those who tried to lead them Godwards. Their great need was a sense of sin and a recognition of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. Like home workers, foreign missionaries suffer at times from depression owing to the lukewarm and irresponsive nature of the people whom they are seeking to influence, though, in the case of native converts, it is always well to remember the pit from which they were taken, and that South Sea Islanders belong to a mode of life so diverse and alien to their own.

From Burumba we proceeded to the village of Jumambele, where we found a good work in progress under the leadership of the local teacher. On the outskirts of the village was a neat, well laid-out cemetery, by the side of which the main road passes. Close to the road is a grave, over which is a slab of wood, bearing the strange device :

YOVETI, CHRISTIAN MAN.

DIED JUNE 19TH, 1916.

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

I asked Mr Weir what Yoveti had done to warrant his fellow-villagers placing this inscription over his tomb, and, on hearing the story, one felt that "Hats off" was the correct thing beside Yoveti's grave.

Yoveti was no make-believe Christian. When he left heathenism and accepted Christ as his Saviour, his whole being was laid on the altar of service. He was never weary in well-doing. The verse of Scripture which gripped his soul was the Word of Christ to His disciples, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and follow Me." That truth became regnant in his soul, and, in obedience to its imperious demand, he left home, friends, and plantation to preach the Gospel among the heathen. On hearing from Mr Weir of the great need in the island of Malekula for teachers, he volunteered for service, and was placed on the small island of Atchin, off the wild northern coast, under the direction of Dr Sandilands. From the first the natives were openly hostile to him and his work. The message of peace and goodwill he brought had no attractions for them. Indeed, they would have none of it. The sacred men regarded him with suspicion, and did their utmost to inflame public opinion against him. In face of difficulties and dangers, he remained at his post until the murder of three of his fellow-teachers made the position untenable, and Dr Sandilands deemed it expedient to withdraw Yoveti from the danger zone until the anger of the heathen subsided. In the meantime, Yoveti returned to his home on Epi, and resumed his old activities in the proclamation of

Midst Volcanic Fires

God's Word. In the midst of a life of service for the Master, he was struck down with a serious illness which ended in his death. The whole community mourned for him, and over his grave his fellow-islanders raised the memorial cross with the inscription which arrests the eye of the passing traveller :

“ YOVETI, CHRISTIAN MAN.”

Unlike most other mission fields, the work in the New Hebrides is not carried on in crowded centres where large congregations and fellowship with kindred minds give encouragement to the workers. It lies in the more difficult work of days and weeks spent in travelling to reach the comparatively few who otherwise would be left alone. To those scattered souls the Church has a mission. The inspiration which holds the itinerating evangelist is the thought of the Good Shepherd who Himself left the ninety and nine to seek the one lost sheep in the wilderness. In passing over the empty spaces of Epi we constantly came across some memorials of the warlike tribes which formerly inhabited the island. But these memorials are rapidly crumbling away. In a land where the architecture is framed in reed and bamboo no structures are likely to be permanent or long survive the passing of the inhabitants.

The road to our next meeting-place at Bullikomoli was long and tedious, and, as the greater part of it lay along the sea-beach, walking through the loose sand, under the hot sun, quite exhausted the

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

whole party. Ploughing through the sand in Revolieu Bay, Mr Weir expressed a desire for a drink of water, never dreaming that his wish could be so easily gratified. No sooner had he spoken than one of the natives flopped down on his knees and began digging in the soft sand with his fingers. He scooped out a big hole, at the bottom of which the fresh water could be seen trickling. Plucking a big leaf from one of the numerous creepers on the beach, he soon had a draught of cool, clear water. Not greater was the delight of the host of Israel when Moses struck the rock in Horeb's parched land than was ours at the sight of the sparkling water on the burning sands of Epi.

One reason why the natives, in walking, prefer the beach to the bush track is on account of the numerous spiders' webs which block the roads. On some of the roads, where there is little traffic, the spiders have time to spin extensive webs, which are as strong and as closely woven as a lady's veil. Should the unwary traveller inadvertently plunge into one of these webs, his face and hair become entangled in a mesh of delicate threads, from which he finds it difficult to extricate himself. In marching through the bush it is usual for the leader of the party to clear the track by swinging a leafy branch to and fro in front of him.

At Bullikomoli we met a splendid figure bearing the heroic name of Paul. He was not a prophet nor a prophet's son, but a vine-dresser, whose heart the Lord had touched. Bullikomoli is a small village, beautifully situated among the mountains

Midst Volcanic Fires

of Central Epi; but even in so small a community there was room for the display of virtues which call forth true manhood and character. The chief of the tribe had been an adherent of the Worship; but, after tasting the Word of God, he became a backslider, and was as big a heathen as was to be found in Ambrim. On the occasion of a village feast he wished to re-instate heathen dancing; but Paul, realizing all that such a step involved, withstood him to the face. Enraged at Paul's hostility, the chief withdrew from all Christian intercourse, and used his influence for the overthrow of Christian worship. Under the influence of threats he succeeded in persuading some to abandon school. But Paul continued faithful to the Lord. Our visit came at an opportune time, and was the means of encouragement and strength to the sorely-tried native Church. Happily, it only required a visit from their missionary to set matters right. Acting on the impulse of weak hearts, they had been led astray by the lure of the past. The call of the blood had suddenly entered their veins, and had led to a sudden outburst of heathen dancing. Shame filled their hearts, and our meetings were marked by a deep sense of contrition. The people confessed their backsliding, and we had united prayer that God would establish their hearts so that they might not be so easily shaken by the wiles of the devil.

The closing meeting was for praise and testimony, and all who cared to do so had an opportunity of making public confession of their wrong-doing and of asking the forgiveness of God and their Christian

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

brethren. There was no lack of testimonies. One of the speakers, in the apt imagery that the natives often use, counselled his brethren not to be like sleepers who, when awakened in the morning, turned over on the other side and fell asleep again. "Fresh voices," he said, "have come to waken us out of sleep, and to call us to repentance. Let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light." We left Bullikomoli with the consciousness that our meetings and interviews had not been in vain: that the seed sown would spring up and bear fruit in restored backsliders and in hearts re-established in the love of God. The endurance of such converts as Paul of Bullikomoli who, without salary or reward, suffer persecution and reproach for the sake of Christ in the daily round of life, assures us of the future of the native Church, and affords the best evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in cannibal converts.

In Epi, as in Ambrim, we found that camping in the native villages brought us into close touch with the natives. The people, too, were delighted to have the missionaries living in their midst, and went to no end of trouble in providing comfortable quarters for the entire mission party. In every village there was some Nicodemus who would approach the missionary only under cover of darkness to unburden his soul. In the quietness and directness of personal dealing we pled with them to part with the lurking heathenism which they were fondling in their hearts and which prevented them from making a whole-hearted surrender to

Midst Volcanic Fires

Jesus Christ. The people themselves recognized that the lukewarmness of the native Church was due to the reluctance of the converts to make a complete severance with heathenism.

The district around Bullikomoli in Central Epi is a land of mountain and flood. The country is broken by numerous ridges, and in the deep gorges are running streams with an abundance of cool, fresh water. Wonderful glimpses of scenery are to be had in a country so diversified with hills and glens. The glens are caverns, dark and dank, where the ferns luxuriate. From bends in the bush tracks can be seen far-stretching landscapes. But those people have no eye for the wild and picturesque; hence there are no such names as Hell's Glen and Devil's Loup. These names are reserved for people in whose blood is a strain of romance. The villages are nearly all perched on mountain-ridges, very difficult of access. Situated at a height of one thousand feet above sea-level, we found the atmosphere distinctly cooler, and there was a freedom from mosquitoes not enjoyed by the coast districts. During the nights we camped in those hill villages the cold was intense, and it was difficult to believe we were in the Tropics. Nowhere in the New Hebrides had I heard the songs of so many birds. The dawn is greeted by the music of myriads of birds. It reminded me of a summer day-break among the full-throated songsters of Scotland.

Owing to the height of these settlements, and possibly, also, to the distance from the sea, the coconut tree does not flourish as on the coastal belt.

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

Various attempts had been made to acclimatize the cocoanut to the new surroundings, but always without success. The cocoanut beverage is a luxury in these valleys, and, having no copra industry to sustain them, these mountain folks are poor. On the occasion of our visit to these hill tribes we proposed that they should make a beginning with cotton planting, as likely to furnish them with good returns for their labour. Now that Christianity has come to Epi, bearing with it the blessings of Christian civilization, the wants of the natives have correspondingly increased, and they require a source of income to meet their growing needs. Large numbers of young men leave every year for other islands to work in the plantations of white planters, in order to earn money. But that kind of emigration may be carried too far, and become detrimental to the well-being of the island. It will tend to create a more healthy state of tribal life if those inland people can have a local source of revenue, as the coast natives have in the copra industry. With his birth-right of fertile soil, the native is capable of becoming a successful farmer. To retain the land he must become such.

These mountain villages have in operation a kind of telephone system for communicating with each other. Though separated by wide and deep gullies, they "ring each other up" with a peculiar, piercing note which echoes across the valley. On our arrival at the village of Apena we found that one of our packages had gone astray. Although it had taken fully an hour to traverse the distance between the

Midst Volcanic Fires

two villages, the people of Apena at once "rang up" the good folks of Anghelia, and shouted inquiries across the valley. Failing to find the missing package, Anghelia, in turn, "rang up" the good folks of Yendu, who, too, knew nothing of the package. Then Yendu "rang up" the people of Meraji, in whose village we had spent the previous night, and in our camping-place the missing package was found. In that way we had an answer in a quarter of an hour across the country which it had taken us nearly the whole day to traverse.

During our visit to the village of Puruvenuo we had the joy and privilege of an extended interview with Taritonga, the teacher, who, for thirty-five years, has maintained a steady, consistent Christian life in the midst of constant disappointments and defeats. Taritonga was one of the first converts on the island of Epi, and, soon after his conversion, was appointed to the important station of Puruvenuo, which was at that time inhabited by a wild and warlike tribe. Many years of stress and conflict passed before he saw any success from his labours. During those years of watching and waiting, his wife and he never ceased to pray to God to turn the hearts of the people to Himself. In the midst of heathen festivals, when the days were rendered hideous with the wild shrieks of the dancers, and the long moonlight nights were given over to the celebration of the grim ceremonies connected with heathenism, the faithful couple would retire to the seclusion of their hut, to intercede with God on behalf of their wild and benighted brethren.

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

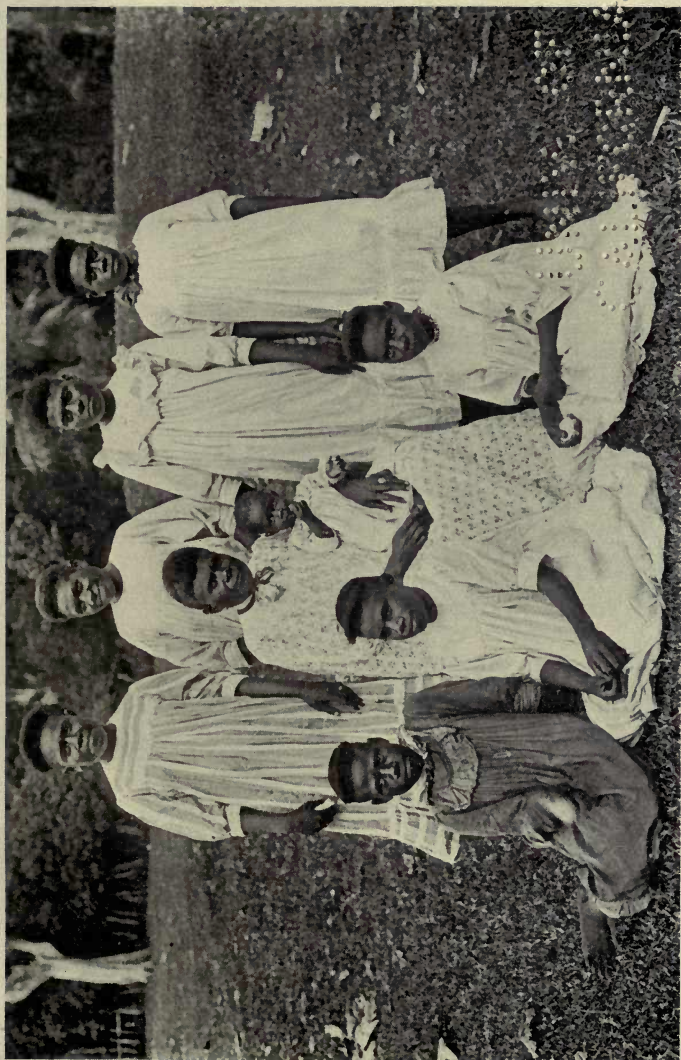
The years of praying and sowing were not in vain. The hearts of the people at length turned to God, and the harvest that Taritonga was privileged to garner afforded abundant proof that even among the cannibal tribes of Epi the ground was not barren, and that the good seed of the Kingdom might be trusted to spring up and bear fruit. Many people were brought into the Kingdom through his instrumentality, some of whom are still alive and serving God by lives of devotion. Puruvenuo is only a distant outpost in the world's great mission field. Its people are of little or no importance in the current of events. But within its borders things have happened which will stand for eternity, if the world is really God's and those people His.

But the years have brought many changes, and Taritonga's heart is saddened with the reflection that the rising generation is not following in the footsteps of its fathers, but is indifferent to spiritual truth and callous about the need of the heathen in other islands. Those things grieve his zealous and single-minded soul. Amid the prevailing indifference and unbelief, Taritonga remains a living force, standing erect and foursquare, rebuking the sins of the people, and exhorting them, as he did their fathers, to trust in God. The aged hero still continues his old custom of bearing the souls of the people in prayer to God, and oftentimes he will gather the faithful ones of the scattered community into his dwelling-house to intercede for the careless and indifferent and far wandering. Throughout his long life Taritonga has indeed fought a good

Midst Volcanic Fires

fight, has kept the faith; and one day, God, the righteous Judge, will award him the crown.

Before leaving the village there was an amusing marriage scene which threw an illuminating side-light on the native treatment of womankind. Without consulting his daughter, the father arranged her marriage with an eager suitor from a distance, whom she had never seen. Being assured that the bridegroom was a suitable young man, she gave her consent, and, in company with a number of village maidens, travelled to Puruvenuo, where the marriage was to be celebrated. The bridal party was the first to arrive, and, entering the church, took seats to await the arrival of the bridegroom and his party. Mr Weir was standing in the village compound when they arrived, and, picking out the shy and shame-faced bridegroom, led him up the aisle to a seat in the front of the church. It was evident to all that the flower of youth had faded from his cheeks, though he had been at considerable pains to conceal his age by the aid of a close shave and a well-cropped head. The waiting bride noticed this too, and did not take long to determine her course of action. She sprang to her feet and bolted. Her friends stared at each other in astonishment; and at last, when it dawned upon them that the bride had run away, some of them followed in pursuit. The bride had taken to the bush, but the young men had no difficulty in tracking her. In about half an hour she was led back to the church, and, on Mr Weir asking the reason for her conduct, she returned the sharp and firm retort :



CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF EPI AND PAAMA.



Trials and Triumphs in Epi

“ I am not going to marry an old man ! ”

“ Then why have you come here if you do not want to marry him ? ”

“ I never saw the man before, and my father told me he was a young man,” was the girl’s quick reply.

Mr Weir addressed the father, and asked him why he had deceived his daughter, and, in reply, the father said that he, too, had been deceived, as he had arranged with the chief of Yendu for a young man. Needless to say, the girl won the day, though one could not but feel sorry for the disappointed bridegroom. However, it will be a lesson to him and his friends, and in his next marriage venture he will be more likely to consult the wishes of the bride.

In one of the adjoining villages we found a young man, a native of Paama, suffering from an abscess in the leg. The average native is extraordinarily patient in suffering ; but I do not remember ever before meeting any native who exhibited such a degree of long-suffering patience. Day after day he remained in the same stolid, impassive position, without showing any signs of restlessness. On urging him to rouse himself and be a man, he expressed a wish to go to the doctor at Vila Hospital. But the monthly steamer had left on the previous day, and, on my remonstrating with him for not availing himself of the opportunity, he submissively said, “ Oh ! in another moon the steamer will be back again, and I shall go then ! ” Another month of suffering did not seem to have any terrors for him. To the European, impatient of pain, the attitude

Midst Volcanic Fires

of the native in presence of suffering is almost unintelligible.

At Livo, one of the villages in the Ngala district of Epi, the evangelistic deputation had a great welcome, and we experienced a time of rich blessing. Billy Nika, the teacher, was full of fire and enthusiasm, and the contagion of his spirit infected the people—another illustration of the far-reaching effect of personal influence. Perhaps we felt the reception doubly welcome after the snub we received the day before at the village of Lokopui, where the people were all under the influence of a wicked chief. Although the chief and people knew the time of our arrival, they disappeared into the bush, and allowed us to enter a deserted village. The conch shell of the village was blown, but there was no response, and, after a long delay, we had to leave the village without a meeting. Lokopui was the only place in the three islands where we were unable to convene a meeting of the people. After the rebuff, we entered Livo with a certain feeling of mistrust; but Billy and his warm-hearted friends soon revived our faith, and the story of his conversion gave us confidence to believe that even the far-wandering chief of Lokopui might still be reclaimed for Jesus.

Eighteen months before, Billy, like all the people of Livo, was a heathen: he was, indeed, a leader in heathenism, and fond of the dance. At that time Mr Weir held a Gospel service in the village square, and the word spoken arrested Billy, and made him think about God. He tried to put away the arresting message, but could not. In a vision of the night

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

the words haunted him, and, awakening out of sleep, he determined to forsake heathenism and follow Jesus. Next day he set out for the mission station, and, after some months of teaching and training, Billy applied for baptism, and was received into the Church. Returning to Livo, he opened a school, and began Gospel services, and is now surrounded by a young and hopeful community. Many of the converts are devoted followers of the Lord Jesus, and in lives of purity and self-sacrifice adorn the doctrine of Christ. Their loyalty, under the most trying conditions, and sometimes in the face of bitter persecution, shows the reality of the change which has taken place in their lives. At Livo we found a spiritual atmosphere for the evangelistic meetings, and there was freedom and scope for the operations of God's Spirit. The services of the campaign proved a time of refreshing to all who took part in them; and their hallowed influence will, we trust, have an abiding effect upon Billy and his friends, and make them still more zealous and consecrated in the work of the Lord.

Many days had passed since the Lokopui incident, and we had well-nigh forgotten about the wicked chief and the deserted village. But the Spirit of God was working in their hearts. They saw and heard of the showers of blessing falling on the other villages of Epi, and they realized that Lokopui was being left out. At the close of the forenoon meeting in the village of Epiiai, whom should we see waiting outside but the chief and people of Lokopui. Mr Weir was the first to speak, and, in tones of rebuke,

Midst Volcanic Fires

blamed the chief as the cause of the backsliding of the villagers. But the chief had not come to argue : he was penitent, and had come with his people to confess their misdeeds. Being known throughout the district as a lawless and unscrupulous man, an interested crowd soon gathered round to hear his speech. Like a penitent before a father confessor, he unbosomed his soul, and the confession of his sins seemed to remove a load from his spirits.

The chief and people had, indeed, a black list to their credit ; but it was very noticeable that the backsliding began with a revival of heathen dancing. So inseparably linked is island dancing with the grosser forms of heathenism that it has always been regarded by our mission as harmful and prejudicial to the welfare of the native Church. Young converts, on being admitted to Church fellowship, were invariably instructed to sever their connection with heathen dancing so as to make the cleavage with heathenism as distinct as possible. On the other hand, the Melanesian mission adopted a less puritan standard, and, while not encouraging, did not seek to repress the practice among the members of its communion. In the early days of our mission, its more exacting standard was not only never questioned, but loyally observed by the converts. Under the expulsive power of a new affection, it was no hardship for them to abandon the heathen dance and all other questionable amusements of heathenism. Zealous and enthusiastic, they placed the concerns of the soul and the welfare of the Church above all else. But the glow of first love had

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

departed. The majority of the converts were no longer living on the mountain tops; and some of them, like the people of Lokopui, had wandered very far from the fold. Carelessness and indifference had usurped the place of earnestness and devotion, and chief and people were only too willing to listen to the syren voices luring them back to their old sinful life. There are no half measures with natives, and when once the call of the blood enters their souls they have to go the full length.

We assured the chief and people of Lokopui of a welcome back to the fold if they would but seek the Lord with their whole heart; and that the sole purpose of our evangelistic campaign throughout Epi was to reclaim any who, like themselves, had strayed from the Good Shepherd. But they were weary of wandering in the wilderness, and, like the prodigal, they longed for a return to the safety and fellowship of the Father's home. Chastened and subdued, the chief left the village of Epiai a happier man; and we afterwards learned that the resolves which he and his people made in prayer to God marked the beginning of a new life for the village of Lokopui.

While conducting the evangelistic campaign in north Epi, the small island of Lamanu formed our headquarters. Situated about two miles from the mainland, it formed a central and convenient place for a base of operations.

After the morning service, in company with the islanders, we crossed to the inland tribes of Epi. Every morning, in a fleet of canoes, the entire popu-

Midst Volcanic Fires

lation of the island can be seen paddling its way across the channel. The work and plantations of the people lie on the mainland, and during the day Lamanu is a deserted island. Epi is the workshop, and Lamanu the sleeping-quarters. Owing to the unhealthy nature of the mainland, and the abundance of mosquitoes, the natives prefer to have their homes on the small but healthy island.

Encircling Lamanu is an extensive reef which, at low water, is quite bare. This reef controls all the movements of the people, and is the only clock they consult. To sleep too long and lose the morning tide means being hung up for the rest of the day. For the first two hours after daybreak the Lamanu beach presents a busy and animated appearance. Every man has a canoe, and during these hours scores of canoes leave the island for the mainland. In the evening the canoes return, laden with the produce of the plantations. Coming home, the natives derive the advantage of the trade winds, and all the canoes have the sails set. In the bright sunlight it is a beautiful sight to watch the canoes, with their white wings, dotted all over the channel.

There are three villages in the island; in one, the seat of the Gnalivasero tribe, there is still a large admixture of heathen people. Our first introduction to this village took place soon after our arrival in the islands, when we spent a week with Rev. Mr and Mrs Smaill, and contained an element of adventure which appealed to strangers unversed in island ways. The village was situated on a hill immediately behind the mission station, and, during

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

our visit, a heathen carnival was celebrated, when a series of dances and elaborate sing-sings were held. One dark night, when the uproar was more hideous than usual, Mr Smaill wondered what scheme he could devise to put an end to the revelry. Arming himself with a bull's-eye lantern, he set off to climb the hill by an unfrequented path, and endeavoured to get amongst the dancers unobserved. In the darkness, and with the whole population engaged in the riotous revelry of the carnival, he had no difficulty in reaching the outskirts of the dancing ground without attracting notice. For a few minutes he watched the wild orgy of heathenism, made even wilder by a supply of contraband gin they had obtained, and then, at a favourable moment, turned on the bull's eye, and made a leap into the circle of dancers. Terror-stricken, they fled in every direction, thinking that one of the evil spirits had come amongst them. The revelry was brought to an abrupt ending, and a considerable time passed before the missionary was troubled with another sing-sing.

For many years the heathen of Gnalivasero held out against all the efforts of missionary and teacher to win them for the truth. Heathenism kept them in its strange spell. Not only did they refuse to have anything to do with the Gospel, but they maintained an active opposition against its further progress. At length, however, the Worship gained an ascendancy over the younger section of the community; but the old men were joined to their idols, and resisted all the advances of the Christian

Midst Volcanic Fires

natives. During our tour amongst them there was not the widespread spirit of inquiry that we should have liked; but we knew that God was working. Excellent congregations turned out to the meetings, and on Sundays the church was quite full.

In Epi the distances between the tribes are greater than in Ambrim, and visitation consequently entailed a great amount of walking. The villages on the north side are perched on hills, with steep and almost inaccessible tracks leading to them. On the road leading to Mopuna we met, near the outskirts, the chief of the inland village of Visina. With a large number of his tribesmen he was on his way to a village where they had been invited to a marriage feast. The chief appeared in the best of health, and it was arranged that we should visit Visina on the following Sunday for the evangelistic meetings. After a short conversation we parted, and nothing further was heard of him until we arrived at his village for the services.

We were greatly surprised to see such a large crowd of people, the majority of whom were drawn from other tribes. Without a word being spoken, we were led to the village club-house, where a body was laid out for burial. We were astounded to learn that it was the body of the chief from whom we had parted a few days before.

The custom of Epi forbids the burial of a chief until a successor is appointed. The new chief touches the feet of the deceased in the sight of all the people, and by this act the function of chieftaincy is transmitted through successive generations. On

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

our arrival the people were engaged in the selection of a successor, and, strange to say, natives of the surrounding tribes had as much to do with the appointment as the people of the village themselves. A neighbouring chief acted as master of ceremonies in obtaining the popular vote.

As soon as the selection was made and ratified, the religious service, which was also a burial service, began; and, as the village church was too small, the service was held around the open grave. In such solemn circumstances all the people attended, and gave earnest heed to the message of the preachers, leading, in some instances, to better lives and a fuller consecration. Mr Weir gave a very impressive and searching address on "Sin." With a wealth of illustration which appealed to the native mind, he pressed home the truth of forgiveness through Jesus Christ; and, from the close attention the address received, we knew that it "got home" to the hearts of the people. Here, as everywhere else, we pressed for open decision; urging those, who believed in their hearts, but shrank from confessing, to make a public acknowledgment, by baptism, of their allegiance to Christ.

At our closing meeting in this village, one of the teachers gave a very effective and original address on "Fishers of Men." Of course, in dealing with such a topic, a native teacher was in his element, and had at his command illustrations which appealed to all his hearers. "In catching fish," he said, "we use all sorts of means: the hook, the net, the spear, and dynamite: if one fails, we try another.

Midst Volcanic Fires

It is the same with catching men for the Kingdom of God. If singing will not attract, use preaching; if preaching does not act, use kindness and love; if that will not do, then throw a charge of dynamite: disturb the waters by preaching judgment upon all that do evil." The point of his sermon was that, in order to win souls for the Kingdom of God, preachers must be crafty, like the men who catch fish.

In our journeys among the primitive natives we had ever before us, as our motto, the example of our Lord: "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." If only we could have healed the sick with the word of power, which was the prerogative of the early disciples, we should have conferred an untold boon upon the natives of Epi. But with the limited means at our disposal, and with our still more limited medical knowledge, we did what we could to minister to their needs, content to know that we had a place in such a succession. In Epi there was the same needy multitude, suffering in mind as well as in body, as thronged round our Lord in Galilee; and it was a great joy to the missionaries to relieve, and in some instances to heal, their sicknesses.

As in Ambrim and Paama, the evangelistic campaign was brought to an end in Epi with the celebration of the Communion. At the baptismal service which preceded the Communion, the church was filled with a reverent congregation, the simplicity

Trials and Triumphs in Epi

and fervour of whose worship was inspiring to behold. The men and women who stood up to pledge their faith in Christ had borne the scrutiny of critical and watchful eyes, and were living proofs of the fitness of the Gospel to subdue and remould the savage heart.

No missionary will deny that there is no justification for the jibes so freely flung at native converts. In the island churches, as in the churches of other lands, there are all sorts of Christians, but, taking them as a whole, they are very far from being a disgrace to the religion they profess. Many of them are men and women of really fine character, who adorn the doctrine of Christ, and are prepared to make sacrifices for His cause.

CHAPTER X

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

IN the days in which we live a great deal is heard about Imperialism. The air is full of it; and statesmen are never tired of pointing to the battlefields of France and Flanders, where Briton and Colonial fought side by side the battles of the Empire, as the great example of Imperialism. There is another kind of Imperialism not so often mentioned, and which, in the long-run, must do more for the good of the Empire than all the armies that ever fought for it, and that is Christian Imperialism. Possibly, the New Hebrides Islands present the best example of its working. There we find the churches of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and, until recently, of Canada, standing side by side in the fight against the forces of evil.

One of the most solemn meetings of the Epi campaign was held at the village of Nikaura, which, in the early days of the mission, formed the headquarters of the first missionaries of the district, the Rev. Thomas and Mrs Smaill of the New Zealand Church. Twenty-two years ago, when Mrs Frater and I first arrived in the islands, we spent a fortnight with the Smaills at Nikaura, and the remembrance

Sunshine and Shadow

of that visit will always remain a hallowed fragrance. At that time Nikaura was a busy centre to which flocked the natives from the surrounding country for the light and healing which streamed from the mission station. But, after Mr Smaill's death, the district was visited with successive epidemics, which took a heavy toll of the natives, and Nikaura is now only a shadow of its former self. The sleepy and diminutive village of to-day is in striking contrast to the busy, thriving community of former years. I recognized a few old faces, and we rejoiced to notice the love and affection with which they cherished the memory of their old missionaries. They still remembered Mr Smaill's untiring efforts to lead them to Christ, and after his death they felt as if the light of life had gone from them. His grave on Nikaura Hill lies between two beautiful trees—a leafy fern tree and a tall palm, symbols of shade and righteousness; a fitting resting-place for such a good and true man of God. Rev. Thomas Smaill was a missionary of more than usual stature, and his work was worthy of a permanent memorial. It is to be regretted that the New Zealand Church has not published, in book form, a record of his thrilling and successful work on north Epi. Such a history would have been a source of inspiration to young men and women all over the world, and an assurance to God's praying people that their faith had been honoured and their prayers answered by the conversion of this little island to God.

At the time of Mr Smaill's death, a religious revival and awakening was in progress among the people of

Midst Volcanic Fires

Epi, and, from all over the district, men and women, in distress about their soul's welfare, were visiting him to inquire how they might find the way of peace. No special meetings were held and no attempt was made to arouse interest by artificial means. At the usual Sunday and week-day services, certainly, special emphasis was laid on the necessity of the native Church waiting upon God in prayer to obtain the baptism from on High and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; but, nevertheless, the revival and quickening came largely in answer to private prayer and the solicitations of personal dealing. In the quietness and sanctity of his home, men and women unbosomed their souls and revealed the yearning of the human heart, even when beating under a dark skin, for a closer and more intimate fellowship with God. When the movement began, Mr Smaill was effecting some repairs to the mission buildings; but the mending of tanks and the constructing of houses had to be broken off for the more serious and difficult work of mending broken lives. His days were fully given up to personal dealings with distressed souls, and, in the pure and hallowed atmosphere of prayer, he endeavoured to lead them into a deeper communion with God and a fuller assurance of His Spirit, the attainment of which Mr Smaill regarded as the heritage of all God's people. From early morning till late at night the work continued until there came to be a travail of souls for divine fellowship. In a letter I had from him—the last he ever wrote—he expressed the joy and gladness his own soul was receiving from the

Sunshine and Shadow

times of refreshing that were being sent from the presence of the Lord.

When the revival spirit was at its height, a message came to him, late one evening, that a woman in one of the inland villages had fallen from a high tree and sustained severe internal injuries. The night was wild and stormy, the wind blowing with hurricane force; but without a moment's hesitation he prepared for the long and arduous journey to the village of Rhengi. Wrapping together a few bandages and medicines, he set out into the darkness, and, after a fierce struggle with the elements, fording swollen streams and stumbling over fallen branches of trees, he arrived in the middle of the night, wet and exhausted, at the village of the injured woman. After attending to her injuries, he lay down in the hut with his damp clothes, to await the light of the morning. When morning dawned, he was in the grip of malarial fever; and, in spite of his strong frame and robust constitution, he experienced the greatest difficulty in reaching his home at Nikaura. For a few days he lay with the ordinary type of malaria, and then blackwater fever set in. He quickly realized the seriousness of the situation, and at once gave instructions for a native crew to cross over to Paama in the whale-boat, and inform me. Mrs Frater and I set off at once, but encountered a head wind and sea, and had great difficulty in reaching Nikaura at all. A journey which could usually be accomplished in from three to four hours occupied nine; and, as the little whale-boat touched the coral strand of Nikaura, the soul of God's servant took its

Midst Volcanic Fires

flight to the shore of eternal day. The wife of a teacher met us on the beach, and, in the laconic manner of the natives when under the influence of suppressed feeling, said, *Missi, mesai boulu* (the missionary was seriously ill). Leaving Mrs Frater, I hurried up the hill, and on entering the mission house I found the poor wife bending over the lifeless tenement. I realized then that God, in His Fatherly goodness and providence, had sent us, not to minister to Mr Smail, but to sustain and comfort the bereaved and sorrow-stricken widow. Thomas Smail needed no human help. His place in the heavenly throng was waiting for him, and at God's summons he had gone to fill it.

Only fourteen years before, Mr Smail had arrived in the New Hebrides, in the full vigour and enthusiasm of youth, to enlist in a service which, to him, was the greatest adventure in life. Amongst the glories of the past century none presented to him an aspect of higher moral grandeur than the opening up of the mission field and the winning of the heathen world to God. In obedience to the dictates of his Divine ideal, he and his like-minded wife began, in simple faith, with means conspicuously inadequate, the gigantic task of undermining heathenism on the island of Epi and replacing it by Christianity. With the training of a godly home, with a brilliant university career, with the experience of a home-mission worker in the slums of Edinburgh and the back-blocks of New Zealand, he brought to his work the equipment of mind and body essential to success in the foreign field. His special gifts were manifest

Sunshine and Shadow

from the outset. He belonged to that select order of men in whom the pioneering instinct shone out conspicuously—leal-hearted, daring, sympathetic, a real lover of God and men, and with a singular capacity for getting the best out of an inferior race.

At the outset of his missionary career he gave himself to the study and mastery of the native language, and acquired a wonderful fluency in its use. His acquaintance with the thought and customs of the natives gained for him a position of great influence which he turned to good account in his intercourse with the people. He recognized their point of view, and could enter into their prejudices. Strong in the denunciation of cruelty and of the exploitation of the natives, he stood as a staunch advocate of native rights against the encroachment of Europeans. Added to these gifts were an affectionate and loving heart, a devout and humble Christian spirit. He was a man, with all the bigness and breeziness, the winsomeness and tenderness, the thoughtfulness and playfulness, of true manhood.

Few missionary biographies afford a more striking example of the power of the Gospel among native races than is presented in the simple contrast of the opening and closing scenes of Mr Smaill's work on Epi. Professor Henry Drummond was travelling through the New Hebrides group of islands at the time of Mr Smaill's settlement at Nikaura, and, as the two men had met and worked together in evangelistic work among the students of Edinburgh, it was a great joy to Drummond to be present at

Midst Volcanic Fires

what he called "Smaill's induction." He made the following notes: "An awful crowd of savages surrounded us: all were naked, and carried muskets, cocked. Notorious district: many murders and cannibal feasts on this coast."

The closing scenes, fourteen years later, revealed a very different picture. The end had come so suddenly and so unexpectedly that very few knew anything else than that Mr Smaill was ill with malarial fever—an occurrence so common in the islands that as little attention was paid to it as would be paid elsewhere to a bad headache. But news is not long in travelling among the natives. From village to village the sad tidings were carried. By next morning all the people from the surrounding district had arrived. Some had been travelling all night. Even from the far end of Epi they came, all anxious to pay their last tribute of affection and honour to the memory of one who had been to most of them a father in God. The natives were allowed a last look at their beloved missionary, and, as they filed past the coffin, even the roughest and strongest amongst them broke down and gave vent to their grief in violent and heart-felt sobs.

The funeral, on the following day, was a solemn and impressive sight, but also triumphant. The coffin was piled high with the flowers of the forest; and, as the native teachers lowered the body into the grave, I looked around on the sea of sad, sad faces, and could not but feel that Mr Smaill's life had indeed been crowned with a rich and glorious blessing. Multitudes of those who were standing around could

Sunshine and Shadow

look beyond the grave to a home prepared for those who love the Saviour and to a sure and certain hope of a glorious immortality.

To appreciate the significance of the change wrought by the Gospel in Epi, one has only to learn of the state of fear and terror in which the people passed their lives before the introduction of Christianity. Many years before Mr Smaill's settlement at Nikaura, an outrage was perpetrated by the natives of north Epi, which, for sheer brutality and treachery, eclipses the general run of island massacres.

A company of some twenty natives set sail in two canoes from the south end of Epi to visit their friends in the north who lived on the small island of Lamanu, where, many years afterwards, Mr Smaill opened a mission station and carried on a very successful work. The visitors were welcomed with the greatest friendliness, and for a whole week were entertained with the open-handed generosity which is so characteristic a trait of intertribal hospitality. The week was spent in a round of feasting and joviality, and on the day of their departure the guests were loaded with a varied assortment of gifts. The two canoes left the beach with every indication of the closest intimacy and friendliness existing between the two tribes.

A choppy sea was breaking on the coral reef which surrounds the little island, and, in attempting to ride the breakers, both canoes were swamped, and their occupants thrown into the sea. In the boiling surf the natives could not right their canoes, and the

Midst Volcanic Fires

whole party was obliged to swim ashore. Their helpless plight did not awaken any feeling of pity in the breasts of their friends ashore. On the contrary, on seeing their defenceless condition they prepared to attack them. It is an unwritten convention among savages that shipwrecked people are fair game for the tribes into whose hands they fall. In attacking their friends, the Lamanu natives simply thought they were playing the rules of the game. Seized by a sudden frenzy for blood, the local cannibals ran for their tomahawks and clubbed their visitors as they attempted to swim ashore. Not a single native reached the beach. Men, women, and children alike were killed, and their bodies carried inland to prolong, through another week, the orgy of feasting.

The feelings are harrowed at the narration of such a tale, and the reader may well wonder if true, believing Christians could be turned out of such raw, ugly material. But the Gospel makes big changes, and the Epi of to-day is as different from the Epi of bygone days as it is possible to be. The preaching and teaching of the Word of God has completely transformed the island, and, in place of the grim, untamed savage, with waving plume and painted body, we now have communities where the peace of God holds sway. Life and property are as safe, possibly safer, than in any part of the Homeland. Mr Weir and I spent two weeks among the people of north Epi, the district where Mr and Mrs Smaill laboured so long, and we shall not readily forget the delightful time we experienced there. Indeed, the

Sunshine and Shadow

Nikaura visit will always remain one of the happiest and most wistful memories of the campaign.

Mr and Mrs Smaill showed an eye for the beautiful in the selection of Nikaura as a site for a mission station. From the verandah of the mission house is obtained one of the most beautiful and expansive views to be found in the islands. Situated at an altitude of 500 feet above sea-level, a spiral pathway winds upwards from the beach through a cocoanut grove to the house on the hill. On emerging from the shade of the cocoanuts into the open space around the station, the eye is alternately bewildered and enraptured with the extent and variety of the panoramic view of mountain and sea. In the foreground are the island of Paama and the lofty cone of Lopevi volcano—gems set in a sparkling sphere of sea. The colour of the water in sunlight and shade, the marvellous combination of blue, purple, and green constantly changing and interchanging, arrests the eye and dazzles the imagination. On either side of the station is a long stretch of coast-line, fringed with a barrier reef of coral, against which the big rollers of the Pacific are constantly breaking in clouds of snow-white foam. The whole scene forms a picture one can never forget.

But a grander sight by far is the genuine religious life of the people. One could not live amongst them, even for the shortest time, without feeling what a vital thing their religion is. The presence of Christ has acted as a strong ferment, and has changed a savage and cannibal people into a God-fearing community. The Church—which is co-extensive

Midst Volcanic Fires

with the entire population—is making an earnest and self-sacrificing effort to strengthen and consolidate the work which God has entrusted to it. There was plenty of fun and movement in their tribal life; but, withal, there was evident the silent leavening of the tribal life with Christian thought and ideals.

And that which produced this amazing metamorphosis was the Word of God. Apart from divine revelation there is no such thing as conversion. The good seed of the Kingdom may remain a long time in the soil, but its life-giving power is at work. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, whether he be civilized or heathen.

Malarial fever is the bane of life on Epi, and, being no respecter of persons, attacks the white and native population alike. By undermining the general health, it lays the system open to the attack of every epidemic that visits the islands, and so has given Epi the unenviable reputation of being the most unhealthy island in the group. During the evangelistic tour, Mr Weir and I were constantly administering quinine to malarial patients, while in Paama and Ambrim natives were comparatively free from the infection. Owing to the porous nature of the volcanic soil on these two islands, there are no pools of water where the mosquitoes—which produce infection—can breed. Even the heaviest rains run through the loose soil like a sieve, leaving scarcely a trace behind. Provided only reasonable care be taken with the house tanks, and if empty tins

Sunshine and Shadow

and other receptacles where water can gather be not allowed to lie about, the mosquitoes can find no breeding-places. To the absence of mosquitoes is due the comparative freedom from malaria which Paama and Ambrim enjoy.

The old idea was that malaria was due to a poisonous exhalation from the ground or to a miasma from the damp soil. The doors and windows of the mission houses were closed and barred at sunset against the insidious miasma, and no one ventured out of doors until the next morning's sun had cleared the atmosphere. A malarial patient was supposed to have contracted the disease either through the inhalation of foul air or through the drinking of infected water. Hence the name "malaria," which means bad air. But within recent years, owing largely to the researches of British doctors, it has become universally recognized that the malarial germ is conveyed from one human being to another by the bite of the anopheles mosquito.

The anopheles lays its eggs in stagnant water. Any receptacles about a station which will catch water become so many breeding-places for the mosquito. The anopheles sleeps by day, and from sunset to sunrise "she" flies about seeking whom she may devour. I say "she," because the male is a harmless vegetarian; but the female is a carnivorous insect, and carries the infected blood from one victim to another. "Her ladyship" is easily recognized by the impudent way in which she tilts her body when she alights upon her prey. It will thus be recognized how, in the malarial districts of the

Midst Volcanic Fires

New Hebrides, a mosquito-net during sleeping hours is a dire necessity to escape the attentions of this troublesome little pest.

During his ten years of residence on Epi, the Rev. Mr Weir suffered constantly from fever. Before the last illness his health had been undermined by successive attacks of acute malaria; and when at last he was laid prostrate with the scourge of blackwater fever—the same disease which carried away his predecessor, the Rev. Mr Smaill—his constitution had not the stamina to fight the disease. At the first onset of the trouble he was taken by motor-launch to Vila Hospital, where he had the benefit of all that medical skill and devotion could do. For a time it looked as if he were going to pull through, but on the third day a change for the worse set in and he gradually sank. By his death the New Hebrides mission lost a consecrated worker and the natives a true friend.

The Rev. J. B. Weir entered upon his life work in the New Hebrides in April 1909, and, during his ten years of service, succeeded in leaving the impress of his character upon the native Church. Endowed by God with the natural gifts and spiritual graces essential to the work of the foreign missionary, his life was marked by thoughtfulness, self-denial, and compassion for the souls of men. He had a high conception of duty, and no obstacles made him swerve from what he considered the straight path. Dogged, persevering, and earnest, he crowded into life's little day a full toll of true, whole-hearted service for the Master.

Sunshine and Shadow

No one who came into touch with Mr Weir could fail to notice his entire consecration to Christ. To him was given serene and unquestioning faith. He was a victor in life's battle, and he went down into the valley of the shadow with the song of the shepherd in his heart, "I will fear no evil." In a gleam of consciousness before death, the doctor asked him if he had any message for his wife, and the message was characteristic of the man, "Love God, fear God, serve God, full consecration, absolute self-surrender"; and the brave heart passed into the presence of his God.

In the island of Epi his name will be held in faithful and affectionate remembrance by the Christian Church. His devoted ministry gained for him a place in the hearts of the people, and the wide esteem in which he was held was shown by the attendance at his funeral. The British Commissioner was present, and with him the entire British community of Vila. As soon as the news of his death reached Epi, the traders and planters opened a subscription for the education of his three young children, and £200 was raised. The French, as well as the British planters, subscribed to the memory of the fallen missionary.

Dr Hoggarth and Rev. E. Raff jointly conducted the service at the graveside, and laid him to rest in the quiet little graveyard on Fila island, in close proximity to the native church, and with the murmur of the waves on the coral strand chanting a tireless lullaby. "It is not customary," Dr Hoggarth said, "in our service, to deliver an address at the graveside;

Midst Volcanic Fires

but I feel that we cannot let the earth close over our deceased friend without a brief expression of the love and honour inspired by him in the hearts of all his friends.

“He faced death squarely with heroic calmness. The valley of the shadow had no terror for him. With a strong, calm faith he committed himself to his Master’s will, saying, ‘Where’er He leads, I’ll follow.’ In watching the passing of that noble soul I saw, as never before, the sting taken out of death. I actually witnessed victory wrenched from the grave, and death swallowed up in victory. ‘The day is breaking,’ he exclaimed, as he rallied before death. Daybreak, indeed, for him then, and now full noontide in God’s Eternal City.”

Owing to the difficulty of securing a successor to carry on the work after Mr Weir’s death, the Rev. R. M. Fraser, a former missionary of Epi, who had retired fifteen years previously, volunteered to return to his old field of labour, and, within a year after Mr Weir’s decease, he was again at work in the New Hebrides. The natives of Epi were greatly touched with the large-hearted generosity of their old missionary, undertaking, at seventy years of age, to brave the risks of an unhealthy climate in order that he might again minister to them in spiritual things. During the months of the cool season he enjoyed good health, and was able, with the help of his native assistants, to carry on the work of the station in a thorough and systematic way. But the trying climate of the hot season returned all too soon, and the excessive heat, combined with the

Sunshine and Shadow

extreme humidity of the atmosphere, soon produced the conditions favourable to the spread of malarial fever. Mr Fraser had several attacks of low fever, which yielded to quinine treatment, and it seemed as if he would be able to throw off the infection; but blackwater fever set in. Through the kindness of a neighbouring trader he was conveyed by motor-launch to Vila Hospital, where he had the skilled attention of Dr Davies and his staff of devoted nurses. But he gradually sank, and passed away only six months after his arrival in the islands. Like a sheaf of golden grain, ready to be garnered, Mr Fraser, laden with years and honours, passed into the great Harvest Home of the Father.

During his short period of service the native converts rallied round him, and his labours were accompanied with much of the Divine blessing. He succeeded in winning back to the fold many who had become careless and indifferent, and in restoring backsliders to their first love. He regarded it as the main object of his mission to impress upon the native Church its duty to undertake a greater responsibility for the maintenance of God's work, and so become a self-supporting Church of Jesus Christ. Already his efforts are bearing fruit. Mr Fraser did a great work for God among the people of Epi, and his name will long be held in affectionate remembrance. His self-sacrificing death is a challenge to the youth of the Church of Christ to take up the work and keep burning the torch of truth which he and his predecessors had lit.

The island of Erromanga is associated with the

Midst Volcanic Fires

deaths of five missionaries who fell as martyrs for the sake of the Gospel. The island of Epi has likewise its martyrs, and henceforth it will be associated with the no less tragic deaths of the three devoted men who have fallen as victims to the scourge of blackwater fever.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUMOROUS SIDE OF MISSION WORK

THE reader will be better able to appreciate the humour of the islands if I begin this chapter by setting forth a few characteristics of the native race.

Long and intimate acquaintance with the natives of the New Hebrides deepens the conviction of the striking difference between the white and black races. Between the western—scientific and analytic—and the eastern—superstitious and credulous—there is a great gulf fixed, and it is difficult for the European to understand and appreciate native psychology. One cannot argue with people who believe in magic. “Thinking black” is a very real thing. If Europeans do a certain thing in one way it is tolerably certain that natives will do it in exactly the opposite. It may come to the same thing in the long-run, but the *modus operandi* is generally inverted. Natives look at most things from quite a different standpoint from Europeans, and they are complacent enough to believe that it is the white man’s world that is topsy-turvy. Even in regard to the mental and moral characteristics of the two races, the same contrasts are noticeable. Accuracy is abhorrent to the native mind, and he speaks the truth by accident. In endeavouring to elicit a plain

Midst Volcanic Fires

statement of fact from the ordinary native he will not trouble to state the precise truth until he gets an inkling that the truth is acceptable. In contrast to the European, who is, by nature, sceptical, and desirous of proof before accepting any statement, the native is eminently confiding and unsceptical. He readily becomes the dupe of any adventurer or man of fortune who crosses his path. It is this trait in his character which makes the native such an easy prey to the unscrupulous recruiter. The most absurd story he will accept as true without question ; indeed, the more improbable and fantastic the story, the greater the likelihood of it obtaining credence. Not once or twice, but scores of times, the natives have been imposed on by the specious yarns of the professional recruiter ; but that does not make him suspicious of the next man who comes along with the same fairy-tale of big wages, easy work, and high living.

Mission work among the simple and primitive natives lends itself to very grotesque and amusing situations, and these were not wanting to relieve the labours of the sober and serious-minded missionaries, even in the midst of an evangelistic campaign. Sometimes incidents occurred which reminded us of the Acts of the Apostles, at other times of a comic opera.

In some churches, especially at remote out-stations, the taking of the "collection" always affords considerable amusement to a visitor from abroad. Indeed, after twenty-two years' experience of island ways, I do not seem to be quite seasoned

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

to the native drollery which reveals itself, in manifold ways, at "collection time," and still find myself indulging in a quiet giggle at their casual ways. In contributing his mite towards Church or benevolent funds, the native displays much more of the Pharisee than of the publican. His heritage from the past renders it very difficult for him to practise generosity. He gives nothing away unless he has a prospect of something in return. The native word for collection is *sonimani*, and the South Sea Islander who coined it must have been a wag. It literally means "to throw away money." Only by education and practice do the natives acquire the art, and it is a great testimony to the presence of the Spirit of God in their lives that they give so freely and so liberally for the support of Christian work.

When the collection is announced the native worshipper never dreams of having his offering in readiness. The money may be in the pocket, or tied up in a handkerchief, or hidden in the folds of his bushy hair. Not until the elder appears before him with the collection-plate does the native think of searching for his offering. Should the money be in a handkerchief, half a dozen knots have to be untied to get at the treasure. The worshipper seems to take a delight in keeping the elder waiting as long as possible. The elder, too, is in no hurry, and frequently assists the worshipper in his hunt for the money.

During a service in an Ambrim church there was quite a scene caused by one absent-minded man who could not find his offering. After searching his

Midst Volcanic Fires

pockets, the locks of his hair, the complex folds of his handkerchief, without avail, he stood up in the middle of the church to make a more thorough examination. The elder laid down the collection-plate, and went through the man's pockets. All over the church could be heard the whispers of the poor fellow protesting to the elder that he was not fooling, that he had the money when he entered the church. Then two brothers from the rear of the building came to the rescue, and, feeling their absent-minded brother all over, eventually found a threepenny-piece in a tussock of his matted hair.

The Great World War did not touch the natives of the New Hebrides so closely as the natives of the islands on the ocean-trade routes; but it was a great puzzle to them, nevertheless. They had their own thoughts regarding it, though they did not always express themselves freely to the missionaries. There was no doubt as to where their sympathies lay, and they regarded it as a great achievement for the manhood of the Empire to fight and die for their country's plighted word to a smaller nation. But behind many of their questions was a background of suspicion that all was not well with the Christianity of the white races who could wage war so bitterly and so cruelly against each other. One of the articles of their Christian Creed is that fighting is wrong, and, in obedience to the dictates of the Gospel, they abandoned intertribal war. The moral prestige of the Christian nations declined in their eyes, and, rather strangely, there was a revival of heathen self-complacency. Their distrust and

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

suspicion of the white man's civilization was often reflected in their speech in the form of humorous irony and innuendo.

On one occasion, during the war, at the invitation of the chief, I paid a visit to the village of Samio, when a somewhat sarcastic reference to the conflict was made. The chief, a knowing old gentleman, wanted my advice about the settlement of a quarrel which threatened to divide his tribe into two hostile factions. After hearing his story and advising him to the best of my judgment, I expressed the hope that he would be able to prevent fighting and bloodshed. With a mischievous smile on his cunning old face, he remarked, "Missi, the black fellows do not fight now; we leave that to the white man."

During the war I gave some natives who were living with me on the mission station a bundle of illustrated magazines that they might look at the war pictures. I found them gazing at a lurid picture of a burning Zeppelin, surrounded by a fleet of attacking aeroplanes. Everything depicted was so new and strange to the natives that they had to ask me to explain the meaning of the picture. When I had finished I overheard one native make the remark that the white race was exceedingly clever. "Yes," replied another, "but exceedingly wicked." It was the first and only occasion I showed war pictures to the natives.

They were able, however, to appraise the Kaiser at his true valuation. When Mr Weir and I were camping in the village of Toak a quarrel ensued between two members of the tribe, and some strong

Midst Volcanic Fires

language was interchanged. We were called upon to adjudicate between the tribesmen, and our intervention happily prevented them from coming to blows. One native complained of the vile swearing used by the other. We had great difficulty in ascertaining the kind of language that had been used, and on asking for a specimen, he said, "Oh, he called me the Kaiser!" Amid the laughter the remark provoked, we felt there was hope for the savages of the New Hebrides when they refused to have their names associated with that of the Kaiser.

Perhaps the most unhappy result of the war in the islands is the discredit it threw on the civilization of the white races. Nevertheless, it may be no disadvantage to the progress of the Gospel in foreign lands that Christianity should cease to be identified with civilization. There is always a very real danger of the foreign missionary relying too much on the prestige of the country from which he comes, and, perhaps, it is well for this prop to be taken away. By the removal of questionable supports on which missionaries have been accustomed to lean they are thrown back on the true source of strength and confidence. Stronger than all the resources of Imperial Britain is the Word of God in the hearts of humble and believing men and women.

As might be expected, a good deal of native humour comes out in connection with weddings. In the good old days, to which some members of the rising generation are wistfully looking back, a marriage was a contract between a father and his prospective

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

son-in-law for the purchase of his daughter by the payment of a number of pigs. The transaction was a purely business proposition; and the maid, without being consulted, went to the highest bidder. When, on the introduction of Christianity, Church marriages were introduced, the natives experienced some difficulty in adjusting themselves to the new situation. Strange to say, though the women themselves were the parties to derive immediate benefit from the change, they were the most stubborn and awkward in responding to the new conditions.

When celebrated for the first time in a native village, a church wedding is always an interesting event, though, certainly, more amusing than edifying. The bride is adorned in the most gaudy and showy dress that the purses of the bridegroom and his friends can procure. The bridal pair are honoured with the front seat in the church; but the maid, shy and bashful, as becometh island brides, sits with her back to the bridegroom, and never once deigns to look at him. Only after the greatest coaxing can she be persuaded to stand for the ceremony, and frequently she has to be assisted to her feet by a poke in the ribs from the best man. At every stage she has to be prompted; and, when it comes to the joining of hands, hers has to be placed in that of her lover. Right glad is she when the ceremony is over, and, though she has now the status of a married woman, it makes no difference. She resumes her seat with her back to her husband. On leaving church, after shaking hands with the entire congregation, she goes her own way, and

Midst Volcanic Fires

seems to find her highest joy in being as far away from her wedded husband as possible.

During the course of our tour we had several rather sudden descents from the sublime to the ridiculous in connection with weddings. At the close of a heart-searching address by Mr Weir in the village of Wile, a wedding was celebrated. In the middle of the ceremony, when I was unfolding to the bridegroom his duties to the bride, her father, in paternal solicitude for his daughter's well-being, stepped forward from his seat in the middle of the church, and, tapping me on the shoulder, whispered audibly in my ear, "Make Apok promise not to swear at Maggie!"

In one village church a very disconcerting mistake was made. Whilst arranging the couples in front of the congregation, I inadvertently placed one of the brides beside the wrong man. Neither bride nor bridegroom made the slightest remonstrance, nor did anyone of the congregation. I proceeded with the service, and had already joined in wedlock one couple, and was proceeding with the marriage of the next, when the local teacher tapped me on the shoulder and whispered in my ear that I was giving Taratonga the wrong woman. I smiled, and, having made a fresh arrangement, proceeded again with the service. At the close of the ceremony I asked the teacher why he allowed me to go on with the service when he knew that the couples were wrongly placed. "Oh," he said, "it would not have mattered very much; they would have sorted themselves out afterwards!"

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

Perhaps the most disconcerting comedy I have experienced in connection with island weddings took place at the village church of Lironissa, near the mission station on Paama. The bride was a fine specimen of island beauty, free and untrammelled, with large lustrous eyes, and a Jewish cast of features. She might well have passed for one of the daughters of Jerusalem whom Solomon extolled, and appropriated to herself his descriptive epithet, "I am black, but comely."

Naomi was the daughter of Samuel Tungan, the local teacher, quite a character in the district, very clever and witty, but a very good man withal. Like old Eli, he spoiled his children, and did not keep them in subjection. I did not know until the day of his daughter's wedding that this blemish stained the character of my faithful teacher. When climbing the hill to the village I heard weeping and wailing, more like a funeral than a wedding. The natives who accompanied me knew more about the temper of the bride than I did, and, smiling to each other, said, "Oh, it is Naomi!" and, sure enough, Naomi it was. The child of nature seemed to recognize that, as the hour of her wedding approached, her free, unrestrained life was about to end. She, therefore, lifted up her voice and wept, and so did her poor old father. It was a heart-rending sight. I shrank from parting the broken-hearted father and daughter, and hesitated about performing the ceremony. But the chief of the village approached, and explained to me that Naomi was a spoiled child, and had grown up a wild, self-willed, and untamed

Midst Volcanic Fires

woman; and that it was desirable, in the interests of the village, to proceed with the service. But her forlorn condition excited compassion, and my sympathy was with her and not with the elders of the village. Clinging to her father, as if for protection, this island belle, in the full bloom and vigour of girlhood, looked more like a figure of romance than the daughter of a savage race. The father, however, insisted, through his tears, upon the celebration of the wedding, recognizing that, in accordance with native usage, Naomi must wed. He, however, was too heart-sore to attend, and he begged to be excused.

Naomi was taken to her home, and decked in a bridal array that other hands had prepared. The chief and the elders of the village thereafter led her in procession to the church, and placed her in the front seat beside the waiting bridegroom. The mother of Naomi was present, and I noticed she betrayed no indication of regret in parting with her daughter. In the church she sat immediately behind the bride; and, as Naomi was painfully slow in rising for the ceremony at the request of the officiating missionary, the mother put out her hand to assist the daughter on to her feet. Whereupon Naomi, to the consternation of the congregation, turned upon her, like a young lioness, and gave her mother a sound thrashing.

Up to this point I had a sneaking sympathy with Naomi; but my feelings underwent a sudden revulsion, and I found myself admiring the faith and the courage of the young man who was prepared

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

to undertake the taming of the shrew. I had some difficulty in keeping my balance after this strange and unexpected interlude. However, the service proceeded without further interruption, and the whole congregation gave a sigh of relief when Naomi was safely married.

At the close of the marriage service it is customary for the congregation to shake hands with the newly-married couple, and wish them all happiness. As the bridegroom shook hands with his mother-in-law he commiserated with her on the flogging she had received from Naomi. "Oh, it is all right!" she said, "it will be the last"; adding, however, the significant words, "If Naomi hammers you, as she has hammered me, you will require to make frequent visits to Missi for medicine." Well, I thought, what a handsome send-off for a son-in-law!

While engaged in the evangelistic campaign in Paama the chief of the village of Lulip, accompanied by a large party from his village, paid us a visit to make arrangements for his daughter's wedding. On the day appointed we waited in vain for the arrival of the bridal party. At a late hour the father came to explain that his daughter was too shy to appear in public in the church at the mission station, and requested us to go to Lulip to perform the ceremony. We did not consent immediately. Lulip is the most inaccessible of all the villages in Paama; and the journey, going and coming, occupies pretty well a whole day. Besides, we had our suspicions that the father had not told us the whole story, and that there might possibly be a reason for

Midst Volcanic Fires

his daughter's shyness. Owing to the shortage of women and girls in the islands, girls of a marriageable age are at a premium, and fathers are inclined to sell their daughters to the highest bidder, irrespective of the girl's wish. In the New Hebrides there is no need for fathers to bestow dowries upon their daughters. If there is money exchanged in the transaction, the father is the person who gets it. However, in case the bride's shyness might, after all, be *bonâ fide*, we agreed to go on the following day.

On our arrival in the village we proceeded direct to the church, and instructed the teacher to blow the conch shell, which, in many of the island churches, is used instead of a bell. While we were waiting for the congregation to assemble, the father appeared, and, from the sheepish look on his face, I knew something had gone amiss. And, sure enough, it was his daughter, the bride. Ignoring the heartless wretch who claimed to be her father, I climbed to the village on the hill, and saw the mother, who conducted us to the place where her daughter was hiding. Halting at a tall tree, with a leafy canopy, she pointed upwards, saying, "There is Saulo." To my amazement, and, I think, to the amazement of everyone, we saw the bride perched high up on the tree, swaying in the breeze, apparently quite at ease, and as unconcerned as a pigeon of the native bush. As soon as I got over my surprise, I shouted up to Saulo that she had chosen a strange place for the wedding, and asked if she expected me to climb up beside her to perform the ceremony. But Saulo made no reply. At length, after further parleying,

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

she consented to come down, if she could speak to her mother and me alone. Instantly the crowd began to disperse, and, as soon as the place was cleared, Saulo descended, as nimble of limb as a monkey. Without hesitation she declared she would not wed the man her father had chosen for her. The choice of her heart was a young man in a distant village. The wedding was accordingly cancelled, and other arrangements were made, in which, needless to say, the father had no say.

The abrupt and unceremonious way in which natives, as heathen, obtain wives often gives rise to complex situations when they come under the influence of Christianity. While we were encamped at Craig Cove, a tall, handsome young man, accompanied by a retinue of wild-looking bushmen, paid us a visit, and seated themselves outside our hut. Some minutes elapsed before any words were exchanged, and then the young man stated he was in trouble and had come for our help.

Several weeks before, after an absence of five years, the young man, Alevea by name, returned in a recruiting vessel to his native island. Having acted, while abroad, as a kind of valet to a well-to-do Frenchman, he had learned to dress himself neatly and acquit himself in a respectful manner. On his return home he was dressed in the latest style of the Colonial boulevard; and the various articles of clothing with which his box was filled seemed to indicate that he intended to impress his fellow-islanders with the swagger civilization he had left. But the natives of Rano cared for none of these

Midst Volcanic Fires

things, and in a few weeks Alevea had discarded his fashionable frills. On the occasion of his visit to our camp, five weeks after his return, his attire, like that of his fellow-villagers, consisted of a smile and a white feather.

His story was soon told. During the volcanic eruption which devastated that part of Ambrim, Alevea was rescued by a French craft, and was never more heard of. No one seemed to know anything about him, and it was presumed that he had perished in the eruption. The only property he left which was considered of any value was a young widow, whom his brother promptly annexed. Amid the confusion, the brother found the widow somewhat of an encumbrance, and sold her for five pigs and £6 to a native of a Christian village. Some months afterwards I joined the two in wedlock; and, for the past five years, they had been leading happy and contented lives, finding pleasure in each other's society. Then Alevea reappeared on the scene; and his visit to us at Craig Cove was to secure our help, not only for the restitution of his wife, but to obtain compensation for the services she had rendered her interim husband.

As might be expected in a native community, Alevea's return created as great a sensation as if he had risen from the dead. Many of the Christian people championed his cause; and, considering the circumstances which obliged Alevea to leave Ambrim, thought he was entitled to the return of Lupwe. But the second husband was not at all favourably disposed to that view, and let it be known that, after

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

five years of married life, he would not part with Lupwe without a struggle. So the matter was left pretty much in the hands of Lupwe herself, and she had no doubt about her choice. "Alevea," she said, "was cruel, and Taso is kind," and she wanted the kind husband. Alevea, after the manner of the islands, was inclined to adopt forcible measures; but he was soon convinced that Lupwe's choice settled the matter. His brother agreed to return the money and pigs he had obtained from the sale of Lupwe, and Alevea went on his way rejoicing.

A few nights later an old woman visited our camp with a grievance of a similar nature. Possibly Alevea's success in obtaining compensation emboldened the old lady to press her suit. She requested the help of the missionaries to regain her daughter from the clutches of a paramour who had kidnapped her and carried her off to one of the heathen villages in the neighbourhood. Securing the help of a cousin of the girl by a bribe of ten pigs, the thief and his friends carried her off without ever asking the consent of mother or daughter. The old woman appeared to be terribly cut up at the loss of her girl, and stormed at the baseness of her nephew. She seemed to recognize, however, that the return of her daughter from captivity was a forlorn hope, and so tried to gain our consent that, if we failed to obtain the return of her daughter, we should bargain with her captor for the payment of a fat pig. We smiled at the incongruous offer; but the old lady saw nothing incongruous in the bargain, and failed to understand our laughter.

Midst Volcanic Fires

News was taken to the heathen kidnapper that the missionaries were coming to see him with a view to getting the girl restored to her mother. Knowing well the tastes of the old lady, he set off during the night with the kind of fat pig in which her soul delighted, and, arriving at daybreak, tied it to the doorpost of her house. Overjoyed at the sight of the pig, she forgot all about her troubles and aching heart and ungrateful nephews, and soon afterwards appeared at the camp with the information that Bogneim had at last given her a fine pig, and had promised to be a good husband to her girl.

On two occasions we were requested to obtain wives for bashful young men. Possibly the fact that the priests at the three Roman Catholic mission stations in Ambrim are often consulted on matrimonial affairs had something to do with the native suitors applying to us. But the success that attended our efforts on both occasions was not such as to tempt us to make match-making an integral part of mission work.

As we were leaving Craig Cove on our journey round the island, Albert, the teacher, approached us in a very business-like way, and, without the least trace of shyness, asked us to make inquiries with a view to obtaining a suitable wife for him. In vain did we plead that it was not in our line, and at length, in a moment of weakness, complied. Soon after our arrival at north Ambrim I let it be known that we had been commissioned by Albert of Craig Cove to obtain a wife for him. Almost immediately, two teachers, with smiling faces, entered



THE AUTHOR ON TOUR AMONG THE VILLAGES OF AMBRIM.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LIBRARY
DIVERSITY

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

the camp to inform us that they had succeeded in finding a woman who would make an admirable wife for Albert. Saling, a fine, handsome woman, was brought in, and she readily consented to become Albert's wife.

On the return journey we called in at Craig Cove to report on our mission, and to congratulate Albert on his good fortune. "What's her name, Missi?" asked Albert, somewhat impatiently. Ignoring the question, I proceeded to enumerate the good points I had noticed about the woman during the time we lived at Makam. But the impatient teacher again interrupted me with the question, "What's her name?"

"Saling," I replied.

"I thought so," said Albert; and, in a very serious tone, added, "Missi, every man in Ambrim knows that woman, and every man is afraid of her!"

"Why, what's the matter with her?" I asked.

"She has been married three times already," replied Albert.

"Then that ought to be a recommendation that she knows how to handle husbands," I argued.

"Missi," said Albert, "all her husbands have died of the same disease, and, if you insist upon marrying me to her, you will very soon have to bury me too."

Further talk was useless; but before leaving Albert we registered a vow that never again would we tread on thin ice.

Friends are sometimes at a loss to know what to send in mission boxes, and, not infrequently, articles are sent for which the tastes of the natives are not

Midst Volcanic Fires

sufficiently educated. On one occasion two parcels came to hand which neither we nor the natives knew how to use. One was a package of spectacles and the other a fairly large parcel of well-starched boys' linen collars.

The natives at first regarded the spectacles, not as aids to sight, but as nose ornaments — a new fashion for the young bloods who could secure “the latest” in up-to-date wear. The only natives living on Paama who wore spectacles came from the island of Nguna; and as Mr Milne, the missionary of Nguna, wore spectacles, the popular impression was that glasses were the correct thing for them, and therefore to be worn as articles of fashionable attire, like ear-rings, for instance, or bracelets.

When the spectacles were taken out of the mission box, it was not the elderly natives, but the young swells, youths and maidens, with eyes as keen as hawks', who cast longing eyes upon them. Sarah, my native housekeeper, had a busy time fitting the different sized noses with glasses. Her standard of fitness took no account of impaired eyesight, but only of bridges of noses. The natives, who eagerly tried on the glasses, had no complaint to make of short sight: appearance was the thing.

“How do I look, Sarah?” was the invariable question; to which the old matron gave the invariable answer, “Oh, my word! you flash too much!” One youth, however, received a shock. A pair of green-tinted spectacles were in the box. He promptly tried them on, but dropped them instantly like a hot potato. The sudden change in the colouring

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

of his world gave him a big fright. It was as good as a Punch and Judy show, and I felt sorry that the donors of the spectacles were not there to share in the fun.

The parcel of collars, likewise, afforded us considerable amusement. A collar, of course, was too grotesque an article to give to a native boy who wore no clothes, and our first impulse was to send them to Australia, where they could be of some use. While they lay on the shelves of the mission house awaiting the arrival of the steamer, the cockroaches and silverfish attacked them, and speedily removed the shine and polish. One Saturday afternoon Mrs Frater gave the parcel of collars to Sarah, and told her to do as she pleased with them. Sarah, however, had been in Queensland, and knew the use of collars. That afternoon she collected all the little nippers of the village, and fitted the collars on them. Sarah was not in the least particular about the fit. If they did not fit, she inserted a piece of string in the holes, and pulled until the ends met. Next morning, on entering church, the first thing we saw was a row of little naked fellows, sitting sedate and sober, with heads as rigid as pokers, and wearing the collars.

The missionaries, medical and clerical, often obtain access to the native heart by the help they are able to render in times of sickness. Medicine was quite a new thing to the natives, and, until the arrival of the missionaries, medicine and magic were very much the same thing. One can readily imagine how, on the introduction of medicine, many strange

Midst Volcanic Fires

rumours gained currency about its miraculous power.

Soon after our arrival on Paama, a native, seeing me opening a box of medicines that had just been landed from the steamer, at once said that he wanted to drink medicine. I asked what was the matter with him, but the only reply he made was that he would like to drink a little of the white man's medicine. "Oh," I said, "you come back again when you are sick, and I will give you medicine!"

But he still persisted in his request "to drink the white man's medicine." One of the bottles I had taken from the case contained strong ammonia, and, by way of silencing the importunate entreaties, I said, "Here, my man, you take a good sniff of this!" Applying the bottle to his nostrils he inhaled vigorously, and, caught by the pungent smell, he jumped into the air. A few minutes elapsed before he could speak; and then, with the tears running from his eyes, he managed to articulate, "My word, medicine, good fellow, too much!" He returned home, and told his fellow-villagers what a fine, strong medicine the missionary had given him. The whole population trooped along to the mission station to sample the wonderful medicine. The same performance was repeated; and, strange to say, all the natives agreed with Maki's estimate, "Medicine, good fellow, too much!"

When the influenza epidemic was raging on the island of Paama, I inquired from the teachers, at the close of the weekly prayer meeting, how the sick people in their villages were getting on. Tapokasi,

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

the teacher of Tahalu Nissa, remarked that only one man in his village was seriously ill, but that it was useless to think of giving him medicine: he attended church only once on Sundays, and God had sent the sickness as a punishment for his sins.

In the remote villages we visited in the course of the evangelistic campaign, where the people came less into contact with Europeans, we found the *metalo*, as the white man was called, a source of wonderment to the primitive natives. Everything he possessed was so totally different from anything they had that from head to foot we were sure to pass beneath their searching and inquisitive eyes. Our dining utensils, too, were a source of wonder to them. We used tables, with knives and forks and spoons and plates: they ate with their fingers while seated on the ground. Our beds were so very different from their cocoanut-leaf beds. But the mirror was the thing which tickled and puzzled them most. Some had never seen their own faces, and could scarcely believe their more knowing friends who told them that the faces they beheld in the looking-glass were their own. They very quickly fell in love with their own looks, and had to be drawn away from the mirror.

While at Makam, the children of the bush had the strangest picnic we ever witnessed. Hundreds of hungry little faces watched the stewards staggering along with big tins full of rice and meat. Those were followed by others who carried equally heavy loads of very hot tea. The boys and girls sat cross-legged on the ground. Above their heads was a

Midst Volcanic Fires

rough shelter of cocoanut leaves to protect them from the fierce rays of the sun, which in the New Hebrides rules the day. In front of each child lay a large banana leaf and cocoanut shell, which did the duty of plate and pannikin. At length, when a pile of food lay on every leaf and a cupful of steaming hot tea in every shell, silence was called for and the blessing asked. Then, for the next quarter of an hour, nothing was said while the food was being devoured. No spoons or forks were necessary. Everyone in that company lived close to nature, and acted on the principle that fingers were made before forks.

Walking through the lines of the children, I came across a teacher's child looking very glum and disappointed. I asked the father, "What's the matter with Bong?" and, without mincing any words, he replied, "Bong cannot eat any more, and is cross with his belly!"

The devil is an adept in the art of compromise and espionage. In every Christian village we found that he had his agents, who endeavoured to chill the ardour and stifle the evangelistic spirit of the Church. A few of the older congregations had largely lost their sense of responsibility to the heathen, and had become backward in the discharge of what they once regarded as their primary duty. The failure to maintain progress explained the low plane of life on which so many were content to dwell. In tribes wherever there was a revival of heathen practices there seemed always to be a disposition for the people to revert to *kava* and grog drinking.

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

In the villages where we had to denounce the sins of a backsliding people, our message was, I imagine, more akin to that of the Baptist preaching repentance than that of the Son of Man preaching the Kingdom of God.

During the course of the evangelistic tour we had to denounce the grog-drinking habits of some native Christians. One of the villages in Epi gave itself away by rather a grotesque form of ornamentation it had adopted. In view of the visit of the mission party, the church and grounds had been thoroughly renovated. A new coral path had been laid out leading to the church, and, on either side of the clean, white coral was a border of *upturned beer bottles*. From the defaulting villages and from a neighbouring trader they had obtained several boat-loads of empty bottles, which they had placed on end, with the necks buried in the ground. Mr Weir and I did not regard such a pathway as a very suitable introduction to a series of evangelistic meetings; but the natives did not see any incongruity. Indeed, they thought they had been very virtuous in bestowing such care upon the church property, and regarded themselves with great complacency, so we had to repress our smiles.

In the village of Botugkagka, where we had to denounce the grog and *kava* traffic, there was a comic touch at the expense of my native country. Learning that I came from Scotland, the chief said that he had a picture of Scotch scenery, and, disappearing into his house, soon emerged with a large placard advertising a well-known brand of Scotch whiskey.

Midst Volcanic Fires

I was rather taken aback to find the advertisement in such an out-of-the-way part of the world, and should have been better pleased had it been an advertisement of the Scottish National Bible Society.

In spite of all our protests about the drink traffic, an old man approached Mr Weir, and, not the least abashed—indeed, with a sly twinkle in his eye—requested the permission of his missionary to drink a little *kava* for his stomach's sake. Mr Weir was confounded at such a request, and, in utter amazement, stared at the old man. But Voambi was a knowing old rogue. Like the Scotsman, who excused his drinking propensities on the ground that whiskey warmed the cockles of his heart, the South Sea Islander apologized for making such a request on the plea that *kava* made him feel good and happy, and kindly disposed to everybody.

Our visit to the village of Botugkagka was one of the most disappointing of the campaign. The church was found to be in a sad state of disrepair, and our meeting had to be held in the club-house of the village. The chief made many excuses for the neglected state of the church; but the truth was, the dilapidated building was an index of the low religious life of the community. As soon as Mr Weir started the singing of the first hymn, he was howled down—fortunately, not by the natives, but by dogs. Every man and boy in the village possessed a dog, and, while the owners were inside at the service, the dogs lay outside around the building. Possibly it was the strange voice; but, as

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

soon as Mr Weir raised the tune, the dogs set up a chorus of disapproval, and brought the singing to an abrupt end. Rushing outside, the chief cleared the place of the dogs, and we started afresh.

On a former occasion, during the Ambrim tour, when a teacher was in the middle of a very forcible sermon, we had a service interrupted by rather a disconcerting incident. The women and girls, as usual, were ranged on one side of the church and the men on the other. In the middle of the sermon a big lizard fell from the roof into a woman's lap, and she let out a scream which startled everybody in the church. All natives have a superstitious dread of lizards, and the women and girls at once vacated their seats and left an empty space in the middle of the church. As soon as order was restored, the sermon was resumed; but every eye was riveted on the hole in the wall into which the lizard had disappeared. Like a mouse coming out of its hole—from which they knew it would soon emerge—the lizard shot out its piercing eye to discover if the coast was clear. Its reappearance was the signal for another stampede. Nothing could now restore order until the unwelcome visitor was removed from the church. The teacher broke off his sermon, and, with the help of two braves, hunted the lizard with sticks, and eventually succeeded in killing it.

When the native Church is established, it is not likely to be fashioned on quite the same lines to which the British missionaries have been accustomed. The native Church is only in its infancy; but already native expositors are using a freedom with Scripture

Midst Volcanic Fires

passages and are interpreting them in a way that would shock, and sometimes amuse, the ordinary Bible reader.

During a service in the Lamanu church we had the sublime and the ridiculous in perfect combination. A thanksgiving service was being held, and several speakers took part. A telling address had been given which lifted the whole congregation into a spiritual atmosphere. Then came a speaker who made it simply impossible for us to keep our faces straight. I scarcely think any of the natives saw the funny side; at any rate, they were better able to control themselves than their missionaries. The speaker asked the congregation to open their Bibles at Johnny's book. I was uncertain where to turn; but I noticed that the people, without the slightest trace of disrespect or irreverence, at once turned to the Gospel of St John, and, during his discourse, the speaker referred to the Apostle as Johnny. Then from the Gospel he made a sudden excursion to one of the Epistles of John, prefacing his remarks with the exclamation, "Now, let us hear what Little Johnny has to say!" For the rest of the address it was "Big Johnny" and "Little Johnny," according as he referred to John of the Gospel or John of the Epistles. We gave a sigh of relief when the trying ordeal came to an end.

Another teacher chose as his subject the text, "For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church." He laid down with stinging emphasis the lordship of man, and, of course, the corresponding inferiority of women. Little did

The Humorous Side of Mission Work

St Paul imagine, when he penned the Epistle, that a native evangelist, preaching to a future generation of South Sea Island Christians, would use his name and quote his authority for the suppression of women.

From the emphasis with which he stated that the Christian women were presuming on the position accorded them by Christianity, and taking more liberty than the New Testament warranted, one readily inferred that there was a personal element in the attack. I was not aware of it at the time; but the speaker was known throughout the district as a henpecked man; and the congregation seemed to recognize that, though he was ostensibly addressing them, he was in reality addressing words to his wife that he would not have dared to say to her face. Once or twice I had thoughts of pulling him up, but was interested to know how far he would go. I had been flattering myself with the notion that the women of the New Hebrides were at length gaining their proper place in society, but that pointed address dashed those hopes to the ground.

If the sentiments expressed had been endorsed by the Christian male population, then, some day, the women of the New Hebrides would have to take a leaf out of the book of their more enlightened sisters in other lands, and become militant suffragists fighting for their liberty.

A rather amusing incident took place at the opening of a new church in the village of Tahī, though, I daresay, the natives saw nothing amusing in it. Peter Toro, the teacher, with the help of his people,

Midst Volcanic Fires

had succeeded in erecting a fine weatherboard church. In front of the pulpit Peter had carved out, in beautiful, large letters, the words, SAINT PETER'S CHURCH. I asked him why he selected the name St Peter in preference to St Paul or St John ? Drawing himself up to his full height, he replied, *Inau na vi Peter !* (I am Peter).

On one occasion, in my English class at the head station, a native was reading the words of St Paul : "One soweth, and another reapeth." I stopped the reader, and asked him what the words meant. Without a moment's hesitation he blurted out the reply : "The woman sews the clothes, and the man rips them up."

APPENDIX

THE JOHN G. PATON MISSION FUND

OBJECT

The Evangelization of the Islands or Tribes in the New Hebrides Group that yet remain in Heathen Darkness.

THE Fund is now responsible for no less than five fully qualified European Missionaries of its own—three of whom are Medical men. New Mission Stations were thus established and manned on the West coast of Tanna; East Santo; Paama and S.E. Ambrim; Wala, Malekula; and North Santo. Three Mission Hospitals, with the necessary accessories, have been planted; and Mission Houses, Schools, Churches, Mission Boats, etc., provided.

The Fund is also responsible for an Assistant Master at the Native Teachers' Training Institute, and for the services of a Mission Carpenter. It undertakes—through annual gifts of £6 each from interested friends—the support of nearly two hundred Native Teachers.

In the course of this growing assumption of responsibility the two Chief Workers have been called away—Dr James Paton died in December,

Midst Volcanic Fires

1906, and Dr John G. Paton in the January following. The loss of these great personalities has thrown upon their helpers and colleagues, Messrs Langridge and Watson, the charge and care of the Mission Fund—a charge that had become sacred by long association and fellowship with the Beloved Brothers, and rendered more obligatory by the last written bequest of the Venerable Missionary, casting upon them the care and responsibility of the work.

Thus charged, these two friends begged Mrs Macleod (Dr James Paton's sister-in-law) to undertake the post of Honorary Secretary of the Fund for Scotland, and Mr J. W. Douglas, solicitor, of Glasgow (a long-standing and sincere friend in the work of the two brothers), to accept the post of Honorary Treasurer of the Fund.

The Fund thus reconstituted still continues in its God-given Mission, and is responsible for the following objects, to which it invites the attention and assistance of all lovers of the Cause and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ :

WAYS OF HELPING

1. By taking one or more "shares" of £6 per annum in one or other of the five Fund Mission Stations, receiving direct reports from the Missionary in charge.

2. By maintaining a Native Evangelist or Teacher at £6 per annum. The name of the Teacher thus supported is supplied, and half-yearly reports of his work are sent to each supporter.

Appendix

3. By maintaining a bed in one or other of the three Mission Hospitals—at £5 per annum.

4. By Gifts to the General Fund, which is charged with the salaries of the Missionaries, the construction and maintenance of the Mission Houses, Schools, Boats, etc., etc.

5. A simple method of assisting the Mission is that of obtaining one of the Fund Missionary collecting-boxes—formed out of cocoa nuts sent from the Islands—or a collecting-card.

6. Auxiliary means of helping are the following :—

(a) Receiving the *Quarterly Jottings* from the New Hebrides, sent regularly to each helper and friend of the Mission. A specimen copy will be gladly sent on application.

(b) Loaning the splendid set of Lantern Slides, with accompanying printed Lecture, giving in popular outline Dr J. G. Paton's Life Story.

(c) Sending gifts of cotton garments and material, bandages, etc., for the Hospitals; and school requisites, etc. All such gifts are gladly welcomed and sent out to the Islands.

New Hebrides arrowroot, prepared by the native converts, is on sale, and the proceeds go towards the cost of printing the Scriptures in the polyglot languages of the Group.

Communications will be welcomed by either of the Honorary Secretaries as follows :—

Midst Volcanic Fires

For England: Mr A. K. Langridge, Honorary
Organizing Secretary, Aniwa, Bournemouth.

For Ireland: Mr William Watson, Rosslyn, Knock,
Belfast.

For Scotland: Mrs Macleod, 10 Leslie Road,
Pollokshields, Glasgow.

The Rev. Frank H. L. Paton, M.A., B.D., of
10 Cotham Road, Kew, Victoria, is the Honorary
Director of the Fund in Australia.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
BERKELEY

Return to desk from which borrowed.
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

APR 20 1948

JUL 5 1977

REC. CIR. OCT 27 '78

LD 21-100m-9,'47(A5702s16)476

YC 42927

M31844

BV3680
N6F7

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

