

Australian Board of Missions

Jubilee of the New Guinea Mission

1891—1941



Cathedral of S.S. Peter & Paul, A Gift from the Natives.

"A Marvellous Growth"

"A Wonderful Achievement"

On a Sunday afternoon fifty years ago the natives living on the shores of Goodenough Bay, on the north-east coast of New Guinea, watched with great interest a whaleboat which proceeded slowly up the coast and finally anchored off Kieta, near to the village of Wedau. In it they saw two white men who, though the natives knew it not, were the forerunners of a company of faithful men and women whose coming to New Guinea signified to its people the opening of a new era in their history. For these two men, priests of the Church of England, the Rev. Albert Maclaren and the Rev. Copland King, were the pioneers of Christian missionary work on the north-east coast of Papua, which was then entirely heathen. Now, fifty years afterwards, that coast from end to end has been evangelized, there is a vigorous native Church numbering over 13,000 baptized members, largely ministered to by clergy and lay evangelists of their own race, and the New Guinea Mission has become one of the most important of the missions of the Church of England, and is the most notable missionary triumph of the Church in Australia.

On the next morning, Monday, August 10th, 1891 (St. Lawrence's Day), the missionaries landed safely at Kieta, although it was afterwards known that hostile preparations had been made for their reception.

That same evening, at a crowded meeting in a Melbourne suburban parish, a working carpenter and his wife, Samuel and Elizabeth Tomlinson, were being farewelled for service in the new mission, and a few days later they left to take up the work which was to be theirs for the rest of their life on earth. It was a great venture for these pioneers, and for the Church in Australia, which had assumed responsibility for the evangelization of the native people in this territory which had only four years previously been added to the possessions of the British Crown. Papua, that territory is now called, and the name is a native one, meaning "frizzy-haired," and refers to the peculiar mop of frizzy hair which adorns the heads of its men. Though racially a unit, the origin of which has not yet been solved by anthropologists, the people are of various tribes or groups, with several distinct languages and varying customs. Fifty years ago they were head hunters and cannibals, and warfare between villages and groups was constantly going on. Their lives were ruled by fear, fear of sorcery, witch doctors, evil spirits and spirits of the departed; and the utmost cruelty was prevalent among them. Amongst such a people our missionaries were faced with a most difficult task, first of all in obtaining contact with them, and then of inducing them to give up their evil ways and to replace them with Christian living. Nor was that the only difficulty. They had to suffer much hardship from the trying climate conditions, for the amelioration of which they had none of the means now available in many parts of the Mission. Malaria and other tropical diseases attacked them, and medical help was not to be had. Death overtook their leader within four months of the foundation of the Mission. So bad was the situation that Australian papers demanded that they be recalled and the Mission abandoned. But no, the Mission was slowly and steadily built up by men and women who were determined to establish the Church of God in Papua, come what may. So they carried on, and as a result that area of Papua which is covered by the New Guinea Mission has moved from the depths of paganism to fine Christian living in the brief space of fifty years, less than an ordinary life-time. The work was started by a grant from the oldest missionary society of the Church of England, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), but the Church in Australia, through its General Synod, accepted responsibility for carrying on the Mission, and The Australian Board of Missions (A.B.M.) has been responsible for its staffing and maintenance all through. Its pioneer priests, and two of its Bishops had formerly served in Australian parishes, and nearly all of its white clergy and lay workers have been drawn from the Commonwealth.

Pioneering Days: Shortly after their arrival, the first missionaries built a small native Chapel, but it was soon found to be too small, and was demolished to make place for a larger building. It was then found that one of the corner posts of the first chapel had taken root, and it was allowed to remain and grow, and to-day it stands a beautiful shady tree, truly symbolic of the live and growing Church of God in Papua which has taken deep root in the native life, and gives spiritual shelter to the people of Papua under its widespread arms. The highest ideals of Christian life have from the first been held up to the natives, and they have learned to know that the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ must come first in their life, and that they must give only of their best to Him.

The Missionaries had first of all to learn the language of the people, and as it had never been written, the task was the more difficult. By degrees mutual understanding was reached, and side by side with the preaching of the Gospel came the establishment of village schools. South Sea Island natives who had become Christians were brought from the sugar plantations in Queensland where they had been working. These men were of immense help in building up the Mission in its earlier stages, and some of them continued to work in the Mission as teachers and evangelists until their death or retirement in old age. Their memory is held in highest honour. As it became possible, the scope of the Mission

work was extended to villages in the neighbourhood of Dogura, the head station, and soon other stations were established up and down the coast as centres from which evangelistic work could be done. Gradually the missionaries, by teaching, example and service, won the friendship of the natives, and by their influence, raiding, strife and bloodshed began steadily to disappear.

Civilised Influence and Community Service: Through their close and continuous contact with the native life, the missionaries were able to bring the natives to an understanding of Government authority, and to give it their obedience and support, and the value of this work to the Government was warmly recognised by Sir William MacGregor, the first Administrator, and his successors. At the same time, the missionaries often had to champion the cause of the natives, and one notable instance of this was their successful opposition in 1907 to the proposed compulsory purchase of native-owned land.

The work of evangelization and education was added social welfare work. Medical missionary work was undertaken very early in the history of the Mission, and it was steadily developed as time went on. Elementary hygiene was taught and encouraged. Trained nurses soon took their part in the service of the Mission, and have ever remained an important section of the staff. Two doctors, one of them also a Priest, have served in the Mission, and a third will shortly be taking up their work. Homes were opened for orphan and half-caste children, and the love of the Good Shepherd for the little ones of His flock made known thereby. Native village councils were formed and guided by the missionaries, and communal life was thereby greatly improved. The value of human life was made clear, and such practices as those of human sacrifice, child murder and cannibalism steadily disappeared before the approach of Christianity. The battle-ground of the past became peaceful playing fields, and in some cases the village church now stands on the very spot where formerly cannibal feasts were held.

Service of Another Kind: Not only was the New Guinea Mission of service to the natives. In accepting its responsibility for service in the newly acquired territory in 1886, the General Synod of Australia included the white settlers and officials, and to these the mission has ever been ready to give service and ministration. The first work done in the Mamba district at St. Andrews was mainly for the benefit of miners from Australia, many a trader, digger and Government official has been cared for in times of sickness and trouble, and not a few owe their lives, under God, to the skill and care of some of our missionaries. At Samarai and Port Moresby, where there are considerable white populations, regular chaplaincy work among them is done, and the activities of an ordinary home parish are maintained. Every Mission Station is also a centre of warm and generous hospitality to visiting officials or the casual traveller. For some years the Mission carried on at Samarai the only school in the Territory for white children. It was later taken over by the Government. A sad necessity had to be met by the provision of a school for half-caste children to which they could be brought out of what was very often a most unhappy environment. The existence of the half-caste is often most miserable, both among Europeans and natives, and even when it is not so, opportunities for advancement from native standards are rarely given him. A boarding school for half-castes was established by the Mission as early as 1906 and has been carried on ever since, being moved from place to place as expansion became necessary. By it half-caste children have been enabled to retain their self-respect and become enlightened and useful members of the community.

Native Advancement: Evidence of the advancement of the native to higher levels of life and service is manifold. For instance, in the service of the Mission itself there are now engaged at least one hundred natives in the work of the ministry and in teaching. There are twelve native clergy, all of whom have passed through a long and exacting period of training and probation. To the native love of craftsmanship has been added high technical skill in building and associated crafts. Some have become expert electrical technicians. Village elders have learnt the art of local government, and their administration is often of a very high order. The general

standard of living has been raised, and such things as child welfare, and domestic hygiene are helping to advance the physical welfare of the people. In all this work the Mission co-operates heartily with the Government, which in turn warmly appreciates its help. All the Mission Schools are regularly examined by Government inspectors, whose reports are generally very satisfactory.

A Crowning Achievement: Perhaps there is no more striking evidence of what the New Guinea Mission has done for the Papuan, and of what the Papuan is willing to do in return, than in the story of the building of the great Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul at Dogura, one of the most wonderful achievements in the story of Christian Missions. Previously to this the natives had built many churches and schools in their own villages and at the various district missionary stations. Some of these were of considerable size, e.g., the temporary Cathedral at Dogura, and Churches at Menapi, Mukawa and Wanigela, all of which, although built almost entirely of native materials, are capable of holding many hundreds of people, and are furnished within and finished without with the greatest skill and adorned with much beauty of craftsmanship. But the crowning triumph of the skill and devotion of the Papuan Christians is their Cathedral shown on the cover. This stately and superb edifice would adorn any modern city, yet it stands on a plateau above the sea at Dogura, in a land where such a building is unique. Under the supervision of one white man, Robert Jones, the natives by voluntary labour given over 5½ years and at a cost to the Mission of only £4,000 for materials, have in solid concrete a Cathedral Church which is capable of holding a congregation of 1,200 people. At its consecration on 27th October, 1939, the building was filled from end to end with a congregation which but for the exception of a small number of white people consisted entirely of Papuan Christian Communicants, and outside the building was a great crowd unable to gain admission. On that day 1,500 of them had received Holy Communion in the district churches, and 800 at the old Cathedral on the day before. So it was that the outward glory of the Cathedral was but a witness of the faith and devotion of those who that day worshipped in it at the Lord's own service of the Eucharist with great gladness and thanksgiving.

Evidence of the great change which has come about is to be seen in the remarkable fact that the native who presented to the Bishop the petition for the consecration of the Cathedral was actually one of those who stood with spears poised ready to kill the first missionaries when they landed fifty years before.

All this is but a brief summary of what the New Guinea Mission has meant to Papua. Yet, just as much remains to be told, so does much remain to be done. The young native church still needs our guidance and help, and there still remains large areas of the interior and an almost unknown people to be evangelized. Will you not, in thanksgiving for all that God has wrought through His Church in Papua, and in earnest desire that all the people of that land may be one for Christ, make a worthy offering for the support of the Mission?

Investment in this great work will bring you no dividends, only blessings.

Contributions for the New Guinea Mission may be made through parochial channels, or sent direct to the A.B.M. Offices in any of the States.

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