George Cousins, “The Past and Present in Samoa. III – Samoa Under Missionary Pupilage,” *Sunday at Home* No. 1834 (June 22nd 1889): 393-397.

The Past and the Present of Samoa

III. - Samoa Under Missionary Pupilage

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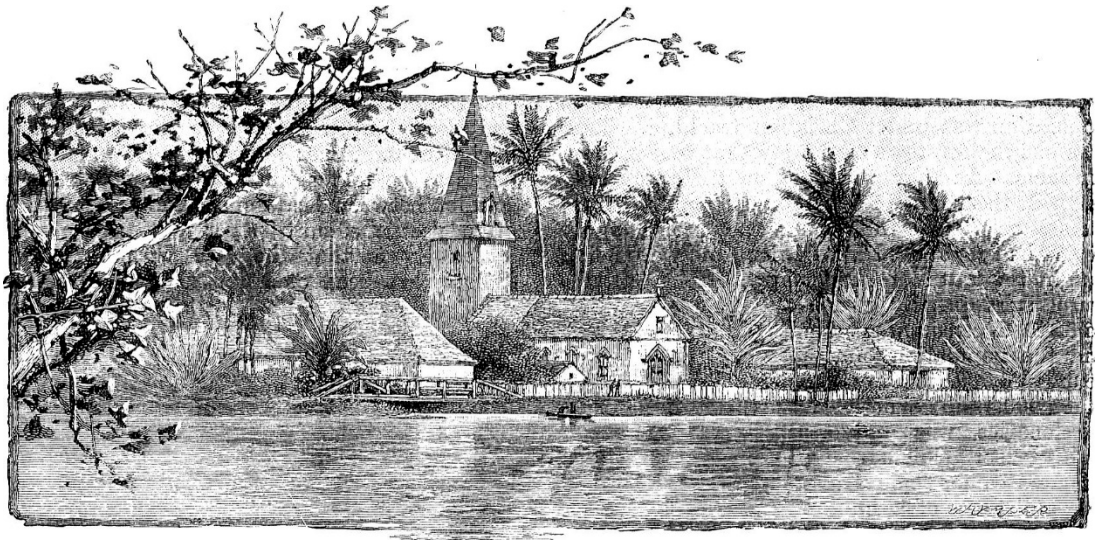

Apia

The idols were abolished; Gospel teaching of an elementary character had been introduced. “A great door and effectual had been opened, but there were many adversaries.” One is thankful to record that the form of opposition just referred to was of short duration. The intrepid, large-hearted John Williams came home to England shortly after that second visit to Samoa, and, by his fervid eloquence and graphic descriptions of the work, evoked such an outburst of missionary enthusiasm as is rarely seen. He was listened to with profound emotion. The missionary spirit rose to a height never known in England before, and, in some respects, never witnessed since. Money from all-quarters poured in; volunteers for the work came forward; missions to the South Seas became the rage, and Samoa was one of the earliest gainers by this extraordinary movement. In 1835 six missionaries, with their wives, were appointed to the group; in 1836 they reached their island homes when, without resistance, the religious pretenders gave place to them, and discontinued their grotesque and wicked hypocrisies.

In the spring of 1838 Mr. Williams returned to the Pacific with reinforcements. He sailed in the missionary ship Camden—a vessel which had been obtained by his own pleading and exertions in Great Britain. After calling at the Cape and Sydney, the Camden proceeded to the islands. On arriving in Samoa the party of missionaries were fairly amazed at the complete overthrow

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of idolatry which had taken place. Near the landing-place at Leone, in Tutuila, and on the site of the original chapel previously mentioned, they found a half-finished house of prayer large enough to hold 1,500 hearers. The entire population was under Christian teaching. That was but the foretaste of the joy that was in store for them. As they proceeded on their way they learned that, out of a supposed population of 60,000 or 70,000 inhabiting the group, about 50,000 had

renounced heathenism, and were being taught the truths of Christianity. (These figures were subsequently revised. In 1843 a census was taken, and the population found to be only 33,900; it now stands at 35,000.) The desire for missionaries was universal and intense. Chiefs from all quarters came, some travelling a distance of a hundred miles, some double that distance, all eager to obtain a white teacher to settle in their midst. Inter–tribal jealousies were of course a potent factor in these urgent appeals, but the eagerness was a favourable symptom notwithstanding. Had there been twenty additional labourers at disposal, instead of three, suitable stations could have been found for them. The dejected looks of unsuccessful applicants, we are told, were painful to witness. While the Camden was still there, four large buildings, with accommodation for from twelve to eighteen hundred persons each, were set apart for public worship. On Upolu alone there were eight or ten chapels of that size, besides other smaller ones; and, as an example of the progress made, we may state that the missionary at Manono had under his superintendence a district containing some twelve or fourteen thousand people, scattered in villages along a line of coast seventy miles in length. His brethren had similar districts. In walking from village to village, as they were in the habit of doing, they found their physical strength severely taxed, but their devotion and zeal bore them through all trials, bodily, mental, and spiritual, and their one aim and desire was to do the work to which God had called them.

Mr Marriott's House at Malau

Student's Houses

And let us clearly understand that their difficulties were yet to come. A crisis had occurred in the history of Samoa. A blessed change had taken place. The people who had sat in darkness had seen a great light. They who had lived in sin without knowing or with but the faintest consciousness that it was sin, had started upon a new pathway of purity and uprightness. True; and yet the Christian church needs to be told again and again that the real conflict between heathenism and the new life is often postponed until after nominal conversion. Especially is that the case with those whose idolatry has been of a debased and feeble type.

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We need not question the perfect sincerity of the converts, even though they subsequently betray much weakness and imperfection. The simple

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fact is that time, careful discipline and enlightenment, the cultivation, yea, in some directions, the creation of conscience, the training and development of moral firmness and self-control are all as much required as the honest acceptance of truth; and it is as thoughtless as it is unjust to expect heathen tribes to pass at a bound from the foulness of their former degradation to “the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ.” The “fruits of the Spirit,” against which “there is no law,” will undoubtedly appear, but “the works of the flesh” will likewise make themselves manifest; and as in the individual believer, so too in the nation, the conflict between these antagonistic forces will be continued. Oh! for something of the infinite patience and long-suffering of God, not merely in palliating the blemishes and stains that mar our own Christian character and conduct, but also, and in like degree, in judging those who belong, as we arrogantly term it, to the inferior races. Our faults may not be theirs; theirs not exactly ours. But simple fairness demands that we should look at home before sitting in severe judgment upon them.

To return from this digression. The missionaries' difficulty in Samoa was not in overthrowing idolatry, not in bringing people quickly to see the vast superiority of Christianity to fetichism; not even in making public worship a delight, not in securing the punctilious observance of the Sabbath, but in building them up in Christian knowledge and Christian life, and in helping them to conquer the evil traditions, sentiments, tendencies, and habits which ages of sensuality, indolence, strife, and untruthfulness had engendered.

With much tact, tenderness, and yet with whole-hearted consecration did they give themselves to this task, and for half a century they have continued their efforts. The six brethren despatched in 1835 were reinforced by three more in 1838, one of whom was a printer, and another a normal schoolmaster. In a tropical mission station changes in the staff are frequent, and many who are sent out are compelled, from failure of health and similar causes, to retire from the field. Since the London Missionary Society commenced operations in Samoa it has sent out nearly forty different missionaries and as many wives. To select names from such a roll-call is somewhat invidious, but those of Murray, Pratt, Drummond, Turner, Nisbet, and Powell certainly deserve special mention, as men who, by long-continued service and marked ability, contributed largely to the shaping and to the success of the work. Once firmly established, the mission was carried on in a systematic manner. The islands were divided into districts. Dwelling-houses were erected in suitable centres, and the work of superintending the native congregations carried on with as much regularity and orderly method as possible. Making allowance for breakdowns, the effective staff usually numbered from ten to twelve, though it has reached fourteen. By methodical superintendence of their districts, by constant teaching and preaching, by efforts to influence for good both the young and those of riper years, the Samoan missionaries faithfully strove to mould the islanders into a vigorous and intelligent Christian community.

In two directions they made special efforts. The first was in providing their converts with an accurate yet idiomatic version of the Word of God. As soon as a sufficient knowledge of the vernacular had been acquired, it was reduced to writing by means of the Roman alphabet. Primers and other lesson-books, a grammar and dictionary, were prepared and printed. Then,

with as little delay as possible, the onerous task of translating the Scriptures was undertaken. A beginning was made with the New Testament. Book by book this was translated and issued to the Samoans, who from the very first were trained to purchase the Scriptures with their own money. The New Testament completed, the Psalms followed, and at various intervals, the remaining books of the Old Testament, until the Book of books was finished. Since then, from time to time, that early translation has been assiduously revised and perfected, until at length an edition has been secured which possesses the full confidence of those best fitted to appraise its correctness and has been stereotyped. Furnished with marginal readings, bound in calf, and ornamented with gilt edges, the Samoan Bible is an object of pride to both missionaries and natives. Some twenty other books—commentaries and educational manuals—are also in the hands of the people, besides a large number of pamphlets and tracts.

Another similarly energetic and successful effort was made in training native preachers and teachers. Young Tahitians, as previously narrated, were the first to labour in Samoa, and prior to the settlement of English missionaries, had gathered large congregations together. Nor did the Samoans themselves lose much time in exercising their national gifts. As a race, they were fond of talking; and whether properly equipped for the office of a preacher or not, were quite ready to undertake it. The missionaries gladly recognised the power, but as prudent men saw that this must be controlled and guided. Two hundred villages looked to them for instruction, and the plan they adopted was to select a preacher and teacher from their most intelligent church members and appoint him to the charge of one of these villages. The missionary kept his eye on the preachers, had classes with them, gave them their instructions, and supervised their work. Even the sermons the men preached were to a large extent furnished by the missionary of the district.

But something of a more permanent and more efficient character was soon felt to be necessary, and in 1844, the Revs. Chas. Hardie, and George Turner, were selected to establish and carry on a missionary seminary at Malua, a picturesque spot in the island of Upolu. In 1855, Mr. Hardie retired from mission service, and first Mr. Murray, then Mr. Stallworthy, and subsequently Mr. Nisbet were associated with Mr. (now Dr.) Turner. The latter maintained an unbroken connection with the Seminary until 1882, when he withdrew from active labour in the field, and

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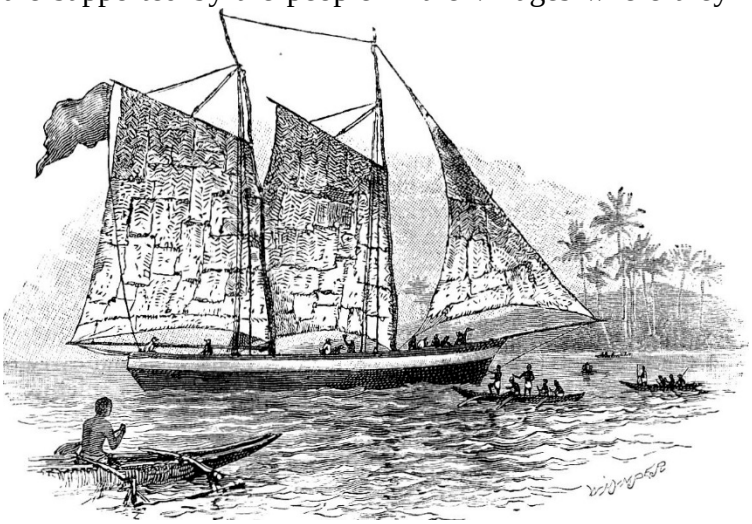
its prosperity is largely due to his unwearying devotion and toil. Malua in its early days was an imposing settlement. How much more so now! It consists of an estate of three hundred acres, on which there are twenty-two stone cottages arranged like houses in a barrack square, also five-and-twenty other cottages, two stone houses for the tutors, and a class-room sixty feet by thirty feet. The surrounding land is cultivated by the students, who usually number a hundred, and the institution thus made self-supporting. By setting apart one day in the week as an “industrial day,” the cottages have been built by the students themselves; they are kept in repair, all necessary furniture is made, food for the entire settlement is cultivated, and the property, which has become very valuable, maintained in good order and condition. Many of the students are married, and have their wives with them. A four years' course of instruction is given, and an average of twenty students per annum are sent forth to fill the vacancies in the Samoan pastorate and mission stations, caused by death, infirmity, and old age. Besides the students proper, there is a kind of high-school for youths, which serves as a feeder to the Seminary. Many of the pupils subsequently become students, in which case, they are eight years under tuition.

This Malua institution, so admirably arranged, and so ably conducted, has proved a great blessing alike to the group and to distant islands. The general results achieved were summarised by Dr. Turner at the Missionary Conference, held in London last June, in these words:-

"Of these students of former days, many are dead, a number have retired from active service, some have become local governors, magistrates, secretaries, or are otherwise in official or commercial service, and upwards of two hundred are now ordained native pastors. We call them Pastors, and not Reverends, and so distinguish them from the European Missionary. These Samoan pastors preach, and manage church affairs, they have boarding and general schools, and are supported by the people in the villages where they labour. They have the oversight of six thousand church members, and congregations, embracing over twenty-five thousand, all in Samoa. In the sixteen out-station islands, from two hundred to two thousand miles to the northwest of Samoa" (the Ellice, Tokelau and Gilbert groups), "our native pastors have the care of two thousand five hundred church members, and of a population exceeding ten thousand; and farther still, while the better qualified and ordained native agency has increased, our European staff of missionaries has decreased from fourteen to seven; and the time may not be far distant when little more European help may be needed for the group and its out-stations, beyond a well-sustained institution at Malua. And thus we think, that the problem has, there at least, been fairly solved, of a self-supporting educational institution."



The Messenger of Peace

But mission work in Samoa is not exclusively in the hands of the London Missionary Society. The Wesleyans have agents there, and the Roman Catholics are present in strong force—Marist fathers and a staff of Sisters. Wesleyan native teachers from the island of Tonga found their way to Samoa when it was first emerging from heathen darkness, and in response to the appeals of these Tongan teachers English missionaries of the same faith and order were appointed to join them. After a time, however, they retired, leaving the group to the London Society. But when the Australasian Conference became an independent organisation, other counsels prevailed, and missionaries were once more sent out, and they are there to this day, working on similar lines to those of the other Protestant Society. The superintendence of churches and schools is carried on with vigour, and in the District Training Institution there are about forty students training for the ministry. The Marists entered the field in 1845. They have erected numerous handsome churches, conspicuous among them the church at Apia, have established schools, convents, and a college. A large number of girls have received an excellent education in the convent school at Apia, and several have taken the vows and been admitted to the Sisterhood.

Sometimes the Roman Catholic and Protestant chapels are seen side by side. This is the case in Leone. The Roman Catholic church is after the European model. Its white spire rises from the centre of the town, and is a landmark visible at a great distance. Close beside it stands a large

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London Missionary Society chapel, built on the model of a native house, the only difference being that, instead of posts and cocoanut blinds for walls, you see stone and mortar. In " My Consulate in Samoa," Mr. Churchward describes at con-

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siderable length an imposing Romanist function which he had witnessed, and expresses his astonishment, that with all that splendid parade, so dear to the hearts of the natives and so continually before them, the entire group does not become Roman Catholic. And yet, as he adds, they do not. The Romanists number but one-fifth of the population, he says, and do not increase. Is the reason so far to seek after all? Whatever the weaknesses of Samoan Christianity may be, its deficiencies are certainly not in the direction of ignorance of the Bible; and when, we should like to know, have a people who were rooted and grounded in the Scriptures ever turned from the open Bible to embrace the ceremonies and forms of Romanism?

About 5000 Samoans are under the care of the Wesleyans, a similar number under that of the Romanists, the remaining 25,000 under the London Missionary Society. It is computed that, since the mission was founded, upwards of six thousand have died believing in Christ. An equal number are earnestly following after Christ to-day. There are day-schools with 4289 boys and 3590 girls in attendance, Sunday-schools with an aggregate of 6583 scholars. Prayer-meetings and Bible classes are constantly held. It is said that you could hardly find one house in twenty in which there is not a copy of the Word of God, and in which family worship is not conducted every day of the week; and Mr. Albert Spicer, the Treasurer of the London. Missionary Society, who recently visited Samoa as one of a special deputation, tells us that the young people of those islands are better acquainted with the Bible than the average scholar in an English Sunday-school. Finally the Samoan Christians generously contribute to the maintenance of their own church organisations, and also raise a sum of above £1200 a year as contributions to the Missionary Society. In contemplating such fruits of toil there is abundant reason for thanksgiving and good cheer. “What hath God wrought!” are the words that fly to one's thoughts.
