

A MISSIONARY AMONG CANNIBALS.

The group of islands in Western Polynesia called the New Hebrides, about thirty in number, were inhabited less than forty years ago by naked and savage cannibals. In 1848 Rev. John Geddie, who had been a minister in Nova Scotia, but whose heart had long been on fire with desire to preach the gospel to the heathen, went to Aneiteum, the most southerly of the islands, to commence a mission. The life of Dr. Geddie, entitled *Missionary Life Among the Cannibals*, prepared by Dr. George Patterson, has just been issued, and is so full of interest that we wish all could read it.

The natives of Aneiteum in their heathen state, as Dr. Geddie found them in 1848, were naked, commonly painting the face either black or red. They were selfish, treacherous, and lying. They were great thieves, and would teach their children to steal. They were corrupt in every way. The most fearful cruelty would cause no remark among them. Revenge for any wrong was considered a duty. Cannibalism was common, and on one island it was said there were no children because the chief had eaten them all up. Women were slaves, and did all the hard work. Of course there were no homes, and children grew up without paying any honor to parents.

When Dr. Geddie arrived at Aneiteum, every woman on the island wore around her neck a stout cord, by which, with a moderate pull, she could be strangled to death: for whenever a man died, one or more of his wives was strangled. The notion seemed to be that his spirit would need some company. Time after time, in the early years of his labors, did Dr. Geddie try to stop this horrid practice. In some cases he succeeded, and at other times he was obliged to stand and look on while the sons of a man who had just breathed his last would strangle their own mother. One of the strangest things about this strangling was that the wives themselves generally insisted upon being

put to death. One case is recorded, happening after some of the people had become Christians, of a woman who savagely bit a man who was trying to save her from strangulation, demanding that they put her to death.

It was in November, 1848, that Mr. and Mrs. Geddie landed on Aneiteum, and the people were not at all glad to see them. The evil conduct of many traders who had come to the island had led the natives to dread foreigners. They had yet to learn how different was the errand on which the missionaries came. Mr. Geddie used to say that the first person on the island who ever asked him to conduct a service was a little boy who one day said, as he put his hand to his forehead and covered his eyes, "Come, let us do so." So the lad gathered other boys, and the service was held. This boy afterwards became a teacher.

Left alone with his wife upon an island fifteen hundred miles from the nearest missionary station, Mr. Geddie's position for two or three years was not only a very trying one, but full of peril. The natives often threatened to kill him. But little by little he won their confidence. The second year some of them began to pray, and sometimes forty or fifty would be present at the Sabbath service. At the end of the fourth year he had not only learned the language himself but reduced it to writing, and hundreds of the natives had been taught to read, and hundreds more were in school. Nearly half the population of the island, numbering about four thousand souls, attended Christian services.

The years that followed were marked by great growth. The people ceased to fight each other. Instead of being thieves, everything was safe, without lock or key. Churches were built, and were filled with decent and happy worshipers.

The missionary work was carried on not alone on Aneiteum. The other islands of the group were visited, and within twelve years from the time Mr. Geddie landed, twenty native teachers had been sent from Aneiteum to Tana, Erromanga, Fate, and