

World of Missions

Unhappy Madagascar.

Lovers of justice grieved over the French seizure of Madagascar a few years since. Friends of missions felt grave forebodings as to the results of Catholic rule in an island won for Christ at the cost of many martyrs' lives. Because of its history the country commands the sympathy of Christ's followers everywhere.

Events speedily began to justify the fears entertained. The exiling of the queen came soon. Lately attention has been drawn to other quarters of the globe, and Madagascar has largely been forgotten. The situation, however, has not been bettered. From French authorities it appears that matters have been growing worse. The French conquest is not completed. On the contrary, in three years the conquerors have been losing much ground; the natives offer a determined resistance; and the struggle still goes on. British traders have been driven out, and the conditions are so uninviting that French vacancies are not coming forward to fill the vacancies; indeed, their hold on what they had seems to be weakening. For France the venture thus far has been one costly in men and money, with meagre returns.

The results to the islanders are more disastrous. Before the French seized the country it was said by travelers that never in any land were life and property safer than in the parts under rule of the Hovas. Losses by merchants were almost unknown. Warfare has been having its natural consequences. A spirit of barbarism has been showing itself. Stealing and murder are common, and travelling without due protection is unsafe.

The religion of the people has been an object of attack. The Catholics among the natives have been estimated at 50,000, the Protestants at nine times that number. But attempts have been made to frighten the Protestants into changing their faith, and their church property is seized for Catholic uses. In their time of trial they surely should have the prayers of the Christian church everywhere that the fruits of victories already won among them may not be lost under the rule of a power nominally Christian.

"Hook Swinging Ceremony."

The Rev. Joshua Knowles, in an article in the "Wide World Magazine," gives a graphic description of this strange and awful pagan rite which is still practised in that country, in spite of efforts to stop it. Mr. Knowles goes on to say: "The pain these devotees go through for the honor and glory of their god is intense. They generally take drugs and intoxicants beforehand, but, in any case, the passing of a large hook through the sinews of the back must be accompanied with excruciating agony."

I wandered about among the crowd for some time giving away handbills and conversing with the people, but they were so excited that I fear, from a missionary point of view, I made but little impression on them. Yes, they said, Christianity was good, but—what did I think of the festival? One and all were full of high expectation.

Presently I heard loud reports as of fire-arms; and going in the direction I found they proceeded from small mortars filled with gun powder. Anyone could pay for mortars being let off, and with the report his sins flew away! So the people said. Soon followed the beating of tom-toms, the screeching of native flutes, the shouts of the crowds. The canopied end of the long beam was lowered. The devotee lay prone on the ground below the end of the beam, and was fastened to the beam by means of ropes passing under his arms and round his chest. To some of the ropes iron hooks were fastened. The priests took hold of the fleshy part of the man's back, squeezed up the flesh, and fastened the iron hooks into it. Some four hooks at least were put through the flesh. A rudely fashioned native sword and shield were then given to the man. Then, whilst the people shouted, the rope fastened to the other end of the long beam was pulled down and the man swung upward into the air, waving the sword and shield and making convulsive movements with his legs as if dancing in the air. With shouts and cries, loud beating of tom-toms, and screaming flutes, the people took hold of the long cable ropes, and strained and tugged till the car moved forward. The place was very sandy; the wheels sank into the sand, so that the work was heavy. Slowly, but surely, however, the people dragged the car round the temple, a distance not quite as far as round St. Paul's Cathedral. Some of the men were suspended while the car was dragged round three or four times. I should think that from the time the hooks were put in till they were taken out half an hour passed.

Finally, the devotee was lowered to the ground, the ropes unfastened, and the hooks taken out of the flesh. I managed to secure one of the hooks—in fact, I assisted in taking it out of the man's back.

Nine persons out of ten attribute the well known expression, "Man proposes, but God disposes," to the Bible, but it was the good Thomas A. Kempis who said it in his "Imitation of Christ." Another often-used expression is "Comparisons are odious." This is properly, so far as English literature is concerned, attributed to John Fortescue, who flourished in the middle of the fifteenth century, but we find it in Cervantes, Marlowe, Burton and Herbert, while Heywood has it among his proverbs. Shakespeare in his "Much Ado About Nothing" paraphrased it into "Comparisons are odorous," and in this form the saying has almost as much currency as in the original. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is generally thought to be a text from the Bible. And in substance it is, for King Solomon said, "He that spareth the rod hateth his son," but it is found in Butler's "Hudibras" in the neater form in which it is usually quoted.—John Gilmer Speed, in the August Woman's Home Companion.

No one can ever become quite solitary, quite poor, quite miserable, who can truly say, "Lord, if only I have thee." That is just the time when God makes his consolation most gratifying and abundant, when we, through distress of body and soul, have turned from all temporal things to him, and have learned that royal, over-shadowing "only thee."—Theodore Christlieb.

The Loyalty Islands.

The story of the introduction of the Gospel among these wild and degraded tribes is one of those romances of mission work of which the South Seas have furnished so many. Mare was the first island of the group to receive the Christian teachers. In 1841 the missionary brig Camden visited the island, and cruised along the shore in the hopes of getting into communication with the people but not a canoe or sign of life appeared, and the coast was too wild and forbidding for a sailing vessel to approach too near. Ultimately, the Rev. A. W. Murray left the vessel in a ship's boat, and rowed in near the beach. After a while a canoe was seen approaching, in which was seen a native, who shouted, "I know the true God." It turned out that this man was a native of Tonga, who, with several companions, had been blown away from their own island several years before after the Gospel had been introduced among their people. They must have drifted fully 600 miles before they found a landing on Mare. The man was in favor with the chiefs, and had gained great influence among the people. Now he was prepared to befriend the teachers, and act as interpreter. Thus an entrance was obtained among the people in a most unexpected way, and two Samoan teachers were left among them, who were the first of a band who did splendid service. When at length European missionaries were located at Mare, in 1854, it was found that, notwithstanding bitter hostility on the part of the heathen, notwithstanding, also, horrible cruelties perpetrated by European traders and sailors who had visited the island for sandal-wood half the population, i.e., about 4,000 had given up heathenism and placed themselves under instruction—"Sunday at Home."

"Go into all the world"—this is the message. The climax of Christ's word upon the earth:

And to fulfill this royal proclamation
The Church of Christ had its prophetic birth.

Central African's Going to Church.

During the first few years, says the Central African Gazette of a recent date, there has been a great change in Northern Ngoniland, which is well shown by the following extracts from a letter from the Rev. Dr. Laws, speaking of a recent visit he paid to that country:—"In Ngoniland there was a great gathering and the contrast between the old days and now was to me marvellous. Services had begun on the Wednesday; we arrived on Friday. Next day 399 adults were baptised, many with old scars of spear, knobkerrie, or bullet, but now, so far as human eye can see, striving after better lives. On Saturday there were 672 communicants, black and white, and 6,661 were counted retiring from the enclosure where the services were held, and several hundreds had already left, unable to hear. In the native church collection there were 1,768 coins, amounting to £4 2s 5 1/4d; besides one goat, 86 fowls, nine hoes, 42 knives, 52 axes, 23 bracelets, 21 rings, garden produce, etc., etc. To my surprise I found that there are between twenty and thirty miles of roads now in Ngoniland; and for one the mission has made, the natives have made three. Some of these are from six to nine feet wide, and the engineering not always of the best, but as the free labor of the Ngoni seeking to better themselves it certainly did surprise me. There are still some of the old fellows left, but their power for evil is waning, and the younger men from the schools are making their influence felt on the side of righteousness and progress. Our fear is that it may become fashionable to be a Christian, and hypocrisy play havoc with truth."