

has been sweeping the natives of other islands into the grave by thousands. It has spread over the whole of this island, and several hundreds of the natives have already died of it. At the time when the disease broke out twenty-one natives were living on our premises, and seven of that number have died. About the same proportion of the people in the district in which we reside have died also. The rate of mortality in other parts of the island has been in some instances less, and others more. There can be but little doubt that the disease will carry off one-third of the population, perhaps more. Very few die of the measles, it is the severe dysentery which proves so fatal. It would be difficult and painful to describe the distress and suffering which the sickness has caused. When it enters a place the whole community is soon laid prostrate, so that the sick can receive but little attention. Many who might otherwise recover, die from want of food. They cannot go to their plantations for it and cook it, and there are few who can do this for them. It is with great difficulty that the dead can be buried, and this duty is often performed by persons on the verge of the grave themselves. Mrs. Geddie's strength and my own has been severely tested in waiting on the sick and dying, and in doing what we could to alleviate their sufferings. Our own dear little girl had the sickness in common with others, and she was brought so low with dysentery that we had no hope of her recovery, but God has spared her to us. Missionary work is in a great measure suspended at present. Six of my best teachers have died already, and others are very ill. It is sad indeed to see so many of the poor natives, whom we love almost as if they were our own children, cut off so suddenly and in such numbers around us. Many who were our earliest and warmest friends, and who endured along with us the first trials of the mission, are no more, and it seems as if we would be left to labour among a new generation. I can give you but little information about the death-bed experience of many who have died, but, if we are to judge of them from their lives, I have reason to hope that not a few are now in heaven. The mortality has been greatest among persons in the prime of life, while many of the old and young have been spared. It is probable that two or three months will elapse before the sickness entirely disappears on the island. The disease was at New Caledonia, Mare, Lifu and Wea before it came to this island, and its ravages are said to have been even greater in these places than here. It is now on Tana, Erromanga, Fate, and we have reason to think on Fotuna also.

BURNING OF THE NEW CHURCH AND THE SCHOOLHOUSE.

The next calamity which I have to mention is the burning of our new church and schoolhouse. They were destroyed by fire one night last month, and we are now sure that this was the work of an incendiary. The schoolhouse was first observed to be on fire, and being near the church the latter building could not be saved. After the fire broke out the captain and crew of a vessel lying in the harbour at the time, two white men belonging to one of the sandal wood establishments on the island, and such natives as were able to leave their houses, were soon on the spot, but all that could be done was to save the stone walls of the church. When the thatch was burnt on it we succeeded in putting away the framework of the roof, so that the stonework was not injured by the heat. The floor being plastered and covered with mats, there was but little combustible matter inside to burn. In the schoolhouse there was property of considerable value destroyed, among which were three boxes belonging to Mr. Johnston, the sails of the *Joh Knox*, and boards which the natives had saved for the missionaries on the other islands. We were altogether unprepared for such an event as this, and many of the natives from a distance would not believe it until they came and witnessed the scene of desolation with their own eyes. The impression made on their minds by the burning of the church seems to be much greater than even that made by the sickness.

No investigation of the matter will take place at present. But as soon as the public health is restored there will be a meeting of all the chiefs on the island. Every effort will then be made to discover the incendiary and punish the crime. Some of the chiefs are resolved on capital punishment, but great as is the crime I must oppose so dreadful a penalty. But by whom was the church burnt? Suspicion at present falls on a small party of natives who live in our neighbourhood,