

MOURNING CUSTOMS.

An account of their lamentations over William may stand as representative of their mourning over the death of any leading man or woman amongst them. But, of course, the grief over the death of a woman is never so great as over that of a man.

On that Thursday night above referred to, we were awakened from sleep near midnight by the loud cry of men as if in agony; the house of the deceased was about a quarter of a mile from the station; but so loud was their howling that we thought that it issued from our yard. On enquiring for whom the cry was, we were told that William was dead. We knew well that some one had breathed his last, for their cry when once heard is not soon forgotten, and we heard it many a time before. They kept up this loud wail all night and with very little intermission until we buried him at noon the next day.

After sunrise I went to the house of mourning. The corpse was dressed in a gray print shirt, white trousers and a red sash tied around the waist, and laid out on a clean mat under a shady tree. The women were sitting around the body in a circle, as closely to it as they could, and beating the mat with their open palms and chanting all the good conduct and lovely traits that had characterized his life. They were the very picture of grief itself, having been assembled for five or six hours and crying all this time. While the women were thus engaged around the corpse, the men were standing and sitting around in the background and alternately howling in the loudest strain. It was this loud wail of the men that awakened us and kept us awake through the night.

When I reflected, as I had ample time to do while lying sleepless in bed, on the facts the new census revealed, that eighty times this dismal wail had resounded through these forests since Mr. Inglis had left, and that only thirty-one had been born within that period, it seemed to me to be the death-wail for the Aneityumese as a people and a race. However we may yet see the facts revealed by the census, reversed in a few years. While there is life there is hope, may be as true of a people as a person.

RITES OF BURIAL.

Our burial rites here are much as at home, having all been introduced by the missionaries, the people being accustomed in their heathen days to throw the bodies into the sea. A man or woman of rank is honoured with a rude coffin, usually made from an old canoe, while children and those of little worth are rolled up in a mat and put into the ground. While we were on the other side of the island a little girl was burned to death while playing with fire.

She had kindled several little fires in the grass and was amusing herself in trying how near she dare run to them, when her grass skirt caught fire, and every particle of clothing she had on was burnt off her. She lived till the next day, the greater part of the time in agony.

Since coming home, one of our best friends and leading men died quite suddenly. He was a teacher and the leading man in his encampment. The older and more reliable class of these people are dropping off. However, Waihit, the first Christian native of the New Hebrides is still living hale and hearty. You will well remember what a friend he proved to your first missionary in the earlier stages of this mission. There are many names here yet who were prominent men twenty-five years ago. May they be spared us at least until we have others fully qualified to take their places.

If I remember rightly I think that I said in my last letter to you that we expected a small crop of arrowroot this year, but I am happy now to be able to inform you that we have exceeded our contributions of last year. I have now ready for shipment by the 'Dayspring' seventeen casks, 3465 lbs. The quantities from the respective sides of the isle are, Aname 1870 lbs., and Anelcaulat 1595 lbs. Compared with last year Aname has fallen off 141 lbs. while our side has exceeded that of last year by 285 lbs.

Total this year from whole island, 3465.

Total last year.....3321 lbs.

PAYMENT FOR BIBLE.

We are still giving all we raise to meet the expenses of the new Bible or rather the Old Testament,—the first instalment of which should reach us next year being the second volume which is going through the press first. It comprises Job and all the rest of the books to Malachi. When we have our Bibles all paid for we hope to do something for the spread of the Gospel in other isles or help to support ourselves.

Four of our lands have done admirably this year at the arrowroot. These four not above the average in population have contributed four casks or a cask each; while in another direction the people of ten lands have only filled one cask amongst them all. One of the above four lands of only twenty-two souls, men, women, and children has given us 213 lbs., or what will yield about nine shillings sterling for every one of them. All the usual voluntary labor has been performed about the station as heretofore. Our cases of discipline are fewer than those of last year; so we see some reason to be hopeful and persevering in our work.