

Letter from Rev. Thos. Neilson, Jun.

"DAYSPRING"—ANNUAL MEETING—APPOINTMENT TO TANNA—HOPEFULNESS, ETC

ANEITEUM, NEW HEBRIDES, }
September 17th 1867. }

Rev. and Dear Sir,—I wrote you last in the month of July from Fomina New Caledonia, on board the *Dayspring*, and received your welcome letter on 29th August, on the arrival of the vessel here, bringing the missionaries to the Annual Meeting. Mr. M'Farlane came with me from Lifu, in order to be present at our Annual Meeting, chiefly for the purpose of making arrangements for the support and sailing of the vessel. Mr. Inglis goes with him to attend their Annual Meeting, which takes place at Uea in a week or two. We wish, now that the *John Williams*, is lost, to manage all the mission work in Western Polynesia by the *Dayspring*; and if the Loyalty brethren raise £300 or £400 a-year, I think we shall see the way plain to her support. She is going to be a much more expensive vessel than was at first supposed. Our annual charges will amount to £1700 or £1800, with an additional £400 or £500 every fifth year for coppering. The only way that I know of for making her expense less is to send out more missionaries, and then, instead of the annual charge for her support being almost £200 a-head for every man in the field, it will be proportionally reduced.

Our annual Meeting took place here on the first week of this month, beginning on the morning of Tuesday, the 3d, and ending on the evening of Saturday, the 7th, so you see we have had a pretty long time of it; and I daresay if you had been present, you would have thought that our debates were as keen, and, perhaps, as ably conducted, as those in the Synod at home. The most important matter to me was, of course, my appointment to Port Resolution, Tanna. It came about in this way:—Last year I was appointed to Havannah harbour, Teahè. But on going there in the vessel it was found that the chief of the only village where it was possible for a missionary then to settle, was not in the humour for receiving us, so there was nothing for it but remaining on Aneiteum during the last rainy season, and I brought a couple with me from Teahè for the purpose of learning the language from them, with a view to my settlement this year. The *Dayspring*, however, on her last voyage to the north, brought word that the people of Mèl had murdered the crew of a vessel, and pillaged her; this rendered it dangerous for white men to live in the vicinity until this outrage should be punished. At the same time a vessel arrived from Tanna, having

on board Nawa (the principal chief at Port Resolution), and a number of natives, who expressed themselves willing to receive a missionary. In these circumstances I was then (in the end of December) recommended to devote my attention to the study of the Tannese language, with a view to my settlement there. The matter was brought up before the Annual Meeting by the reading of this minute, and by my requesting that my appointment should be reconsidered. On this being agreed upon, I expressed a decided preference for Port Resolution, to which station I was finally appointed.

The *Dayspring* is away north, landing the missionaries on their various islands, and on her return here, which we expect in a day or two, she will take on board Mr. Inglis and Mr. M'Farlane for the Loyalty Islands, and Dr. Geddie and myself for Tanna. She will leave us, on her way, with the frame of a house, and some natives to put it up. She will call again to bring back the natives, and in the end of the year to bring over Mrs. Neilson and the baby. On the 3d of September, last year, the first land that I saw in these seas was the island of Tanna, rising up in lofty peaks to the sky. On the 4th of September, this year, a year and a day afterwards, I was appointed to Tanna as my sphere of labour.

Thirteen years ago the first native preachers from Aneiteum were settled on Tanna—my wife, then a little girl on her way home to school in England, acting as interpreter for the London Missionary Society's missionaries in their settlement.

It is now twenty-five years since Messrs Turner and Nisbet were settled on Tanna, and it does not seem any more inviting for the Gospel now than it was then. God only knows what success may attend the present attempt again to plant the standard of the Cross on that dark island. We make it at least in humble dependence on Him who holdeth the hearts of all men in His hands, entreating that you who are far away may sustain us by your fervent prayers, that this dark island, perhaps the most beautiful in the group, on which so many efforts have been put forth, and put forth almost in vain, may now at least be won for Christ. The Tannese seem to me to be an active and energetic race, beyond the average of natives in these seas; and the very fact that missionary enterprise has hitherto been so unsuccessful on this island, instead of discouraging the Church at home, ought to nerve her to put forth still more vigorous efforts on its behalf; for if the natives of Tanna embrace Christianity, it will not be long ere we have a band of native teachers fit to carry the glad tidings to all the islands of the New Hebrides, and even beyond them.