

BOYS AND GIRLS

John Geddie.

(By the Rev. Alfred Gandier, M.A., B.D., Halifax, in 'The Westminster.'

In turning our attention to the growing passion of the Church for world-wide evangelization, we at once call to mind certain men who were the fathers and founders of the present foreign missionary movement. We think of Ziegenbalg, Schwartz and Zinzendorf on the Continent, of Carey in England, of Brainerd and Judson in America, and of Geddie in Nova Scotia. Perhaps no one of these men had greater obstacles to overcome, or, on the whole, accomplished a greater work, than did John Geddie, pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides, and first representative of a colonial church in the foreign field.

John Geddie was born at Banff, Scotland, on April 10, 1815. His father, after whom he was named, was a man of deep religious life and missionary zeal. A clockmaker by trade, he at one time had as apprentice a lad named James Morrison, who afterwards became an influential minister in London, and was for many years a director of the London Missionary Society. His mother was Mary Menzies, of a pious Secession family who lived on the banks of the Deveron, about seven miles from Banff, and it is worthy of note that Milne, afterward missionary to China, lived for a time as farm servant in her father's house.

When their son, John, was but a few days old he was taken with an illness so severe that life was despaired of; and then, as the parents besought the Lord for the life of the child, they together vowed that, if he were spared to them, they would devote him to the service of the God of missions to work among the heathen. The parents did not tell the son of this solemn dedication and he knew it not until after he had chosen his life work and was appointed to the South Seas. And who will say that the parental vow and the missionary tidings with which Dr. Morrison kept the Geddies' home supplied were not responsible for the desire that awoke in the boy's mind at an early age to go abroad with the message of salvation to those who had not heard it?

When John was but a year old his parents migrated to Pictou, Nova Scotia. He received his education at the Pictou grammar school and academy, and afterwards studied theology under Dr. Thomas McCulloch. As a boy he gave little indication of the courage, daring, and ability that he was yet to manifest. Says his biographer, 'Seldom has a more timid, shrinking little creature been thrown into the work and play of a public school.' He showed little inclination for those rougher sports of his companions which involved severe physical effort. His school-fellows were fond of him, but looked upon him in a half-condescending sort of way, and thought and spoke of him as 'little Johnnie Geddie.'

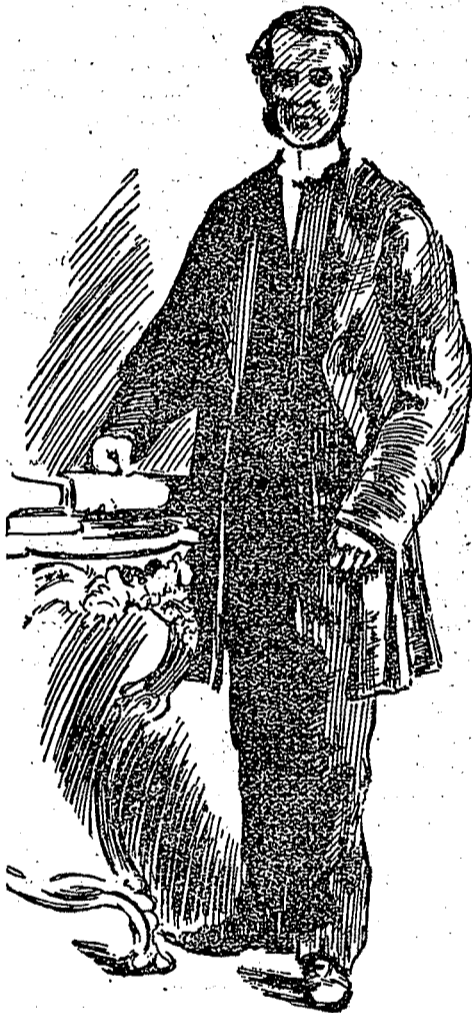
'Shrinking from the rougher play of the boys outside the school, and cowering before the glance of the master within,' he was not the boy we would expect to be the father of the man, who, with wife and little children braved the dangers of unknown seas, made his home in a far island of the Pacific amongst the fiercest cannibal savages, and more than once flung himself alone and unarmed between opposing warriors to stay the rage of battle.

But things are not always what they seem. The lad had a frame wiry and enduring, a purpose resolute and determined,

a courage born not of the flesh but of the Spirit.

There was nothing especially remarkable about his career either in academy or college, nothing to indicate ability beyond the average. But in the mind and heart of 'little Johnnie Geddie' there was a great thought; and great thoughts—not brilliant scholarship and surface cleverness—make great men. It is by thinking the thoughts of God that men become great, and early in the life of John Geddie, even before he was licensed to preach, which took place when he was just twenty-two years of age, a thought from God had possessed his mind—a thought new and startling to his contemporaries.

When Geddie was licensed, in 1837, it is not likely that there was a minister in the



REV. JOHN GEDDIE,
Pioneer Missionary to the New Hebrides.

provinces who did not believe it to be the Church's duty to evangelize the world. But the idea of a colonial church, just struggling into existence, itself in need of men and money, undertaking a mission of its own to some heathen land, seems to have entered no mind but that of Geddie. To him first came the thought, evidently inspired of God, that no church, however small, however hampered, for lack of ministers to fill its home fields, has any right to consider itself a true Church of Christ until it undertakes upon its own responsibility some work among those who have not yet heard the gospel.

The most important service rendered by Mr. Geddie to the Church of Christ was not the work which he himself afterward accomplished in the New Hebrides, grand and glorious as this was, but his emphasizing the idea that not merely the mother churches, but colonial churches, struggling for a foothold in new lands, ought to engage directly in foreign mission work; and his

proving that they could do so through the action of his own Church.

Nothing better reveals the greatness of this humble-minded man, and the power of the truth which possessed his mind, than the fact that he, a young man, with no position of influence in the Church, with reason, common sense, and the interests of the Church at home, apparently against him, in a few years succeeded in leading a majority of the synod to think as he did.

The Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia with which Mr. Geddie was connected, consisted at that time of thirty congregations, small and poor. There was but little money in circulation. The stipends of the ministers were small, mostly paid in produce and always in arrears. There were home mission fields all about, for which the Church had neither men nor money. A sufficient supply of ministers could not be obtained from Scotland, and money was greatly needed to equip a college for the training of a native ministry. Was it not folly to talk of supporting a foreign missionary when but few congregations seemed able to pay their own ministers? Why send men away when they are so much needed at home, and why spend money in sending men away that ought to be spent in training men for the needy fields at home?

It would be difficult to tell how many times the words 'beginning at Jerusalem' and 'charity begins at home' were flung at Geddie. But he was ready to meet all objections that could be urged. He argued that instead of a foreign mission injuring any home interest it would promote them all—that while in natural economics saving was acquiring, and spending involved losing, in spiritual economics the reverse held: 'There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.' He held that the backward state of things at home might be the result of this not looking more to interests abroad, and that a wider beneficence that looked to the interests of those beyond would be returned in rich blessing upon the Church in all her measures at home.

Settled as pastor of Cavendish and New London, his influence was soon felt throughout the whole of Prince Edward Island, and in July, 1843, that presbytery presented an overture to the synod, One year later the victory was won. The little synod of less than thirty ministers all told, which met at Pictou in the summer of 1844, decided to enter upon foreign mission work and appointed a committee. In 1845 it was decided to establish a mission somewhere in the South Seas—New Hebrides or New Caledonia group—and John Geddie was appointed first missionary.

On Nov. 30, 1846, Mr. and Mrs. Geddie sailed from Halifax, the first foreign missionaries to be sent forth on the sole responsibility of a colonial church. Dr. Belcher, a Baptist, who was present at the farewell meeting, said that the circumstance of a church in so young and so poor a country undertaking a mission to the heathen was, he believed, unparalleled in the history of the Christian Church.

In those days to travel from Nova Scotia to the New Hebrides meant time, toil, and exposure to countless hardships and perils. No railways crossed the continent, nor did swift steamships plough the waters of the Pacific. 'Eight tempestuous days were spent between Halifax and Boston. In