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"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget its cunning."—Ps. 137, v. 5,

SERMON.

THE DARK PLACES OF THE EARTH.

BY

THE REV. JOHN INGLIS,
MISSIONARY, ANEITYUM.

(Preached in 1862, before the Synod of the
Reformed Pres. Church of Scotland.)

PSALM LXXIV. 20.—"Have respect unto the covenant. for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitants of cruelty."

THE psalm, of which our text is a part, was evidently composed after the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the carrying away of the captives into Babylon. It is not written by Jeremiah, it was evidently suggested by the same scenes of woe and suffering, which called forth his sad and plaintive lamentations. It was, no doubt, written to sustain the faith and patience of the suffering remnant in captivity, by directing their minds to never-failing sources of comfort, in their covenant relation to the God of their fathers. The writer of the psalm directs their minds from the dark cloud of divine displeasure, to the silver lining on its edge, indicating light and hope beyond; he recalls their attention from the black thunderstorm of divine vengeance that has passed over them, to the rainbow of the covenant that was now spanning the heavens; he directs them to look not only at the dispensations of God's providence, so dark, mysterious and trying; but also at the promises of his covenant, so clear, consoling and unchangeable. He fills their mouth with arguments, and instructs them how to plead effectually with God, not to cast them off in this day of their calamity.

The words of the text sum up the argument contained in the whole psalm. "Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitants of cruelty." The dark places of the earth here are generally interpreted to mean places of ignorance; and they may be understood as referring to those organized systems of ignorance and idolatry, of which Babylon was, at the time, the most formidable and oppressive.

Interpreted in this way, we have here a brief but graphic description of heathenism, ancient and modern: its *condition*, its *character*, and the *remedy* which God has provided for its overthrow. We have first its *condition*—dark; 2d, its *character*—cruel; and 3d, the *remedy*—God's covenant. In all these essential features, ancient and modern heathenism are the same: both are *dark* and *cruel*, and the *remedy* for both lies in God's covenant. I, however, pass over *ancient*, and confine my observations to *modern* heathenism.

I. The *condition* of *modern*, as well as *ancient*, heathenism is *darkness*.—namely, *ignorance*, *error* and *superstition*. The heathen are *ignorant*. I might refer to India and China, and show that amid a comparatively high civilization, on the subject of religion there is gross darkness. I might go for proofs to other less civilized countries, and the same conclusions could be easily established. But I shall draw simply on my own personal experience, and confine myself to the heathenism of the New Hebrides, and chiefly what it was on Aneityum: the other islands of the group, though differing in some details, are in all essential points the same. I wait not to show their ignorance of things pertaining to the present life: for example, thirty years ago the natives of the