

TOIL AND TRIUMPH IN MADAGASCAR.

The Island of Madagascar, lying two hundred and fifty miles east of the coast of Africa, is about one thousand miles long, and from two to three hundred miles broad. Its area is larger than that of the New England and Middle States, with Virginia, or about twice that of Great Britain and Ireland. Little was known of this vast island until the early part of the present century, when the English sent a friendly embassy to King Radama, a wise and able ruler, who welcomed the foreigners.

The first missionaries landed in Madagascar in 1818, but they retired, and the mission was not begun till 1820. The first comers found a singular people, busy and shrewd, but ignorant and superstitious. They are called the Malagasy. They had no written language, and, of course, no books. Most of the people were filthy and half-naked, and their morals were shocking. They worshiped idols, and were subject to cruel superstitions, among which was one that certain days were unlucky, and that children born on these days must be put to death, or evil will come to their parents. In one of the tribes all the children born on Tuesdays were destroyed. Multitudes of lives were also destroyed by the *tangena* ordeal, a trial by poison, which was supposed to test the guilt or innocence of one accused of crime or witchcraft. The trial was conducted in the following way. The suspected person was made to swallow three square pieces of a fowl's skin, and after a time a portion of two nuts of the *tangena* tree, an active poison, was administered. If, in the vomiting which followed, the pieces of skin were thrown up uninjured, the person was pronounced innocent of the charge. But even then the poison was often fatal in its effect, so that the victim died, whether the ordeal pronounced him innocent or guilty.

King Radama, who welcomed the missionaries in 1820, allowed them to open schools, and the next year he sent his

nephew and ten other young men to England to be educated. At the time of his death, in 1828, there were four thousand pupils in the schools, but neither Radama, nor any of his people, had accepted the Christian faith. He sought only the education which the missionaries could give. His Queen, Ra-na-va-lo-na, after murdering all who stood in her way, seized the throne and commenced her long reign, marked by bloody persecution of those who had anything to do with the Christians.

At her coronation in June, 1829, Rana-valona took two of the national idols in her hands, saying, "I received you from my ancestors. I put my trust in you, therefore, support me." At first she permitted the missionaries to teach and preach, seeing the advantages of the education they imparted; and in 1831, thirteen years after the first missionaries had landed, the first converts were baptized, and what has well been called the "Martyr Church" of Madagascar was formed. But the permission was soon withdrawn and the most violent persecution began. All who refused to worship the national idols were declared criminals. Many suspected persons were compelled to submit to the *tangena* ordeal. The Queen summoned an assembly at the capital, at which it is said one hundred thousand people were present, and death was declared to be the penalty to be visited upon all who should not within one week renounce the Christian faith. It appeared that twenty-four hundred of the Queen's own officers were more or less implicated, and she so far relaxed her decree that four hundred of them were reduced to the ranks, and two thousand were simply fined.

Under this persecution many of the people fell away from the faith, but thousands of them remained steadfast. They would meet secretly in each other's houses, or they would go twenty or more miles for a midnight meeting in some secluded valley or on a rocky mountain side. Here they would read from God's Word, and sing their hymns of praise. Strangely did