

A NARRATIVE OF MISSIONARY ENTERPRISES IN THE
SOUTH SEA ISLANDS.*

By John Williams, of the London Missionary Society.

The first favourable impression at Aitutaki was made by a tour through the island.

The teachers stayed a few days at every district, conversing with the people, and teaching them the alphabet, and the Lord's prayer. On reaching the district of Tautu, they held, in the presence of a great assemblage of people, an argument with an old priest, who vociferated, "Te-erui made all lands, he made Aitutaki; and after he had made it he gave it its present form, by moulding it with his hands." The teachers answered, that it was not so; that God alone had power to create, and that he made Aitutaki, and every other land. The priest continued vociferating upon the greatness of Te-erui, and asserted that he was the first man. The teachers asked him who was Te-erui's parent. He replied, "O Tetareva." They then inquired of him whence Tetareva came; he said, "From Avaiki." They desired to know where Avaiki was; he said, "It is beneath: Te-tareva climbed up from it; and because he arrived at the top he was called by that name;" whereupon the teachers said, "This land, then was made before Te-tareva arrived?" "Most certainly," replied the priest. "Then," continued they, "how can Te-erui be the maker of a land, which you say was made before even his parent Te-tareva came up from beneath?" This appeared to perplex the priest, and he was silent. They then addressed the assembled multitude, upon the being of God, affirming, that before any thing was made he only existed, and that he was without beginning, and is without end. From this topic they proceeded to speak of angels, and of one portion of them falling from their original happiness, which was followed by a detailed account of the creation of the world. All this was new to the people; and the interest excited by the announcement appears to have been intense; for, if the slightest noise was made, there was a general cry of, "Be still, be still, let us hear." Thus encouraged, the teachers went on to describe the creation of our first parents; their being placed in the garden of Eden; their transgression, with its consequences; and the love of God in giving his dear Son, to die a sacrifice for sinful man. On hearing which, they exclaimed, with one accord, "Surely this is the truth; ours is all deceit." From that time many began to listen attentively, and to believe what they heard.—Pp. 65—67.

As at Tahiti, so at Aitutaki the downfall of idolatry was accelerated by ordinary occurrences, in which, however, a Divine agency was too conspicuous to escape observation. So general and powerful was the impression on the minds of the people of Aitutaki, by the circumstances I have narrated, that on the Sabbath day after the death of the chief's daughter, the people of several districts came, cast their idols at the feet of the teachers, and professed themselves worshippers of Jehovah. During the week the rest followed; so that, by the next Sabbath, not a professed idolater remained in the whole island. On the third Sabbath in December, just about fifteen months after the teachers landed on their shores, they had the delightful satisfaction of seeing the whole of the inhabitants convened to worship the One living and true God. Having no house which would contain so great a number of people, they assembled under the shade of a grove of Barringtonia and mape, or chestnut trees, whose interwoven leaves and thick foliage were at intervals penetrated by the rays of the sun, while the cooling breeze from the ocean swept softly among the branches.

At the conclusion of the services of this memorable day, Papeiha requested the people to attend a general meeting which was to be held on the following morning, when subjects of importance would be brought before them. At the appointed hour, the whole of the inhabitants of the island assembled, and after having spoken to them of the immense labour they formerly bestowed in the erection of their maraes, and in the worship of their false gods, he exhorted them to let their "strength, devotedness, and

steadfastness, in the service of the true God, far exceed." He then made the two following propositions:—first, "That all the maraes in the island should be burned, and that all the remaining idols should be brought to him, in order that he might forward them to us at Raiatea, that we, with our people, might also rejoice in the triumphs of the word."

The second proposition was, "That they should commence immediately building a house in which to worship Jehovah." To both of these proposals the assembled multitude yielded their cordial assent. As soon as the meeting broke up, a general conflagration of the maraes took place; and so complete was the destruction, that, on the following morning, not a single idol temple remained unobliterated.

The whole population then came in procession, district after district, the chief and priest leading the way, and the people following them, bearing their rejected idols, which they laid at the teachers' feet, and then received from them in return a few copies of the gospels and elementary books. Thus were the labours of two comparatively weak instruments rendered "mighty through God" in effecting the utter overthrow of an idolatry, dark, debasing, and sanguinary, which had shrouded the by-gone generations of this verdant little island, and held them bound in its fetters.—Pp. 72—74.

Things, however, were not always thus prosperous. At Mangaia, an island only visited once before, by Cook, the missionaries were nearly destroyed.

Thus our pleasing anticipations were frustrated, and our poor people suffered the "loss of all things," in attempting to introduce the Gospel into this island.

We left the island with feelings of deep regret, but resolved to embrace the first opportunity of sending two single men, who, we had every reason to hope, would suffer no other inconvenience than the loss of their property. A few months after our return to Raiatea, the deputation intending to touch at Mangaia, on the way to New South Wales, it was determined that several teachers should accompany them. Davida and Tiere, two unmarried members of the church at Tahaa, offered their services to carry the Gospel to that island. On arriving at it, these two devoted men, as Papeiha had done before them, leaped into the sea and swam to the shore, taking nothing with them but the light dresses which they wore, and a portion of the New Testament in the Tahitian language, which was carefully wrapt up and tied upon their heads. Contrary to expectation, they were kindly received, an afflicting dispensation of Providence having very much subdued the violent spirit of the people, and prepared the way before them; for soon after our visit, a disease broke out which was exceedingly fatal; the infant and the aged, the chieftain and the peasant, fell alike beneath its deadly influence. Ascribing this calamitous visitation to the vengeance of the "God of the strangers," whom they had ill treated, they collected all the property they had taken from us, and cast it into an immense cavern in one of the mountains; making a vow to "the God of the strangers," that "if he would suspend the execution of his vengeance, and conduct his worshippers again to their island, they would receive them kindly, and give them food to eat."

Thus again we had the pleasing task of recognising the timely interposition of an all-wise and overruling Providence, adapting the means he employs to the circumstances of the people whose minds are to be influenced. And it must be allowed that the event just narrated was calculated to produce as powerful an impression upon the minds of such a people, as if they had been eye-witnesses to a miraculous display of Divine power.—Pp. 80—82.

We have no room for any account of the discovery of Rarotonga; but the following extract from another Missionary's (Mr. Bourne) report about Aitutaki and Rarotonga, will be read with satisfaction.

In reference to Aitutaki, Mr. Bourne says—"They have built a coral pier, six hundred feet in length, and eighteen feet in breadth. The number of plastered houses in the settlement is one hundred and forty-four, in many of which are beds and sofas. The female teachers have taught the women to make good bonnets. They are diligent in learning and

numbers can read. Family and private prayer is very general. Every thing has remained quiet since our last visit; neither war nor rumour of war has been seen or heard, although formerly it was their greatest delight, and the bodies of their slain enemies formed the horrible repast at the conclusion of every engagement."

Respecting Rarotonga, after having given an account of the large congregation to which he preached the numbers he baptized, &c., Mr. Bourne observes—"Much has been said in Europe, &c., concerning the success of the Gospel in Tahiti and the Society Islands, but it is not to be compared with its progress in Rarotonga. In Tahiti, European Missionaries laboured for fifteen long years before the least fruit appeared. But two years ago Rarotonga was hardly known to exist, was not marked in any of the charts, and we spent much time in traversing the ocean in search of it. Two years ago the Rarotongans did not know that there was such good news as the Gospel. And now I scruple not to say, that their attention to the means of grace, their regard to family and private prayer, equals whatever has been witnessed at Tahiti and is astonishing. Two native teachers not particularly distinguished among their own countrymen for intelligence, have been the instruments effecting this wonderful change, and that before a single Missionary had set his foot upon the island. I could not help earnestly desiring the presence of my brother Williams, that as we shared in the disappointments experienced in our last voyage, we might share the joy which the change that has since taken place is calculated to produce."—Pp. 111, 112.

We quote the next extract, in order to confirm the impression made upon us as to the necessity of every Missionary being able to converse in the language of the people whom he visits. This impression is forced on us by the private reports of those who have laboured in the East; and we have little doubt that the same necessity has been experienced elsewhere; and if so, the argument in favour of the plan which the Church of England pursues, in establishing Colleges, as those of Calcutta and Barbadoes, is greatly strengthened. Mr. Williams speaks of Rarotonga:—

The people were exceedingly kind to us, and diligent in their attendance at the schools, and on all the means of grace. They made, however, but very little progress in reading; and we considered them as scholars, compared with their sprightly brethren in the Society Islands. Indeed it was to us a matter of astonishment that not a single person in the island could read, although the teachers assured us they had been unremitting in their endeavours to instruct them. It is true they were teaching them in Tahitian, as it was our wish to extend the use of that dialect as far as possible; but not succeeding, we determined immediately on preparing some books in their own language; and with this view I drew up an elementary work, and translated the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Galatians, which were printed a few months after; and from the moment the people received books in their own dialect, their progress has been so rapid, that, at the present time, there is a greater number of persons who can read at Rarotonga than at any other of our stations; and I may add, that I think it a circumstance of very rare occurrence that a religious impression is produced upon the minds of a people, except by addressing them in their mother tongue.—Pp. 121, 122.

DUKE OF SUSSEX.

The sentiment which the Duke of Sussex expressed in a deputation of Dissenters in London, ought to be known. His royal highness said, "Gentlemen, I am now 65 years old, 35 of these I have spent in indisposition. Gentle men, that sobers a man—that makes him think—that corrects many of the opinions he might have entertained in former years. It has done so with me. I am accustomed every morning alone to read for two hours in the Bible before breakfast; and if any man reads that book as he ought, he himself will in some measure become inspired by it." His highness's biblical library contains 150 Bibles in different tongues and editions, and estimated to be worth from £40,000 to £50,000.—*London Chronicle*.