

A cruise in the Mission vessel among the Islands of the New Hebrides.

BY THE REV. DR. STEEL.

No. II.

On arriving at Port Resolution in the Island of Tanna, the Rev. Mr. Robertson, his wife and child went ashore to the mission house of the Rev. Thomas Neilson, but I remained on board, which I did for the most part all through the voyage. This accustomed me the more to the vessel, and prevented the recurrence of the *mal de mer*. Next day I found Mr. Robertson laid up with fever and ague, to which missionaries are subject on these hot volcanic islands. I had a walk with Mr. Neilson, who showed me kind attention, along the peninsula which encloses Port Resolution, and from one spot saw the islands of Aneityum, Fotuna, Aniwa, and Eromanga—all the southern islands of the group. I visited a sacred spot under a wide-spreading banyan tree—a natural cathedral. The people connect all the events of their lives with sacred observances, and make offerings on their rude altars. We saw a company making their favourite drink, kava. This is made in a very disgusting way by chewing the roots of the pepper plant—*piper methysticum*. After being well mixed with saliva, it is placed in a wooden dish, mixed with water, and very carefully strained with a piece of the cloth-like bark of the cocon-nut tree. A portion was placed in a cup and presented to the chief first, who sucked it through a reed. The chewing process is performed by boys; but the drinking is confined to men. This drink is very popular all over the Pacific. There is an intoxicating element in it, but of a stupifying, not exciting kind, when taken to excess, which is not often done. This plant grows abundantly in Tanna, and the drink is daily made. The same men had a fowl baked in a paste made of bananas, carefully covered with leaves of the same. It looked very juicy and well cooked. The Tannese go as naked now as when Captain Cook was in this part exactly one hundred years ago. His description of them then applies to them still. Mr. Neilson is now quite safe among them, and is respected, but few come to the worship. Much mischief has been done in this port, as in so many other places by white traders.

Contrary winds detained us several days and it rained, so that we could not walk about; but on Saturday afternoon, the 2nd of May, it cleared. I landed with the captain, and Mr. Neilson took us a very interesting walk through the trees to a spot

on the shore where the evidences of great volcanic action were apparent. The rocks looked as if they had been melted, and had run like water. The ripples were marked on the surface.

On Sabbath morning, at half-past nine, I attended the native service. There were about fifty present, thirty men and twenty women. They sang well, much better than the Aneityumese at Mr. Murray's. Mr. Neilson called upon a chief to offer prayer. This man was clad in a soldier's red coat. He had once been a great cannibal, but had been interested in the Gospel, had been friendly to missionaries for many years. He saved Mr. Paton's life in 1862. He is not, however, yet baptised. Mr. Neilson preached very fluently, and called upon me to say a few words, which I did. I was deeply moved to see such a company engage in the service of God. The men were mostly naked, but a few had shirts. One of them had a bonnet. Others had coverings on the head made of the green leaves of the banana, and one had these bound by a piece of fishing net.

An English service was held in Mr. Neilson's at eleven o'clock, when the mission party, the ship's company, and a resident white man assembled. I preached a discourse of consolation to the bereaved from John xi. 35—"Jesus wept." Both Mr. and Mrs. Neilson had recently lost their fathers, as well as their own child, and Mr. Neilson had lost a brother-in-law, who, as their fathers, was a Presbyterian minister. Mr. Neilson was to preach on board in the evening, but as Mrs. Neilson had an attack of fever, he could not come. I therefore again officiated, Mr. Robertson taking the preliminary devotional exercises.

I learned that Tanna is not the native name of the island. It signifies "land." When in 1774 Mr. Forster, who was naturalists to Captain Cook's expedition, inquired the name of the island, perhaps by pointing to the ground, the natives said "Tanna." They say "Tanna Ipara" for their own land; "Tanna Aneityum," "Tanna Immer," for Aniwa; and "Tanna Erronan" for Fotuna.

On Monday the 4th May we sailed from Tanna. It was a beautiful day, and as the wind was light, we went slowly along, and had a very good view of Mount Yasur, the volcano.

"By noon a dusky cloud appeared to rise
But blaz'd a beacon through nocturnal skies."

The sides are covered with lava. A considerable quantity of sulphur is deposited, and is sometimes exported. The springs are hot and sulphuric. The wet weather prevented me from visiting of more closely, and seeing into the crater.