

CHAPTER IV

Fiji

After remaining more than year in Brisbane, I received orders from the Missionary Committee in London to return at once to Fiji. At first I questioned whether or not I should obey the order, for my wife was still in a delicate state of health. I was certain if the Committee knew how ill she was, they would not press me to return. It seemed like taking her to her death. I did not see that God had called me to do that. Beside all this, I was pretty sure that the Committee had been urged to give this order, and that it was unfair and cruel. But my wife urged me to go. I went, and have never once regretted it. Had I refused to go, what my future course would have been no one can tell; but I am sure that in going to Fiji, and trusting the Lord to make all things work together for good, I did right. The Lord did care for us, and has cared for us ever since.

We left Queensland immediately for Sydney. The Rev. John Eggleston met us at the boat, and gave us a word of comfort and encouragement. The Rev. W. B. Boyce, while thinking that the Committee had made a great mistake, was glad that we were going to Fiji.

We at once took ship for Auckland, New Zealand, and arrived there in time to catch the *John Wesley*. We were glad to find new missionaries from England going with us to Fiji. After a few days at Auckland we set sail for Tonga. Our captain, who was new to these seas, was so nervous among the narrows and rocks in the entrance to the Tongatabu harbour that I had to get a Tonga, who had boarded us, to pilot us in, which he did safely. During the time we remained at Tonga, events occurred that can never be forgotten. The chiefs of an important and well-fortified town called Bea rebelled against King George, and some desperate fighting took place. There was great excitement, which reached its climax one night when a number of the king's best friends were shot. That was an awful night. The Rev. Mr. Webb, Chairman of the District, did what he could to put an end to the trouble; but all in vain. Night after night the firing was heard, and the sad news came of one and another having been killed. King George's men from various places were full of wrath, and loudly cried out for revenge for the murder of their friends. They wished at once to storm the fort and destroy all the people in it. But George held them back, saying, "Wait a while, and you shall have your revenge." He then gave orders for Bea to be surrounded. After some time the rebels were starved into submission. The three rebel chiefs were brought before the king as he sat among his friends in the meeting-ground, the soldiers standing round. Addressing the captive chiefs, George said, "You are bad men: you have done badly: you have shot my best friends; you deserve to die. But the religion of Jesus has taught me to forgive my bitterest enemies, and I forgive you. Go, live, and learn to be wiser, better men." Then turning to his soldiers he said, "That is your revenge." What a glorious testimony in favour of our holy religion, and the mighty power of Jesus to make his people kind and loving as He was!

Mr. Webb, who had been very anxious about the rebellion, and very active in seeking to check it, was taken ill in the midst of it, and nothing that was done could arrest the disease. He grew worse and worse, and speedily the end came. He died trusting fully

in Jesus, and triumphing over the last enemy. Mr. Webb was a valuable missionary, a man of a sweet and loving spirit, and greatly beloved by all. His death brought great sorrow to his brother missionaries, and to the people of his charge. For the bereaved widow and children we all felt most deeply.

Viwa

Leaving Tonga we reached Fiji in safety, and, at the District Meeting held immediately after our arrival, I was appointed to the Viwa Circuit with Mr. Calvert, and was requested to revise the New Testament. My dear wife was very ill all the year: often, we thought, on the very brink of death. Once the end seemed very near. She was patiently waiting, fully resigned to God's will, and I was on my knees pleading with the Lord that, if it were consistent with His will, He would spare her life, when the answer came at the same time to both of us. She said, "The Lord is answering prayer; I shall not die, but live." From that moment she began to improve; but still continued feeble all year.

Complying with the request of my brethren, I began at once the work of revision. Assisted by one or two native teachers, I was at it day after day, from early dawn until late at night. As fast as I could supply Mr. Calvert with copy, he went on with the printing at our press, where we had a good staff of workers. Since the making and printing of the first excellent translation of the New Testament, the language had, of course, become somewhat better known, and the native teachers were more fully qualified to assist in the work of revision. Many alterations and corrections had therefore to be made; but great care was taken that this should be done only when, after thorough investigation, it was considered absolutely necessary by all. By hard toil day and night our work was completed in twelve months, and what is still known as "The Viwa Edition of the New Testament" was published. This was a cause of great rejoicing to the missionaries and our people, and it certainly gives me no little joy and satisfaction to know that that edition was then, and has been ever since, greatly valued by all.

Beside the revision of the New Testament, we had many other things to cheer and encourage us during the year. Our work was growing, a good number were converted, and the blessing of the Lord was richly granted in answer to prayer. Still we had many things to discourage and try us, and to make us mourn before God.

One cause of deep sorrow was the fall of Vatea the wife of Namosimalua, the chief of Viwa. Vatea had been truly converted some years before, and her case was a very delightful and interesting one. Often sorely tried and tempted, she remained faithful to God. Her influence over others was very great, and we often glorified God in her. But she fell, sadly fell. During the year she tried to destroy herself by throwing herself down the steep precipice in front of her husband's house, and it was a wonder that she was not killed on the spot. Her lapse gave us all great sorrow, and did immense harm. She continued in her fallen state for some years; but we are told, in an excellent memoir of her by the Rev. Joseph Waterhouse, that she deeply repented, lived for some years fully consecrated to Christ, and then died in the Lord.

Another terrible event of the year was the strangling of his widows on the death of Tanoa, the old king of Bau. The story of this fearful work has been more than once told by others; but as I was the only missionary present at the time, I may be allowed to tell it over again. As I wrote a full account of it at the time in my diary, I cannot do better, perhaps, than transcribe what I there wrote:--

December 8, 1862.—Tanoa, the old king of Bau, died today. He was a great and a bad man. He was at one time driven from his throne, and fled to Somosomo, and afterwards to Rewa. His son, Seru, now Thakombau, succeeded in driving the rebel chiefs from Bau and bringing back his father. Tanoa has had little to do at Bau for years; his son Thakombau being really king. He lived to an old age, and died a heathen. It is the custom in Fiji for one or more of the wives of a chief to be strangled when he dies, and it was supposed that many of Tanoa's wives would be strangled when his end came. For some years the missionaries have been labouring to prevent this. The captains of ships of war visiting Fiji have spoken strongly to Thakombau, and warned him of the evil of doing it. In November last, when Tanoa was getting weaker, we often presented whale's teeth to the king, according to Fijian custom, and begged him to spare the women; and we thought that we had some good hope of succeeding. In the latter end of November and beginning of December Tanoa was very low, and we almost daily saw the young chief, and pleaded hard for the lives of the women. On Sunday, December 5, Bro. Calvert and I saw the chief at Bau, and again interceded with him. On Monday 6th he came over to Viwa, and we had a long talk with him, and hoped that what we said had some influence on him. On Tuesday 7th Mr. Calvert, who was greatly concerned about the matter, and had done very much to try and prevent the strangling, was compelled to leave for Ovalau. Soon after his departure I went in my canoe to Bau. When I reached the old king's house I was deeply affected to find most of the ladies of the town assembled, and all weeping. The ladies who were chosen to be strangled were pointed out to me. I spoke to them, and found some of them unwilling to die. But one spoke very lightly about it. I told her of the other world and warned her; but she said, "I'm going to jump into hell." I went to the large house, and there found Thakombau's wife superintending the making of the dresses for those who had to be strangled. I had some conversation with these, and then, with a bleeding heart, I went to seek the chief. I found him and others in the large open space making a sail. He asked me what I had come for. I said, "We cannot rest; we are feeling deeply about those who are to be strangled." He laughed at what I said, as did many others. I had a long talk with him, and promised to give him anything, or all we had, if he would spare the women. He said that if I were to take him a large ship it would not stop the strangling. One of the chiefs spoke very roughly to me. He said, "We strangled women and cooked and ate our enemies before the door of the missionary's house in Somosomo. What makes you so uneasy? Don't you get enough yam or taro, or do you want to eat human flesh?" I said to Thakombau, "I do not wonder at Ratu Mua thus insulting me; we expected it when we came to Fiji." "No, no," he replied; "you are right. It is right of you to warn us. You go, Mr. Watsford, and get the women to say that they wish to live, and they shall live." I went and spoke to them; but I might just as well have tried to hush the tempest into a calm, as to get those women to say that they wished to live. Having visited the old king, I returned to Viwa. In the evening I tried to get Verani to go with me to Bau, but he was poorly, and seemed afraid. Our printer, Mr. Martin, accompanied me, and we reached Bau about 9 o'clock. All in the town was as still as death. I went to the large house where old Tanoa was now lying. In the middle of the

house sat Thakombau. I went and sat down by his side. He seemed surprised and uneasy, and asked, "Why have you returned?" I replied, "I want to be present when your father dies, that I may try and prevent the strangling." He said, "It cannot be prevented; the women wish to die." I answered, "It rests entirely with you; you can prevent it if you wish." I again told him that he might have all we had if he would save the women. I remained for some time, and then, the old chief reviving a little, I left for Viwa, where we arrived, full of grief, about midnight.

This morning, Wednesday, Dec. 8, I sailed for Bau, accompanied by Mr. Martin. All was very still and quiet when we arrived. We went to the house of a friendly chief, who said to me, "Have you come from the large house?" "No," I said, "is the old chief worse?" He replied, "He is dead, and they are now strangling the ladies." I at once ran to the place, and at the door saw six biers for the dead bodies. As I entered the house they were strangling a Rewa lady. Sons and brothers or near relatives only can take part in the dreadful work. Four or five at each side were pulling the rope which was round the lady's neck. Her face was covered, a person standing behind pressed upon her head, and her arms were round a lady in front of her. Nothing was heard but the creaking of the rope as it tightened around the neck. There was no struggle, and after the rope had been held for about five minutes all was over. When the rope was taken off, Thakombau, holding it in his hands, turned to me and said, "Well now, you see we are strangling them: what about it?" As well as I could for weeping, I said, "Let no more die: spare the rest." He replied, "Only five have to die; but for you missionaries there would have been twenty-five." I pleaded hard for the lives of the three waiting to die; but all in vain. Thakombau said, "Are you not afraid to come here to interfere with our customs?" "No," I replied, "I am not afraid. I come because I love you, and I love these whom you are strangling." "Love," he said; "oh, we all love them: we are strangling them because we love them." While we were thus talking, the rope for the third victim was prepared, and soon another soul had gone to its doom. Two others waiting at the door were now called in. They entered, one of them as if going to a dance; their friends kissed them, and they were hurried into the presence of their Maker.

I was greatly surprised that there was no noise, no crying. All was as silent as death except when, now and then, someone expressed her admiration of the ladies' dresses, or the king spoke to me or I to him. I had expected to see the men awfully excited, but there was nothing of the kind. When the last of the five had been strangled, I thought it prudent to retire, as I could do no more. When going out I turned and tried to count the little fingers, placed on reeds over the door, which, according to the custom of the Fijians, had been just cut off the hands of babes and little children to show their love to the dead chief. But by heart sickened at the sight, and I hurried away to my boat with my soul crushed within me. Oh heathenism! Bloodthirsty, cruel heathenism! Doing thy dark and hellish deeds in the name of love! When shall thy murderous hand be stayed in Fiji? God of love, Lover of souls, speedily bring to an end all this evil. "Have respect unto Thy covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

Amid all the dreadful things of today I cannot but think that it was no little thing that I, a lone missionary, could stand unharmed in the presence of that lion of a man, with all the ferocious savages around him, and command attention while I bore my testimony against their evil deeds. The chief, Thakombau, has acted very badly in this awful affair. He has been fully, frequently, faithfully warned, and he has done it

knowing it to be wrong, and after leading us to believe that he would try and prevent it. It all rested with him, and he might have forbidden it.

During the year we had a visit from H.M.S. ----, Captain -----. The "drinking" on board most of the ships of war that came to the islands was very bad, and in this respect Captain ----- was no exception to the almost general rule. He was very much annoyed because Mr. Calvert and I would not take wine with him. He professed to be a religious man, and when well under the influence of drink swore that he would have all Fiji converted. One evening, when he had drunk very freely, he called in his chaplain and would have him write out a prayer for the conversion of the Fijians. When it was finished he said, with an oath, "There, that will do it."

At the District Meeting my brethren were of one mind that my wife could not live in Fiji; and although I loved the work, and would gladly have lived and died in it, I was compelled again to leave the Mission. We had our trials and afflictions in Fiji, but God greatly blessed us there. Mr. Hunt used often to speak of Dr. Hannah's last words to him when he was leaving for Fiji: "Go, my brother, and God will bless you there more than He would have blessed you in England, for you will need His blessing more there." And so we found it. According to our day so was our strength. I greatly loved the Mission work; and if I were now a young man just beginning my work, I would say, "Here am I; send me to the mission field."

The missionaries in Fiji were a noble band of men, thinking little of privations and sufferings in their eagerness to win the heathen for Jesus. The work when I left was only in its infancy, but it was a good work. Our people were spiritually mere children, but a wonderful change had the grace of God wrought in them. No doubt many were Christians in name only, yet many were Christians in deed and in truth. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said Jesus; and if love to God's word and to prayer, if patience in suffering, if holiness in life and triumph in death, are sure signs of men being true Christians, then we had them in Fiji.

In Viwa we had one of the worst cases of leprosy that I ever met with in the islands. It made one's heart ache to look upon the sufferer, worn and wasted, parts of whose body had been eaten away by the terrible and incurable disease. But the afflicted man was a Christian. His name was Mesake (Meshach). In the days of their heathenism the Fijians would have made short work of his leprosy by putting the strangling-rope about his neck. But Christianity taught them better things. A hundred yards or so outside the town they built Mesake a small cottage, where he lived all alone. But every day they carried him his food, and he was never forgotten. I had the privilege, and it was a great one, of frequently kneeling at Mesake's door, and talking to him and praying for him; and I never went with the inquiry, "Well, Mesake, how are you today?" but he would answer, "It is well with me. Jesus is here, and I have no fear." The last time I went he said to me, "I have many friends in the town: they send me food, and come to see me, but none of them come in here. You, sir, you come and talk to me and pray for me, but you stop at the door. It is not well, it is not safe, for any to come inside. But Jesus is always here, and always blessing me, and I shall soon be with Him for ever." The day I left Fiji Mesake died, and went where there is no leprosy, and no separation and no sin for ever. I thought as I came away from Fiji, that that one glorious case was worth ten thousand times over all the money spent, and all the work done, and all the suffering endured in our Fijian Missions. Among those

whom I hope one day to meet before the throne of God in heaven is the once afflicted, suffering leper, Mesake.