

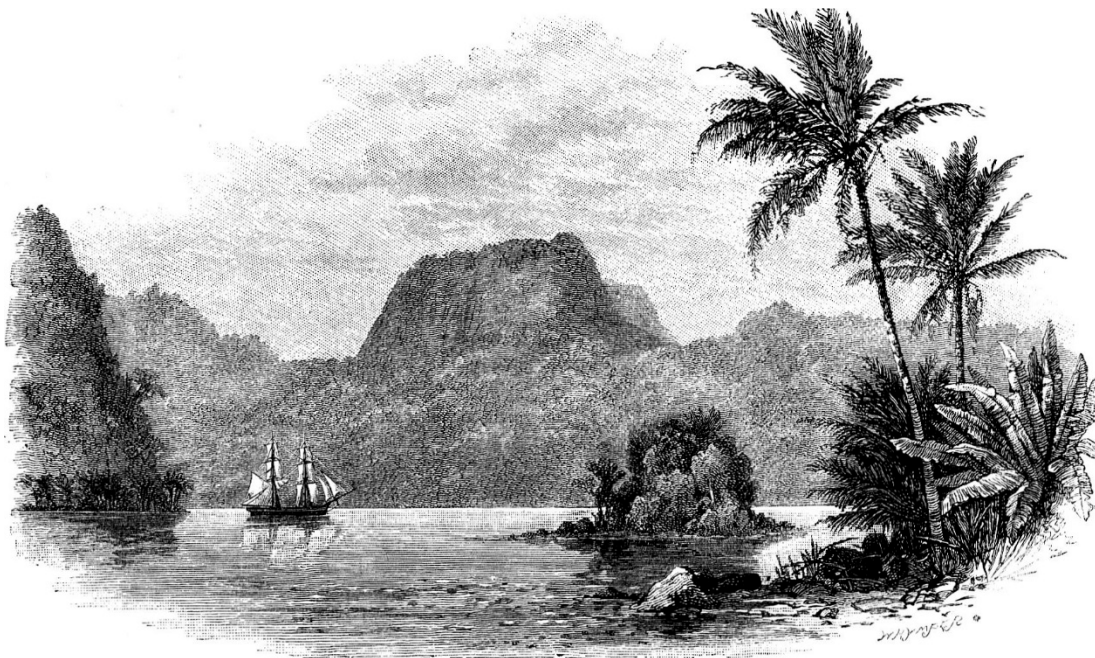
The Past and the Present of Samoa

Fifty years ago missions to the South Seas were in their glory. Islands previously unknown were emerging into the light of day. John Williams and his noble compeers were sailing from island to island, from group to group, stationing missionaries or native teachers as they went. And marvellous to relate, where-ever they did this, the idolatry that had hitherto held undisputed sway, succumbed almost without a struggle. The gospel triumphed, and the natives placed themselves under Christian instruction forthwith.

Surprised and delighted as our fathers and grandfathers were at the changes thus wrought, it was after all not so much to be surprised at. The mere presence of white men in their midst filled the childish savages with awe. Coming from a world they knew nothing of, borne across the sea in strange vessels so unlike their own canoes, the missionaries were looked up to as gods rather than men, and their influence was supreme. Added to which, the paltry fetichism and superstitions of the Polynesians lacked all force and vitality. They fell like a house of cards before a gust of wind. The islanders were in gross moral and spiritual darkness. Light came streaming in upon them; the darkness fled; and for the time their eyes were completely dazzled with the

[p.361]

brightness. No sooner had their foreign visitors mastered the grammatical construction of the dialect and acquired a sufficient knowledge of their vocabulary than at once they proceeded to give them a translation of the Word of God. Without a written language or any knowledge



Pangopango Harbour

of letters hitherto, they were initiated into the mysteries of reading in order that they might at once become acquainted with the best of all books: from the lowest depths of mental destitution they passed at a step into the possession of rich stores of wealth. No wonder that their joy was intense; no wonder that the story of the work carried on among them reads like a romance.

But half a century has passed by since then, and what do we find to-day? Let us endeavour to realize the situation: Christian teaching was grafted upon an idolatrous trunk; and never yet in the history of man has a nation shaken off its superstitions in a day, or even in a generation. Moreover the new life had to encounter opposing currents of inherent heathen corruption, of inherited, persistent tendencies, of the old physical, social, and political environment. What is the result of the conflict? Which force is now triumphant, the old or the new? How too are these simple races bearing the aggressive energy of Europeans? Commerce, colonial expansion, schemes of annexation and appropriation are becoming mighty factors the wide world over; and at this particular crisis the Pacific is exposed to all the dangers, and is on the eve of receiving the possible gains, suggested by the foregoing terms. From a humanitarian point of view we may deplore this. We would gladly have begged for a little more time for the South Sea Island converts. Only yesterday they were in the "stone age" of human progress. Some of their neighbours are in it still. To-day, without any intermediate stages, they are in direct contact with our nineteenth century civilisation; they live in a world in which iron, steam, and electricity are dominant. Bemoan it as we may, we cannot shield them from all that this contact involves. We cannot put the clock back. For good or for ill, the world is drawing nearer together, and the entire human race, white, black, brown, and yellow, is intermingling and amalgamating as never before.

With such facts present to our minds, we propose to sketch the history of one mission field. The complex and difficult problem indicated is being worked out at this very moment in the Samoan Islands, and of them we write. No apology can be needed for selecting these islands as an illustration, for Samoan affairs are well to the fore in these days, and Samoa furnishes an instructive example of the development and the struggle we wish to consider.

I. - Samoa in Its Heathenism

Samoa is not one island, but several. It is the native name of a group of volcanic islands in Central Polynesia, which lie between 13° 30' and 14° 30' S. Lat., and 169° 24' and 172° 50' W. Long. The group consists of three large islands—Upolu, Sayan, and Tutuila—a trio of small islands sixty miles to the east called collectively Manua, but each having a name of its own—Tau, Olosenga, and Ofu—and two yet smaller ones named Apolima and Manono, situated in the channel that separates Savaii from Upolu. There are a few lesser islands, but these eight are all that need be mentioned.

[p.362]

Upolu is in the middle of the group, and from an outsider's standpoint is the most important. Its geographical position, and its harbour of Apia, make it the natural centre of commerce. Vessels of all kinds bring produce to Upolu from the other islands. It runs east and west and has a circumference of 130 miles. Savaii, its western neighbour, is slightly larger, being 150 miles in circumference. The mountains of Savaii tower aloft to a height of 4,000 feet, and can be seen by

passing vessels fifty miles away, their slopes richly clothed with luxuriant tropical vegetation as far up as the eye can reach. Tutuila is forty miles to the east, Manua more eastward still. Upolu and Tutuila also contain mountain peaks which rise to a height of 2,000 and 3,000 feet respectively. In general appearance, fertility, verdure, and beauty, they resemble Savaii.

The European discovery of these islands is supposed to date back to the year 1722, when some Dutch vessels are said to have first observed them. French navigators called in 1768 and 1787, on the latter occasion coming into deadly conflict with the natives. Bougainville, who commanded the French ship that visited them in 1768, struck with the way in which the islanders incessantly moved about in their canoes, gave the group the name of the "Isles of the Navigators," a name still in use in geographies and maps, but rapidly yielding to the superior claims of the native name. La Perouse's visit in 1787 was attended by circumstances more discreditable to his own crew than to the Samoans, although the latter were made to bear all the blame. A native who had gone out to the vessel in a canoe was guilty, or was suspected, of some trifling act of pilfering. It was thought well to make an example of him, so there and then he was shot at and otherwise brutally used. When this man was carried off to the shore bleeding and dying, enmity and a thirst for revenge seized the people, and attacking with slings and stones the French boats which had taken landing parties to the beach, they killed two officers, one of them named De Langle, and ten of their men. La Perouse branded the Samoans as a set of treacherous and bloodthirsty savages, ignoring altogether his own unjust and cruel conduct. In consequence of his reports the Navigators' Isles were for many years



Samoa House

carefully avoided by European ships, though in 1791 they were visited by H.B.M. ship Pandora. Captain Cook had heard of them from the Tongans in 1793, but had not reached them.

The Samoans belong to the widely scattered Malayo-Polynesian race, a people found in Borneo, Sumatra, and the islands of the Malayan Archipelago bordering the Indian Ocean on the east, in New Zealand, New Guinea, many parts of the Pacific, and, strange to say, also on the western side of the Indian Ocean, where they inhabit the island of Madagascar. The course, time, and manner of their migrations is one of those in-

[p.363]

teresting ethnological puzzles which still await solution. The Samoans belong to the light brown or tawny-coloured branch of this Malayo-Polynesian family.



The Rev. John Williams

As regards their physique and general bearing we cannot do better than quote from Mr. Prout's *Life of John Williams*. He thus describes them: "Of all the Polynesians whom he had seen, Mr. Williams pronounced the Samoans the most pymmetric in form, and the most polished in manners. And of this they were themselves aware, and no means were neglected which, in their estimation, could set off or enhance their personal attractions. The toilet was a shrine before which the gentlemen, no less than the ladies, daily offered incense to their own vanity. A pair of portraits from the pencil of Mr. Williams, sketched from life upon his journal, will enable the reader to form his own idea of the people amongst whom he had now arrived. 'Picture to yourself a fine, well-grown Indian, with a dark sparkling eye, a smooth skin, glistening from the head to the hips with sweet-scented oil, and tastefully tattooed from the hips to the knees; with a bandage of red leaves,

oiled and shining also, a head-dress of the nautilus shell, and a string of small white shells around each arm, and you have a Samoan gentleman in full dress; and, thus dressed, he thinks as much of himself, and the ladies think as much of him. as would be the case with an English beau fitted out in the highest style of fashion. A Samoan lady, in full dress for a ball, wears a beautifully white silky-looking mat around her loins, with one corner tucked up; a wreath of sweet-smelling flowers around her head, a row or two of large blue beads about her neck; her skin shining with scented oil, and the upper part of her person deeply tinged with turmeric rouge. The ladies spend a considerable time in preparing themselves for company, as much so, perhaps, as their more enlightened sisters in Christian and civilised lands, and two or three "lady's-maids" will be required to assist in these decorations. They are not tattooed like the men, but many of them are spotted all over.' "

Oppressed with the heat and humidity of the atmosphere the Samoan wanted but little clothing and in that respect is little changed even now. The ease with which he could obtain the necessaries of life made him the victim of indolence. He had no need to exert himself.

Everything ministered to his laziness. Bread-fruit and cocoa-nuts grew freely at his very door and could be had for the gathering, the latter not even requiring the exertion of cooking. Bananas too abounded, and the yam, and the highly relished taro, were easily cultivated. Both grew rapidly and luxuriantly. Then for animal food there were fish from the sea, various edible creatures from the coral reefs which encircle the islands, and choicest of all—the flesh of the favourite pig. As an ordinary beverage, they had the sweet, slightly acid, deliciously cool and refreshing liquid found in the young cocoa-nut; for special occasions the intoxicating kava juice, an infusion of the chewed root (the duty of chewing the root being specially assigned to the girls of the family) of the ava or kava plant, a species of pepper.¹ Living under such conditions the Samoan became a slave to sloth, with an inveterate dislike to continuous, sustained exertion.

His dwelling was of simple plan and construction. That still in general use is a slightly improved form of the house built by his progenitors in bygone days. It is a kind of huge bee-hive, thatched with reeds, and containing one single apartment which has to serve for all purposes. The house itself consists of a framework of posts about four feet apart with cocoa-nut leaf blinds for walls. During the day these blinds are pulled up, and the house is left open to the light and air of heaven; but at night they are let down. The interior is then sub-divided by the erection of five or six low tents, under whose protection the inmates can sleep safe from the stings and bites of lively and voracious mosquitoes. Each native builds his house on his own plot of ground. He does this without the least reference or thought to neighbouring houses; the result being that no such thing as a row of houses is to be found, no attempt to secure order or regularity attempted.

But we must leave these secondary matters and pass on to the consideration of the moral and religious condition of the Samoan in the days of his heathen darkness. In some respects he was far less degraded than the inhabitants of other groups. John Williams was much impressed with this. He found none of the temples, idols, altars, priests, and sacrifices, which abounded elsewhere; and although the prevalent superstitions were equally gross, they seemed to be less demoralizing and cruel. It was also obvious to him that idolatry had not so firm a hold upon

[p.364]

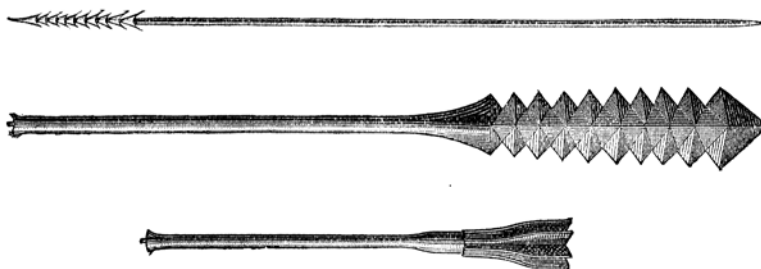
their affections as it had upon others whom he had visited, a circumstance he tells us, which, with the absence of the more palpable symbols of idolatry, had obtained for them from other islanders the epithet "godless." But this adjective was misapplied, for though they did not worship idols of wood and stone they practised zoolatry, deifying and reverencing the beasts, birds, fishes, and reptiles by which they were surrounded. Still, the absence of an interested, sanguinary, and powerful priesthood filled the heart of this noble pioneer missionary with great hopes as regarded the future of the Samoan people.

Long continued heathenism, however, had wrought terrible evils among them, had warped and misled their thoughts, and together with climatic and similar causes, had begotten great corruption, impurity, and depravity. They delighted in war, were quick to take offence, and of a quarrelsome disposition. Polytheism had shut out from their minds all knowledge of the Living and True God. Each district, each village, each family, even each member of the family was supposed to be under the protection of some special deity, and one and all were guarded by the god of war. Infanticide as practised in other, regions of the Pacific was unknown in Samoa, but

¹ *Piper methysticum*

in a specially horrible and unnatural form which cannot be further described in these pages it was prevalent to a melancholy extent. Chastity was but a name. The thing itself did not exist. Obscene and filthy conversation was heard and indulged in by young and old alike. The marriage tie was of the loosest character, divorce easily obtained, concubinage and polygamy indulged in by the chiefs and richer men. Many native customs, such as the ceremony of tattooing, night dances, etc., were attended with unbridled licentiousness. Being "past feeling" they gave "themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness." There are always redeeming features in the life and character even of heathen races, but the moment one penetrates beneath the surface and discovers their awful and loathsome corruption, a feeling of shame and pain overwhelms one, and the insight obtained fills the heart with sorrow and sadness. Vice and immorality alas, are common enough here at home, but in heathendom they are not only common, they are universal, they are in perfect accord with the prevailing sentiment. Nobody is ashamed of them, they are condoned, yea, approved of and commended. "The whole head is sick, the whole heart faint."

But let us turn from this dark picture to one of brighter colours and witness the blessed changes effected by the Gospel of Christ.



Samoa clubs and spear

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