

Pambu

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WHAT MR TERAI SAW IN NEW GUINEA IN 1883

Although it is well known that Cook Islands missionaries, sponsored by the London Missionary Society, played a prominent part in the early efforts to evangelise New Guinea, probably few people now know that several Tahitians also took part in that work.

One such Tahitian, whose name has long been forgotten, was "Mr Terai", who worked with the Rev. James Chalmers in Papua in the early 1880's. Terai's name came to light recently when the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau obtained a microfilm copy of the papers of the Rev. J.L. Green, one of the last of the L.M.S. missionaries in Tahiti.

Terai was a friend and probably a one-time pupil of Green in Tahiti; and after he and his wife went off to New Guinea as missionaries, they wrote Green and his family informative letters on the conditions they found there.

Although the originals of Terai's letters seem to have been lost, an English translation of a longish letter he wrote from Aloma, Papua, on June 13, 1883, has been preserved among the Green papers, and there is also a translation of portion of an earlier letter dated April 23, 1882.

The letter of 1883, which is undoubtedly one of the earliest extant accounts of Papua written by a Pacific Islander, reads as follows:

"Mr Terai and wife write this letter to you and to your children. We are well, not suffering from any disease. We are working devotedly that Papua may become its portion. This is the character of the people. Some of them will come to our schools just for a day or two, but they will not

The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau was established in 1968 as part of the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. Its purpose is to locate unpublished documents of value concerning the Pacific Islands and to obtain copies of them on microfilm for four world libraries specialising in Pacific research. The four libraries are the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; and the Library of the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

persevere. They will stay away again for a long time till they have forgotten all they had learned. The children are beginning to read. The great difficulty, however, is the parents will not control their children. They never reprove nor chastise them.

The people have no kind of religious ceremony at their marriages. This is the course they adopt. The bridegroom takes food and many other things according to his own inclination and presents them to the father of the bride who, in return, gives his daughter, and then the bridegroom takes his bride away to his own home and the matter is settled.

This is another custom prevailing here. The men let their hair grow long and the women's hair is cut short.

The women cultivate the ground. The men construct the fences enclosing the land, and the women plant and cultivate the food.

The people here have no ovens for cooking their food as we have; but they make vessels for cooking purposes in shape like Tahitian calabashes cut through the middle. They are very strong. The people have three meals a day. Morning, noon and evening. The evening meal is about 8 o'clock. The morning and evening spreads are full meals, but at noon it is only a luncheon.

The great enemies of the Papuans are the snakes (poisonous) peculiar to the country and the Alligators, which live in the water. The bite of the snake is invariably fatal. As to the water enemy, The Alligator, if the savage thing seizes hold of a man's foot, there is no hope of recovery from its bite. About 40 people have been killed by the snakes and the alligators since we came here.

I do not well understand their mode of reckoning time yet, but they have a festivity at their new year. As the season

approaches, the families prepare their garments. A tree is taken with its branches and carried to the beach and planted there, then they suspend their food upon it. Coconuts and every other kind of food. In the afternoon of the day appointed, the people assemble together from all the villages round about with their clubs in their hands. In former times they would kill each other. Thus, when the time comes for those who were appointed for the purpose to assemble on the beach, they go in companies, running along until they come to the tree, then they throw their spears at it, so do the people of each company in turn. But if the people of one village have a grudge against those of another village, they spear each other. There was no spearing of the people on the occasion when we were present. I stood near the tree and watched the spearing, but there was not one person aimed at.

We have visited the villages around us, and the natives have not molested us. They received us and brought us food.

This is another feature of their character. They are not generous people. They do not give away, but they expect everything to be bought. This is a very ancient custom of theirs.

The word of God is growing in Papua in those parts first occupied. Mr Chalmers has a training institution. The population is large in every part.

The Gods of the people seem to be their ancestors. They petition their ancestors to cause their food to grow, to heal their diseases, and to give them a good supply of fish. They never recognise the Creator of all things in their prayers. This is all.

Terai,
Aloma, Papua."

Terai's letter is one of several letters from Papua among the Green papers. There are five others from Chalmers to Green written between 1880 and 1884. (There are also four from Chalmers to Green in 1875 from Rarotonga.)

One of Chalmers' letters, written from Port Moresby on October 5, 1880, describes an attack at Keakolo on a Chinese junk in which some of the crew were killed and the missionary teachers acted heroically. Another, of March 29, 1881, speaks of the motley crowd of missionaries, gold diggers, beche de mer fishers and bird and plant collectors who "risk New Guinea proper."

The bulk of the Green papers are made up of diaries that Green kept during his career in Tahiti from 1870 to 1886. These are:

- . A diary for the period January 1, 1874 - December 29, 1879.
- . Journal notes for July, 1884, to August, 1886.
- . A diary for the period November 12, 1884 to September 9, 1886 - the last part describing Green's departure from Tahiti and arrival in San Francisco on his homeward journey to England.

Green's diaries will undoubtedly be of considerable value to historians studying the Tahiti of his day. Besides containing a running account of matters of church interest (which took Green on frequent trips throughout Tahiti and to islands in the Leeward and Austral Groups), there are numerous references to the leading personalities of the day - the Godeffroys, Bruns, Vienots, Darsies, Branders and Verniers, etc.

Here are a few sample entries from the diaries:

. On the evening of the 24th [December, 1876] Mr Chalmers, in compliance with a special request of Queen Pomare, exhibited his magic lantern in the large building at Paofai. There were at least 400 to 500 persons present. The Queen was delighted with the exhibition.

. September 19, 1877 - At an interview with the [French] Admiral [two days after the death of Queen Pomare] I was gratified exceedingly with the testimony which he bore of the character of the late Queen. He spoke of her earnest piety and Christian zeal, as proved by the many proofs she left behind her. He was astonished to see the immense no. of notes on Scriptures among her papers, which shew that she felt an interest in the religion she professed.

. On Wednesday evening last, the 11th inst., the superior of the Brothers School was caught in the street of Papeete in disguise and drunk. Some of the boys of his own school caught him in the act of contending with some native women. He has left the islands today for San Francisco in the mail.

. The English corvette Opal, Captain Robinson, arrived in Papeete harbour on Sunday afternoon at about 3.50. She saluted the protectorate flag on the following morning, but unfortunately the flag was hoisted upside down. The captain, however, discovered it after the salute was fired and hastened to government house to throw all the responsibility on the French commandant for sending him an imperfect flag. It was not fastened to the cord properly.

The remains of the late Queen Pomare were transferred from the old vault to the newly erected mausoleum (near the old one) today, November 27th [1879]. A short service was conducted by Messrs. Brun, Vernier and myself. There were about 150 persons present, but sad to record, the king was sadly under the influence of liquor and his conduct was not such as becomes a king and son of the departed queen.

The Green papers were generously made available for copying by the missionary's son, Mr R.T.T. Green, and his grandson, Mr James R. Green, of West Grinstead, Horsham, Sussex. Miss Irene Fletcher, librarian/archivist of the Congregational Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) kindly arranged for the microfilming of the documents in London.

FOREIGN OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE WITH FRANCE AND FRENCH POSSESSIONS

The first 25 of an estimated total of 60 reels of microfilm, consisting of copies of records in the Public Record Office Class F.O.27, have recently arrived in Australia under the Australian Joint Copying Project.

Described as "General Correspondence: France", this is one of the largest individual classes from which copying has been undertaken selectively, after long and careful searching of the original records.

A statement from the National Library of Australia says that of 3772 pieces or volumes for the period 1781-1905, nearly half were found to contain material relating to Australia and the Pacific. On average there were only half a dozen relevant items of correspondence in each volume, but in a few cases whole volumes or sections were filmed. For example, there were some 27 volumes about recidivists in the New Hebrides, from 1880.

Sections relating to consulates at Papeete and Nouméa have also been copied in full. This complements the class of General Correspondence relating to the Pacific Islands (F.O.58) already filmed, and in the case of Papeete, the class consisting of the Consulate's own archives (F.O.687), also filmed earlier. Items from British Consulates in French home ports, such as Havre and Brest, were also often found to be rewarding for information about shipping movements in the Pacific.

Shipping matters feature prominently throughout the selections from F.O.27, and commerce and communications became increasingly

well documented over the years. Other subjects of major importance are the Pacific Islands labour traffic or "Coolie Emigration", missions, mining in New Caledonia, international exhibitions and public health.

The contents of the selections from this class are at present accessible only through the search-note, prepared by the A.J.C.P. staff in London; the class and piece list for the Foreign Office groups of records microfilmed under the A.J.C.P. is in preparation, and a further detailed description will be available at a later date.

The National Library reel numbers for the 25 microfilms are 3585 to 3610 inclusive. The microfilms may also be consulted at the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

A FARCICAL FLAG INCIDENT IN SAMOA

A century ago, when neither the Samoans nor the motley group of European residents in Samoa had fixed on any settled form of government, it was not uncommon for international incidents to develop out of the most trivial occurrences.

One such incident, possibly the earliest of its kind, had its beginnings in 1867 when Godeffroy's manager, Theodor Weber, who was also consul for Hamburg hauled down a French flag that was flying over the property of a Frenchman called Reban.

The reason for Weber's action seems to have been that Reban's property had been mortgaged to him, and in taking possession of it, he did not wish to become the owner of the French flag, too.

However, Weber's action greatly offended Monsieur Reban, who complained of it to both J.C. Williams, the British consul, and to the French Government. On February 24, 1868, the French warship, Coetlezon, under Captain Dedit, arrived in Apia to seek an indemnification for Reban and also "satisfaction" for the insult to the French flag.

The day after his arrival, Dedit discussed the Reban-Weber affair with Williams on board his ship. Williams told him all that he knew of the affair, and recommended that Dedit write to Weber so that they could arrive at an "amicable settlement."

Dedit replied that the settlement could not be amicable - that he must have "satisfaction"; whereupon he wrote to Weber inviting him to attend a meeting with himself, Williams and the American Consul, Jonas M. Coe, to settle the affair.

Weber, at first, declined the French captain's invitation. But later he went on board the Coetlezon to pay his official respects, and when, on February 28, Williams received an invitation from Dedit to go on board to discuss the question of Weber's insult to the French flag, he found that the two men had already settled their differences.

They had agreed, Williams wrote in his diary, that on Saturday, the 29th, at 10 o'clock, the French flag should take the place of the Hamburg flag on Reban's former property and be saluted from the ship, and that afterwards it should be hauled down again and replaced by the Hamburg flag.

Promptly next morning, the French blue jackets landed and were duly drawn up in military style in front of the Reban property. Williams and Coe, at the captain's invitation, were on hand to witness the "yo-yo" act with the two flags. However, an unforeseen contretemps then occurred.

When Captain Dedit gave orders to lower the Hamburg flag, Weber objected that it was he should give the order for the flag to come down.

"Some altercation then took place between them", Williams recorded, "the captain saying what he wanted was that what Mr Weber had done to the French flag, he should do to the Hamburg."

In the end, Weber submitted to the French captain's demand; the Hamburg flag came down; the French tricolour took its place; a salute was fired from the ship; and Dedit and Weber shook hands. Then the French flag was lowered; the Hamburg flag was raised; and "after a little time" that, too, was taken down again. Finally, honour having been satisfied on all sides, everyone went off to Weber's place for breakfast...

These farcical details about the Reban-Weber flag incident are recorded in a diary spanning four years which J.C. Williams kept in Apia from February 24, 1868, to March 20, 1872. The diary is written in a large leather-bound ledger, now owned by a descendant of the consul in South Africa, Mr R. Williams, of Johannesburg. Mr Williams kindly sent the diary to Australia so that it could be microfilmed for the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.

With the diary is Williams' letter of appointment as consul, dated September 28, 1857, and signed by the British Foreign Minister, Lord Clarendon.

The diary is an exceptionally valuable one for historians of Samoa as it covers a period for which documentation is scarce.

It complements several journal-letters of Williams and his wife Amy for the years 1855-56, 1864, and 1873-74, which were microfilmed for the P.M.B. several months ago (see Pambu No. 6, pp.1-5).

PLAN TO MICROFILM 60 YEARS OF W.P.H.C. DOCUMENTS

A plan to microfilm the official records of the Western Pacific High Commission territories for the period from 1878 to 1938 was announced recently.

The present W.P.H.C. territories are the Solomon Islands Protectorate, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, and the New Hebrides. In earlier times, Samoa, Tonga, the Tokelau Islands, Cook Islands and Pitcairn were also within the jurisdiction of the commission.

The microfilming of the records will be done over several years in the Central Archives of Fiji and the Western Pacific High Commission in Suva.

The W.P.H.C. records at the Archives cover 3,300 feet of shelving.

BEYOND THE REACH OF THE P.M.B.!

A Tahitian schoolteacher who devoted a large part of his life to the study of Polynesian legends and who wrote numerous manuscripts about them died in Tahiti on August 6 at the age of 67. He was Tearapo Teauna, known as Pouira.

Pouira used to conduct a regular session on Polynesian legends over the local radio station. It had a large and eager audience.

In accordance with his own wish, Pouira's manuscripts were buried with him. This was described by the Papeete weekly magazine Tahiti Regards as "an anti-cultural act, if ever there was one", although there was ample precedent for it in Tahitian history.

Popular report has it that some of the most valuable papers of the Royal Pomare family finished up in the family mausoleum at Arue; and it is on record that the papers of Dr Francis Johnstone, one of Papeete's first resident medical men, were interred with him in the cemetery at Tipaerui. Dr Johnstone, who figures in Herman Melville's book Omoou, died in 1855. His lost papers include valuable catalogues of the medical plants known to the Tahitians and of Tahitian flowers.