GOING BACK TO PAPUA, VIA AMERICA, THIS SPRING
New Guinea Evangelization Society, Inc.

Room 1018, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

(Con-operating with the Kwato Extension Association, Inc., London, England.)

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Editor: Charles W. Abel, Kwato, Samarai, Papua

THE MISSION STAFF

Address: Kwato, Samarai, Papua. Via Sydney, New South Wales

Rev. Charles W. Abel
Mrs. Charles W. Abel
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A New Year Message

KWATO, Samarai, Papua,

DEAR FRIENDS: Nov. 11, 1924.

We are drawing very close to the end of the year. Long before this message reaches you, I shall have been back at my work for Christ in Papua twelve months. It is a time for spiritual stock-taking. The review of this period brings to my mind the many real causes I have for which to praise God, not only for what He has done for us in answer to prayer, but also for what it has seemed good to Him to withhold of the things for which we had hoped. It has been a year of hard, constant, many-sided work. It has brought its mead of disappointment. "Demas hath forsaken me," said the Apostle Paul, "having loved this present world." Here too, where the flood-tide of heathenism flows strong in many villages, some isolated Christians have fainted and have again identified themselves with heathen practices. We hope soon to be in a better position to succor these weak brethren by giving them more regular and personal attention. They sadly need direction and more constant teaching in the Word of Life. Very few of those of whom I speak are content to remain cut off from the blessings of the Gospel. The constant plea offered at our noon-day prayer meetings throughout the district is that the Holy Spirit will lead back to Christ the sheep who have wandered and there is evidence everywhere that prayer is being answered.

But this backsliding of some only serves to bring into stronger relief the wonderful things we have witnessed of the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of others during the past year. If some few have been enticed away from Christ, many more have sought to disentangle themselves from the world and to find the new life offered to them in Christ. How can I convey to you the deep joy we felt last June when one Sunday morning a goodly company of youths, none of them more than 17 years of age, were baptized at Kwato, and admitted to church fellowship? They were converted during my absence in America and England. They are a youthful body of earnest Christians rejoicing in their first experiences of the Christian life, and are already entering gladly into the Lord's service by seeking to bring others to Christ.

Here and there in the district we find those who have fallen into sin and who come, repentant and asking earnestly to be led back to God. They are dissatisfied with what the world had to give them in place of what they had forfeited. How manifestly that has revealed to us that, despite the slender faith of some of these ignorant believers, their faith was indeed a saving faith.
There comes also to my mind the case of a convert at Koukou. When I visited this village some months ago, this man brought to me his "friend"—a man of notorious character who lived two days' journey inland from Koukou. Until a few months ago he was only a name to the natives on the coast, but his name always stood for strife and violence. He was called hemahemanabara, (wild); he was eaueaure, (demented) describe his uncontrollable actions. But the Christian, Bulolo, had an idea, put into his heart by the Holy Spirit. It was that he go forth and seek this wild stranger who needed Christ. Bulolo considered that only Christ could subdue such a man and he was sure that Christ could. So forth he went on his missionary journey, and made himself known to this "demented" heathen man. They struck up a friendship during the two days at his village. Bulolo prayed with him and for him, and then left, having obtained the man's promise in two moons to come to the coast as Bulolo's guest. The visit took place as promised and the Gospel testimony was given with an appeal. At first the hard heart of the wild man was not impressed, but later he returned to the coast to hear more of the wonderful message.

When I landed at Koukou one Sunday to meet with the little band of converts, Bulolo lead a man up to me, saying:

"This man is my friend. He is a seeker after the Light."

The faces of both men reflected the Light which had already dawned in the dark heart of the wild man.

Last Sunday I was visiting one of the villages, to the east of Koeabule, when a message reached me from Wadunou—fifteen miles from here—"Will you come and help us?" I could not land at Wadunou until late in the afternoon. Among the men who met me on the beach was one who had reverted to heathen practices.

"Master," he said, "I sent for you to ask you to help us. Since my sin there has been no witness for Christ in this place. I want to find the way back, and I want my people to hear the Gospel."

I can truly say I thank God for the desert. I have met with Him in the desolate place, and in the quiet of waiting upon Him my ears have heard the "still small-voice." But God never leaves us in the wilderness. God desires to lead us out into fuller service, to greater responsibility, to a more fruitful ministry. Therefore the future is full of hope.

Charles W. Abel.
A Practical Result of the Gospel

Thirty years ago, when we first settled in this country amongst a backward race hardly touched at all by outside influence, it was impossible for us, in the light of history, not to be apprehensive of the future of these savage Papuans. What had happened almost everywhere else under similar conditions was likely to happen here. As the new territory opened up to commerce, we anticipated the evils which would inevitably follow in the wake of our civilization. But way of a new life which is good and inspiring to take the place of what has been abandoned. It is often difficult to gauge the success of such work. We can see its healthy and promising influence upon individuals, but it is not easy to see how it is affecting the natives in general. Lately, however, we have had very clear proof of our success which is very gratifying. His Excellency Judge Murray, the Governor of Papua, in speaking to me a short while ago on this

none of us in those early days imagined that we ourselves would have to deal with these hindrances, even before some parts of the country had been opened up at all. Today, the Government and the missions are conferring to see what can be done to counteract the serious decline of several of these sturdy tribes. Missionaries are realizing that their responsibilities have increased, and that upon them must fall the duty of helping their converts, and the community of heathen from which they come, to withstand the destruction which threatens them.

The work at Kwato has been specially planned to give these natives the necessary assistance to tide them over this crisis. We aim to give this people, suddenly bereft of old, time-honored interests, many of which were of a vicious character, something in the subject of native decline in population, especially in the districts on either side of Kwato, asked me to investigate the matter with reference to the Church.

In the official census, the Christians are, of course, included with the heathen section of the community. A careful census of those who have definitely embraced the Gospel reveals the encouraging fact that there is not only no decline amongst them, but that they are greatly on the increase. The census shows that among our church members, the 202 married couples have 505 living children. When it is remembered that a large percentage of these Christian married natives are young people, or are men and women still in the prime of life, the significance of this record will be appreciated. There could be no better proof of the results
of the Gospel in the habits and life of the Papuan than is indicated by these figures. Anthropologists are telling us that decline is due to the Papuan's lack of interest in life. They are of the opinion that there is nothing which we can introduce from our civilization which will be a sufficient substitute for the old savage interests which have been destroyed. They even go so far as to advise the encouragement of old heathen vicious customs as the only means of arresting disaster. In the face of the facts stated, it will be necessary for them to revise their verdict, and to admit that a spiritual interest, such as the Gospel brings to those who accept it, is something that will hold a tribe together, and will result in the saving of the race through the Christian remnant. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this young church in Papua, that, through their zeal for Christ, many more may be won to Him that a wider and deeper influence may be exerted upon the whole community.

"The Vailala Madness" in Papua

Considerable interest has been awakened in Papua by the publication of a pamphlet written by the government anthropologist dealing with a remarkable semi-religious movement which has recently swept through the villages in the Gulf of Papua, and alluded to as the "Vailala Madness."

It takes its name from a village about the center of this 200 mile wide gulf, and from which this strange innovation spread to the east and west with great rapidity.

The only intimate knowledge I have of Vailala was gained during a short visit which I paid to it over thirty years ago. We were journeying west and stayed there two nights on our way along the coast. We were warned to remain on the western side of the river because the eastern natives were waging a fight against an enemy and in their excited condition it was not deemed prudent to approach them. A South Sea Island teacher had been at Vailala west for a short time and with difficulty acted as interpreter for us. Throughout the years since then, the London Missionary Society has had its representatives working all along that coast, the Government has also been represented there for nearly thirty years, and various agents of commerce have been active in this locality so that the natives of the Gulf can no longer be regarded as unsophisticated.

According to the anthropologist, the natives in the Gulf have become the victims of a disastrous hallucination which has swept through their villages for miles, and which, though recently modified in intensity, shows no signs of final abatement.

The externals of this new movement are said to be extraordinary. Its leading votaries lose control of themselves when under its spell, and act and speak like lunatics. From this peculiarity of bodily contortion, foaming at the mouth, incoherent speech, and falling to the ground as if in a fit, the term Madness has been applied to it. Mixed with it there is a strange belief in the near approach to their shores of a big vessel carrying as passengers the spirits of their ancestors. But the strength of the movement is seen in the fact that the natives have, to a large extent, repudiated their old customs, thrown aside their former beliefs, and conceived an entirely new cult. It is not surprising that this should include some of the terms of the Christian faith, any more than that the influence of the Government is clearly traceable in some of its phases, and the influence of commerce in others. These three forces have been at work among these people for over two decades: one result is the "Vailala Madness." There is apparently no definite connection between this new cult and the section of the community which has accepted the Gospel. It appears to have arisen in the minds of the heathen. "Boys," who have been employed as Government servants in one capacity or another, or who have been indentured as laborers to white men, seem to have taken the prominent part in the ceremonies described rather than those who have had intimate intercourse with the missionaries. The movement would easily adapt to its own purposes some hazy idea of God, Jesus Christ, and heaven. It would doubtless draw within its sweep some of the weaker elements in the Church, but little is made of this in the pamphlet. It is worth noting that the natives who have refused Christian teaching are the ones who have lost their balance.
The writer of the pamphlet deplores the "Vailala Madness" primarily because it means the break-up of the old life of the people affected. In abandoning their dances, feasts, and their various former rites, he says that they have given up what "for its own sake, was worth preserving." He is alive, as we all are, to the menace which any change in the life of a backward people must be if it is brought about too suddenly. However worthless, and even vicious, some of the Papuan customs may be, we have to remember that they constitute a very real part of the life of a savage community. They have received these things, and nothing else, from their ancestors, and, in the course of ages, these rude customs have been woven into a social system which is the only life to which these people are accustomed. I know no missionary who would ruthlessly attack and destroy a harmless native custom for the mere sake of destroying it. But, he cannot successfully teach the principles of Christianity without opening the eyes of his hearers to the fact that customs which are cruel, or vindictive, or sensual are taboo to those who would accept Christ as their Lord and would practise His teaching. The missionary is offering the Papuan something better than the thing he already has and the result is the destruction of the inferior things as soon as a man is able to realize the higher value of the substitute. Every alien contact does something to modify the old habit of thought and manner of life of a people until so recently entirely shut up to their own crude civilization. The break-up of the old life is inevitable. It would be brought about under much more disastrous circumstances if the missionary element was not one of the main factors in the change which is taking place.

The anthropologist pleads for a return to the old conditions, for a revival of old customs as the only means of restoring interest to the lives of the natives. To what length he would go in this revival he does not make clear. He gives a rather drab description of an evening mission school at Motumotu, and asks whether this solemn performance is an advantageous substitute for the wholesome and amusing obscenities of a rollicking native dance." The mission school was never, of course, designed as a substitute. In my own territory, I should regard a day's cricket match between a good eleven of young white cricketers, and a well matched Papuan eleven, and witnessed by a large company of Papuan and white people, as a fair substitute for such questionable dances.

But why revive only the dance, and a few other customs whose revival is urged? A large part of the Papuan's old ritual was associated with cannibalism. Should that be tolerated, however anthropologically interesting the custom may be? Any form of obscenity is attacked at its very citadel by the preaching of the Gospel. The Government and the missions together cut very deeply into the old life for which revival is urged. To those of us who have lived most of our lives amongst these natives, it is very questionable whether you could permanently preserve what is left, when you have, by Government ordinance, swept away in one motion the liberty of the native to raid, kill, and eat his fellow. By this prohibition, you have destroyed all the ritual connected with such an important part of savage life and have cut away so much of the foundation of his old social edifice that you have shattered the structure to its ultimate fall. There is absolutely no hope for the Papuan in an effort to restore a few of his old customs. He has discarded these himself. You cannot restore them by any mechanical process. You must deal first with the mental condition which has led him to cast these things aside.

To the missionary, the solution of this problem is to be found in the opposite direction to that advocated by the anthropologist. Old, and often vicious, interests have been abandoned, some by Government ordinances, as for instance warfare, cannibalism and homicide; some by moral suasion as the result of Christian teaching; and some by this strange phenomenon called the "Vailala Madness." The thing is not to try to put this broken man back into a condition of life which is as past for him, but to lead him carefully forward, out of the maze into which he has stumbled, into a simple, straight path of Light. We have brought this present-day world to the Papuan, and it is in this world that he will have to try to live. The Papuan will die, they say, for lack of interest in life. But it does not follow that his old interest alone will keep him vital. We are all concerned, government, commerce, and missions, to supply him with new interests. This is being done in an increasingly wide field of missionary enterprise. When the Federal Senators from
Australia visited Papua some ten years ago, a great native dance was specially organized at Port Moresby for their entertainment. The impression it left on their minds was that a condition of life, of which this be-feathered, bedaubed, naked orgie was the expression, was one for which it was impossible for them to do anything by legislation. Later on in their itinerary, they visited the mission station at Kwato and spent an afternoon inspecting industries, and listening to good part-singing, and so forth. At the banquet given in their honor at the township of Samarai that evening, their spokesman said, comparing the dancers with the skilled mechanics; "the one condition completely baffles us; in the other we find ourselves dealing with men whom we can regard as our brothers."

It would not be difficult to enumerate a long list of new interests which have been brought into the life of the Papuan to take the place of those which have been abandoned. It will take time for him to adjust himself to them but it is evident that his mentality is changing, and even this "Madness" may be his passage to a much better condition of life than the one he has been obliged to discard. It will need great patience, hard work, tact, and sound sense, to put this native firmly on his feet again. This is definitely the work of the Christian Church. Needless to say, in the forefront of any effort to reconstruct the life of the Papuan, we must put Jesus Christ. Christian teaching is creative of what is good as well as destructive of what is evil. Our anthropologist seems to doubt this and sees in the ghostly advent of their ancestors, which is apparently affecting the non-Christian section of the community? We see vicious men made pure; cruel men softened by the entrance of the spirit of God into their hearts, and made kindly and considerate; bitter enemies turned into close friends; useless lives employed in the service of Christ. These sound like platitudes, but they are no platitudes here in Papua. If men wish to see miracles of grace there is no better field for their investigation than this. Unfortunately, the anthropologist does not recognize this. But the fact remains for all to see who can see. No man is more to be pitied than the missionary (if you could find him) who comes to such a field as this to teach these natives "the Holy Creed and the Ten Commandments." Our work is full of encouragement because we see the citadels of evil assailed and the heart of the Papuan won by the love of Christ; because we see daily, wherever we go, those whose lives have been blessed of God, and who are a blessing to their fellows. "In Christ old things have passed away, all things have become new." Christ Himself is the new dominant interest we have given to the Papuan, and while we may, for the time being, be distressed by the extravagances of a section of the natives, whose old system of life has been shattered by the sudden impact of new and sometimes conflicting forces, we can gladly report that many of these Papuans are conscious sharers in the unspeakable benefits of the Gospel of Christ.

Charles W. Abel.