Booklet

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A MISSION AMONG MURDERS

EARLY ADVENTISM IN VANUATU

By Milton Hook

Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series

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A Heritage Series: Debut - Adventism Down Under before 1885
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Milton Hook is the author of "Flames Over Battle Creek", a brief history of the early days at the Review and Herald Publishing Association as seen through the eyes of George Amadon, printer's foreman at the institution. Dr Hook's doctoral dissertation researched the pioneering years of the Avondale School, 1894 to 1900, and he has published some of these findings.

He spent three years as a mission director in Papua New Guinea. His teaching years include primary, secondary and college level experience, especially in Bible subjects, in Australia, New Zealand and America. He is an ordained minister, married and the father of two sons.

He would welcome any information which may enhance the content of this series.

“Trespassers will be eaten" was fingered, as it were, on every beachhead in Vanuatu. The inhabitants were treacherous and hostile. Even among themselves there were frequent inter-tribal wars. Their infamy was renown. Spanish, French, and English navigators had discovered the various islands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whalers often wintered there, especially in the southern islands, and violated the native women. Sandalwood loggers made temporary camps, filching as much of the precious timber as they could carry away. Blackbirders, or slave-traders, beguiled and ambushed thousands of the strong young men and took them to work on the European cottonfields in Fiji and the sugar-cane plantations in Queensland. This exploitation by the whalers, loggers, and blackbirders generated a legacy of hatred towards Europeans.

The nineteenth century saw the coming of two more groups of Europeans. Traders and missionaries all risked their lives to further their purposes. British and French traders built their fortified cottages and exported copra in exchange for tobacco, alcohol, knives, firearms, matches, salt, rice, and other Western commodities. On more than one occasion the weapons they sold were used to murder them.

Presbyterian missionaries were the first Christians to evangelize Vanuatu, beginning in the southern islands and gradually extending their influence northwards. First to land was John Williams in 1839. He and an associate, James Harris, were clubbed to death in the surf on Dillon's Bay, Erromanga, minutes after their arrival. The

inhabitants killed them in retaliation for the murder of a chief's son by a European. The bodies of Williams and Harris were eaten by the islanders.

George Gordon and his wife, Ellen, were axed to death on Erromanga in 1861, and later a brother, James Gordon, suffered a similar martyr's death. All were killed because the local inhabitants blamed them for sickness and death in their villages. Samoan and Cook Island missionaries, in addition to some early converts in Vanuatu, were also murdered as they pioneered with the Christian message. Anglican missionaries entered from the north and were given hostile receptions too. Later, Roman Catholic missions were also established throughout the group.

That area bounded by the Santa Cruz Islands to the north and the Loyalty Islands to the south, with Vanuatu in between, witnessed more martyrdoms than anywhere else in the Pacific. The disregard for human life was abysmal, the early activities of Europeans only provoking the worst in the islanders' natures.

Women were valued on a par with pigs and were the gardeners of the rich volcanic soil. The menfolk smoked, made war, and built the occasional crude dwelling. Polygamy was the norm, young girls being married off even before puberty. The elderly folk and unwanted widows were strangled to death. In some islands the favourite wife of a deceased chief was placed under an upturned canoe and buried alive alongside him. Little wonder that women, receiving no genuine love, no regard, and no acceptance as an equal human being, often suicided, ran away, or committed adultery in a desperate attempt to better their miserable lot. Their punishment was brutal. Spurned husbands were prone to tie down the offending wife, drop a red-hot rock behind her knee, wrench the leg back over it and seer a deep hole in the flesh, maiming her for life. This angry discipline was meant to force her faithfulness. Marital love was something uncomprehended. Christianity introduced a more humane morality. Resistance to it was long and widespread.

The coming of Seventh-day Adventists to Vanuatu occurred during the fifth voyage of the PITCAIRN in 1896.[1] It was merely a passing visit. The captain only called in at safe Presbyterian mission stations on Efate, Ambrym, Malakula, and Vanua Lava, before sailing home via the Santa Cruz Islands and the Marshall Islands further north. They took note of the dense vegetation and rugged peaks but plenty of wind was kept in their sails as they skirted the cannibals' shores.

From 1912 the responsibility for Seventh-day Adventist missions in South-East Asia was relinquished by the Australasian Union Conference in exchange for the care of the expanding South Pacific missions. This was done with the vision of Adventist entry into Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and the Solomon Islands, as well as Kiribati and Tuvalu. In anticipation of this advance, Vic Stratford, a clerk at the Australasian Union Conference office, had been sending "Life and Health" magazines to Europeans in unentered areas such as Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

The decision to enter Vanuatu was really made in late 1911. Pastor John Fulton, President of the Australasian Union Conference, perhaps influenced the choice of the appointed missionaries. Fulton's fearless associates during pioneering days in Fiji, Pastor Calvin Parker and his wife, Myrtle, were chosen for the dangerous task.

By the New Year of 1912 the Parkers had embarked for Vanuatu. They left their daughter, Ramona, with friends at Cooranbong so that she could attend the Avondale School. Harold and Clara Carr, newly-weds and 1911 graduates of the Sydney Sanitarium, accompanied the Parkers. The medical work which the four missionaries would do was planned as the vital entering wedge. They could also attend each other in the event of sickness in isolation.

The missionary group made a lengthy stopover at Norfolk Island. The men then went ahead to Port Vila, taking with them a portable

[1] For the context of this event seek the booklet “Dame of the Deep”.

home in case of need. They arrived on June 10, 1912, found a place to stay at a Roman Catholic school which had been turned into a lodge, and made application for a building site. Despite the problems of dealing with the joint British-French government, a condominium often branded as a pandemonium, their request was granted within three weeks and they started to build a weather-board mission home for two families at Port Vila. Their wives joined them on August 11 when the home was nearing completion. This was not meant to be their permanent abode. It was a staging ground for more remote regions.

At Port Vila the Presbyterians were operating a hospital and school. The Parkers and Carrs sometimes attended their services. In November Parker made a boat trip among the northern islands, visiting various Presbyterian mission stations and noting that Malakula was proving to be the most difficult island to evangelize. Later, he learned of a possible site on Atchin for his mission. Atchin was a tiny island close to the north-east coast of Malakula.

In February 1913 Parker and Carr hired a schooner and sailed to make a close inspection of the Atchin property. It comprised a six hectare section on Atchin and less than a hectare on Malakula. The main portion included an eight-roomed house with iron roof and lime walls, as well as three smaller lime-walled buildings. Mr Germain, a Frenchman and coffee planter whose native wife was murdered there by the local people, had abandoned the property after narrowly escaping during a second attack. This was not a good omen for the Adventist missionaries, but they were assured that the islanders wanted them there.

The Roman Catholic mission had tried Atchin Island and left without results. The Presbyterian mission had located a national missionary there but he was unpopular and no-one would attend his services. Mr Farrell, a Roman Catholic trader further along the coast, was anxious for the Adventists to settle there. He and his wife wanted schooling for their two children.

First impressions were good. Parker and Carr then steered the schooner back to Port Vila against strong headwinds and currents, taking nine days to cover the seventeen kilometres. On their arrival they found Clara had given birth to a baby boy, Harold, Junior.

Before a decision to buy the Atchin property was made, Pastor Edwin Butz sailed from Lord Howe Island to give his experienced viewpoint. During March/April he made two extensive trips throughout the north and south islands to assess what was available. Atchin was still considered to be the best option. It was purchased for $300. A small launch was ordered at the same time, it being considered essential as a means of supply and to visit the nearby areas.

Parker stayed in Port Vila to try and sell the mission home. The Carrs, with their four-month-old infant, went ahead and landed at Atchin on June 19, 1913. Parker found the Port Vila home hard to sell so he rented it and followed Carr a week later. On the way the inter-island boat took on a Frenchman who had been mutilated in a machete attack by the islanders. He died the next day at the little Presbyterian hospital on Ambrym Island.

The missionaries immediately threw themselves into renovating the buildings on the Atchin property. Carr had already assembled two rainwater tanks for their drinking supply. Parker also visited every village on the island. Carr dispensed medicine wherever needed, carrying with him a Red Cross kit which the young church members in Victoria and Tasmania had donated. They also began to learn the local language although they were hindered by a minority who didn't want Adventists on the island and who purposely taught them wrong word meanings.

Tragedy struck when little Harold Carr caught bronchitis. He died on October 6, just eight months old. Clara, too, became dangerously ill and was confined to the Presbyterian hospital on Ambrym. They saved her life but it was imperative for the Carrs to return to the homeland. It was a sad irony that those most qualified to help in

medical lines were themselves in such desperate need. Calamity was heaped onto tragedy when, just a month after Clara Carr was discharged, an earthquake and volcanic eruption of Mount Marum destroyed the Presbyterian hospital on December 6. The Parkers then had cause to feel even more vulnerable in their isolation. Four months later a medical reinforcement arrived at Atchin in the person of Arthur Wright.

Before Wright arrived the islanders plotted to kill the Farrell family, declaring that all whites had to leave. Farrell quickly donated his rowboat to the mission and fled with his family. Soon after, on February22, 1914, seven Presbyterian islanders teaching on Malakula were shot and eaten. Their two counterparts on Atchin were immediately withdrawn, leaving the Parkers completely alone with the local people. One friendly local, Melek Woraim, appointed himself as Parker's guard and paraded up and down the beach in front of the mission home.

Parker felt safe and continued to sleep at night with his house wide open to get the fresh air. Others believed he was inviting trouble. During daylight he toiled on with more renovations, finally transforming an old copra shed into a neat building as a church and school. This was located very close to the back corner of his home. It was dedicated on Sabbath, January 17, 1914. The rostrum and pulpit were stained and varnished. It seated about seventy people. Parker mounted a bell on a tall tower outside and regularly used this to call people to worship. Only the men and boys would come, the women not being allowed by local custom to enter the same building. Instead, Myrtle Parker held social meetings with groups of the women, playing music on her portable organ and serving rice, rolls, and cereal coffee.

A boys' school was started by Myrtle Parker in the church building. The average attendance was eight. All the pupils were stark naked. It took Myrtle Parker many months of coaxing before they would wear a loin cloth. Even then they would only put them on for the school session, leaving them hanging on the back of the church

door as they left at noon. If they wore them outside the mission compound others would mock them, saying, "Do you have white skin so that you have to cover it up all the time?" Classes were conducted in the mornings only and most instruction was done using English. The pupils could often be seen holding "Christ in Song" upside down and heartily singing hymns they had memorised. Myrtle would lead on the portable organ - another mission gift from the Victorian and Tasmanian youth.

In mid-1914 the mission's eight-metre auxiliary launch arrived on a cargo ship from the Ford boat-building yards on Sydney harbour. Its sails were supplemented with a 5 horsepower engine. Parker named it the ERAN, meaning the Light.

More trouble erupted when a combined British and French force arrived at Malakula to punish the villagers who had killed the seven Presbyterian teachers. During the skirmishes one local tribesman was killed in addition to four in the police party. Two of the latter were eaten by the people of Malakula. The locals sent an urgent delegation to Parker, asking him to be a peacemaker and depositing $10 with him as a guarantee they would not make any more killings. Parker arranged a meeting at his mission station for the government and tribesmen and a truce was made. Soon after, the Parkers went to attend the Australasian Union Conference in Australia, leaving Wright alone to care for the Atchin station.

After Parker returned he again had to play mediator. The war beats of the tom-toms were heard in the air and Parker summoned the opposing tribes to meet on his station and discuss their differences. The trivial bone of contention was over the question of who possessed magic powers controlling the rainfall. Parker related the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, reasoned with them, and then they finally shook hands and laughed all the way home about their petty quibbling. It was obvious by this stage Parker had cemented confidence and trust in himself and his mission.

In April 1915, fourteen months after the murder of the Presbyterian teachers, Parker and Wright walked into Malakula where the atrocities occurred. The people on Atchin pied with them not to go, fearing for the missionaries' lives. When they returned safely the Atchinese still tried to persuade Parker to promise never to do it again and they pied with the government officers to try and force Parker to stay off Malakula. This was a complete reversal for some of these Atchinese because when Parker had first arrived a few had urged him to visit Malakula in the hope that he would be captured and eaten.

Norman and Alma (Butz) Wiles, both graduates of the Avondale School, arrived at Atchin on April 1915 amidst the friendly atmosphere which Parker had generated. These new recruits had also done a three month course in simple medical treatments at the Sydney Sanitarium. By this time the local women were gaining confidence in the mission and showed some interest in attending services, but at a different time to the menfolk. Myrtle and Alma conducted these, each occasion preceded by a dressing session inside the church because the local ladies and girls were too timid to wear a European-style dress to and from their village homes.

An unsettling influence came in mid-1915 when an English anthropologist arrived on Atchin to do some field work. He encouraged the local people to return to their old customs. Tribal animosities were resurrected and war broke out again. The anthropologist franticly called for Parker's help when he realised he had let loose some forces beyond his control. He and Parker had to grapple with the warriors and restrain them just as the fracas was heating up. Tempers cooled and Parker's diplomacy saved the day once again. Bloodshed was avoided but frequent dances, initiation ceremonies, and witchcraft persisted. School numbers petered out but a few continued to attend religious services.

Parker was disappointed with the turn of events. However, he took fresh heart when an opening presented itself for expansion onto Malakula. The simple medical treatments, their neutrality during

hostile times, and the obvious desire to help the local people had broken down the barriers. Invitations to start outposts on Malakula began to trickle in. After two trips in the ERAN in late 1915, Parker and Wiles chose to begin a station at Matanavat on the north-west coast of Malakula. They purchased a tiny piece of land from a local called Charlie for $4.

At that time Wright transferred to Norfolk Island. The Parkers remained at the Atchin station and the Wileses pioneered at Matanavat. As the new property was being cleared and yam gardens were being established Wiles conducted a school under the shade of a tree with his pupils seated on the ground. Eventually a little school house was built.

The dispensary at Atchin was dismantled and re-erected as a mission home for the Wileses at Matanavat. There they adopted an infant whose mother had died soon after childbirth. Normally the baby would have been buried alive with the mother, but the Wileses saved her from this fate, naming her Naomi. Wiles also published a little hymnal of twelve songs translated and typed in the Matanavat dialect.

The importance of Matanavat lay in the fact that it provided a gateway to the inland mountain people known as the Big Nambus. Small groups of the Big Nambus people would sometimes visit Matanavat. Their confidence grew as they became familiar with the nature of the Adventist Mission. But just as Parker and Wiles were about to make an expedition among the Big Nambus the trip was aborted. Blackbirders had made a raid in the area and carried off four Big Nambus youths. This naturally enraged the entire inland region. Everyone was on full alert and trigger-happy.

In November 1915 an inland tour was made from Matanavat to become familiar with the outskirts of the Big Nambus territory. Then, over the New Year period, the ultimate thrust was made. Parker decided, for safety reasons, to leave Wiles at a base camp, take h is medicine bag, and walk into the heart of the region. A meeting with

the chief, Nikambat, and his people was prearranged. The chief's brother led Parker from the coast, along a sixteen kilometre track, and then up a six hundred metre mountainside to one of their main villages.

Parker was frisked on arrival. He wondered if they were searching for weapons or accessing the amount of meat on his lanky skeleton. Perhaps it was just a novelty for some to see a live pale-skin in their midst. A few may have wanted to convince themselves he was not a spirit.

The Big Nambus offered a stone for a seat and they queued to be treated for their ailments, both real and imaginary. The aroma of "rub medicine", a mixture of turpentine and kerosine for skin diseases, was especially popular. Parker then hung his picture roll on a tree and began to sing. When he prayed they sat down with their backs to him and covered their heads with their arms as a mark of respect.

Parker was told that Nikam bat owned fifty wives, his brother only half that number. All the women in the tribe had their upper front teeth knocked out as a sign of their married status. Parker noted the women wore a grass head-dress dyed red, which extended down to their feet. The men wore a shaft of bone through the nostril septum, bracelets of pig's teeth, and a bark waist-belt to which was attached a twisted bunch of red-dyed grass for a meagre dash of modesty. This loin covering was called a "nambus".

During the visit Parker was shown a tract of land near the village which was offered to him as a site for a mission school. He was impressed with the cooler climate at that altitude and determined to appoint a missionary for that area.

In May 1916 the Parkers left their Atchin station with its red roofs and white walls, took furlough, and soon after served in Fiji. Before Parker left he had the satisfaction of completing a European-style mission home at Matanavat and holding the first Sabbath service there in the little thatch church on April 8. His replacement,

Alexander Stewart, and wife Jean, arrived at Atchin in mid-April. The Wileses remained at Matanavat, making excursions through the head-high grass to surrounding villages and up the mountain sides into the Big Nambus territory. It was pleasantly cool in the mountains but on the coast quite torrid. On one occasion they returned to Matanavat to find chickens hatched among eggs they had left on the kitchen table.

The Big Nambus folk continued to build a thatch school house in readiness for an Adventist teacher, but then there was another outburst of violence. Mr Bridges, an English trader, living further south on Malakula was murdered with four of his children by the locals. At the same time his thirteen-year-old son was captured and later eaten. Bridges' Vanuatuan wife, with another child, escaped death only because she was visiting relatives on another island.

The atrocities on Malakula were carried further when a punitive expedition of police brought more loss of life. It did, however, subdue the local bushmen into a more sober frame of mind. Stewart and Wiles continued to visit their villages, dispensing medicines and telling Bible stories from the picture rolls. They found a skin disease was prevalent and treated it with a mixture of vaseline and chrysophanic acid. But dramatic changes in lifestyle were slow to emerge.

Stewart became frustrated with the lack of progress. Late in 1916 he sailed the ERAN north and explored the Santo region for a potential mission site. The Presbyterians had done considerable work on Santo but Stewart hoped one day to perhaps pioneer the Adventist message on the north coast, far removed from Presbyterian headquarters.

By the end of 1917 the Wileses were reduced to frequent fevers. Norman, especially, grew thin and feeble and they had to return to Australia to recuperate. Early in 1918 new recruits arrived in the persons of Ross and Mabel James. Ross had done some training at the Sydney Sanitarium followed by ministerial work in Victoria.

Mabel was a 1917 graduate from the Avondale Business course. They married and left immediately for Matanavat. At the same time Jope Laweloa, his wife Torika, and little boy arrived from Fiji to help at Atchin. This dedicated Fijian couple served three years in Vanuatu. The Wileses returned to Vanuatu in better health some months after the new arrivals.

During 1918 yet another European trader was murdered on Malakula. Once again the government posse stalked the jungle, killing several islanders in retribution. Of course, the locals were further incensed and rumour said two bushmen had been given cartridges by a chief to shoot Wiles too. Government authorities then ordered Wiles to leave Malakula for his own safety. This delayed any advance among the Big Nambus for over twelve months.

For a time all the missionaries worked at the Atchin station, waiting for murderous tempers to cool. Some hymns were translated into the local language and an eight-page tract about the Second Coming was published. It was the first publication in the vernacular. As hopes faded for a full-scale thrust among the illiterate Malakulans the missionaries were obviously preparing to work among those who had learned to read in the Presbyterian schools. A few of these tracts were first distributed on Ambrym Island.

With government permission Stewart arranged to begin a mission station on thirty-two hectares near the head of Big Bay, north Santo, in the latter half of 1919. He had explored the possibility three years previously and noted that other denominations had virtually deserted the area. The site gave them access to the islanders on Sakau Peninsula, whose chief, Thingaru, had a price on his head for murder.

At Big Bay Stewart, James, and Jope, all worked together in the pouring rain to quickly erect a native materials hut with a few sheets of iron nailed on the roof. The bare earth served as the floor. Its total cost was a mere $10. The Jameses moved into this spartan home

and developed the station, being joined by Jope and his family in 1920 when a small church-cum-school was established.

Just as the Big Bay enterprise was being born Chief Nikambat on Malakula persuaded the government officials that the islanders wanted the Adventists to resume work among his Big Nambus people. For this reason the Wileses returned to Malakula, but instead of locating at Matanavat they dismantled and re-built the home at Tinmaru,[2] closer to the usual pathway leading up into Big Nambus territory.

Each Sabbath Wiles would climb the mountains and conduct a worship service for a group of the Big Nambus people. But he was far from robust and suffered from frequent malarial fevers. On Sabbath, April 24, 1920, just a few months after he resumed work among the Big Nambus, he walked home from the mountains and suffered fevers that afternoon. The following Sabbath, May 1, he struggled to keep his usual appointment, setting off feeling ill early in the morning. When he returned home he slumped on the floor. He told Alma he had been passing blood in his urine and was convinced his condition had degenerated to an acute phase of blackwater fever. After a hot bath he went to bed. He seemed a little refreshed the following morning but the symptoms persisted. During Sunday afternoon his temperature rose to over 40°C accompanied by uncontrollable shivering and vomiting.

Alma lovingly nursed him as best she could, having only a meagre training in medical treatments. Norman was too ill to travel anywhere even if a boat was summoned. And to send for help from the Stewarts on Atchin was futile because they too were not trained nurses. This desperate predicament worsened as Norman's slender grip on life petered out over the next tragic days. He passed away on Wednesday, May 5, aged only twenty-seven.

Tired, shocked, and emotionally drained, Alma buried her husband at sunset the following day in a shallow grave close to their home. A

[2] Published reports of this area carry various names such as Atnamaro, Tonmoro, Tonmaru, and Tanmaru.

recruiter's vessel had arrived in the bay during the day. The captain, oddly enough, had attended a Presbyterian mission and knew a little about Christian funerals. Alma persuaded him to speak and pray in his own language as Norman was laid in his coffin less grave. Leaving everything behind, Alma then accompanied them in an effort to reach Atchin. It was moonlight but their passage grew rough and perilous as they rounded the northern tip of Malakula. Alma chose to go ashore and walk through the jungle to a point on the coast opposite Atchin. Late at night she chanced upon a villager and his wife who gave her refuge and a mat to sleep on in their grass hut. After two days walking she sighted Atchin and was taken across the water to the Stewart's home.

Back at Tinmaru a local youth kept watch at the mission station because the bushmen threatened to come and take Norman Wiles' corpse for a cannibals feast. Stewart later built a picket fence around the grave and set up a headstone. Without heart the local people eventually vandalised the abandoned home, stole anything of value, then slaughtered and ate the bull and cow.

Norman's death cut short the advance among the Big Nambus. Stewart continued with occasional visits to Matanavat and inland to Chief Nikambat's people but mission efforts were not renewed until some years later.

Meanwhile, Stewart concentrated on developing the Atchin station. He built a new and larger church, of white-washed concrete, which was dedicated in December 1920, and operated a school for a promising group of young men, some from Ambrym. By this time the boys were proud to wear their white singlets and red calicos. James had built a European-style home at the Big Bay mission station, but Jope contracted blackwater fever. After his second bout later in 1920 he was hurried to the Sydney Sanitarium to recuperate and then he and his family returned to Fiji.

While the Jameses took furlough Don and Lilian Nicholson transferred from the Solomon Islands to care for the Big Bay station. It proved to be the start of a lengthy stay for the Nicholsons at various stations in Vanuatu. When James returned late in 1921 he brought a horse called 'Winsa", a donation from the Windsor church in Melbourne. This he used to extend his visiting in nearby villages. Over the next four years a number of small out-stations were established there, first at Hapuna, then Vileasu, and some on the west coast.

In 1923 the first baptisms were held, more than a decade after the Adventist Mission began in Vanuatu. Among these were four baptised in a flooded river at Big Bay. A young brother and sister duo, Moses and Miriam were among the group. More were baptised there later. The early converts were then employed to care for the out-stations. Among these early workers were a tall young man called Niala (later called Joshua) and his wife, Lois; Amos, who married Malupisa (later called Rachel); and Jekavu or "Jack" (later called Timothy) who married Eunice, a young woman who had previously refused to be exchanged for pigs in a heathen marriage deal.

Jack and Eunice were the first on Santo to be married in an Adventist service (1924). It had to be conducted on James' front verandah because a hurricane had destroyed their little church the previous year. James finally built and dedicated a more substantial church before the end of 1924.

The Big Bay station continued under James' care until 1926 when Anton and Bertha Well took over. Neither were trained in medical work. Soon after their arrival Anton was called on to remove a seventeen centimetre long fish-hook from a twelve-year-old girl's elbow. With only tweezers, pliers, a file, and an old razor he severed the eye end, pushed the hook further in until the point appeared under the flesh on the other side, made an incision and pulled the hook through. The poor girl screamed all the time but later, after complete recovery, was able to rejoice.

After the death of Wiles on Malakula it was only the Big Bay and Atchin stations which continued to operate in 1921. The Stewarts had cause for feeling discouraged at the time. But when he was absent on furlough in 1922 and the Nicholsons were caring for the Atchin station a major breakthrough occurred. David, or Baling, a young man from nearby Ambrym Island, had visited Parker in the early days and had briefly attended the Atchin school run by Stewart. He then returned home and on his own initiative he started gathering a group of his friends and then sent a message back to Atchin,

> *Me glad that me can write 'im you today. You can take 'im launch belong you now. You can come take 'im me fella, me fella can go along school belong mission. Some more boy, might ten fellow, all 'e ready. Me fella like you come and catch me fella, me fella waft now along time you come.*

Nicholson made a number of trips to Ambrym in the ERAN, returning with a total of twenty-four young men to train at the school. A small company of worshippers remained at Baiap on the south-west coast of Ambrym and in December 1922 the Nicholsons transferred there to pioneer a separate mission school. About sixty people formed the initial core and approximately half of them attended school. The Nicholsons first lived in a leaf-thatch hut and drew water from a beach hole at low tide. Its taste was very unpleasant.

The Ambrymese were influenced by the Presbyterian mission whose hospital was destroyed in the 1913 volcanic eruption. Furthermore, there were still some alive who had returned after working on the Queensland sugar-cane plantations. Nicholson found a man at Baiap who owned a copy of James Edson White's book, "The Coming King". Some also spoke of relatives who had come back to Ambrym from the plantations with the idea that Saturday was the Sabbath. There had obviously been some contact with Adventist colporteurs or other church members in Queensland.

There arose a strong team of missionaries from the groups of young Ambrymese men who trained at the Atchin and Baiap schools. Sixteen were baptised in 1923 and by the end of that year Parker, who had returned for a second stint in Vanuatu and replaced Stewart, officially organised the church at Baiap with nineteen charter members. The first Adventist marriage in all of Vanuatu was conducted at the same time.

Not everyone at Baiap was pleased about the Adventist Mission coming to their shore. Adventist converts were beaten, brought before courts, had their homes destroyed and their land taken from them by fellow villagers. A local chief was led to poison Etul, an ardent young man who had returned from the Atchin school. On Christmas Day (1924) Peter was also poisoned. He had returned to Baiap after serving briefly as a missionary on Malakula. Two days later, December 27, another adherent, Rachel, died of poisoning at Baiap also. Apparently, on this occasion the chief accidentally imbibed some of the poison and he died too, confessing on his death bed that he had a long hit list which included the Nicholsons. Trouble subsided with his passing and greater harmony returned to the district.

The domino effect in out-station development was nowhere more evident than on Ambrym. Before long a company at Malavet, just a few kilometres from Baiap, built their own thatch church. The influence then spread around to the north coast where Masig Nalo and his wife, Phoebe, established a company at Limbul. It was into this area that men such as Thomas and Silas had returned from the Queensland plantations. Thomas, in fact, had kept the Sabbath from his return in 1914 until his death sometime before Adventist missionaries came to his village in 1925. From Limbul Adventists then extended their reach to the east coast at Falifur in 1926.

Mission work on Ambrym experienced a dramatic turn on Friday night, June 28, 1929, when Mount Benbow erupted. William and Mary Taylor, nurses who had replaced the Nicholsons over three years earlier, awoke to distant rumbling. Then they saw the lava

flowing towards their home. They quickly alerted the sleeping village, packed two suitcases, snatched up their infant and fled in heavy rain to a point further along the coast.

A few incapacitated islanders perished close to the volcano but no lives were lost near the coast. Both the Adventist station at Baiap and the Presbyterian station nearby at Craig's Cove were destroyed under metres of molten lava. Those who had fled from the danger zone were ferried to nearby islands. Church companies on the northern and eastern coasts continued on unaffected. Adventist mission work didn't resume in the Baiap area until some years later when the environment recovered and resettlement took place.

During the 1920s mission work on Malakula fluctuated amid recurring promises from the Big Nambus on one hand and murderous attacks on the other hand. Trainee missionaries at the Atchin school were encouraged to think of north-west Malakula still as a challenging area for development. Some of the Ambrymese students served there from 1922 as small groups decided to break from heathenism in the mountains and move closer to the coast. Renewed interest sprang up at Wo Wo, Matanavat, Espiegle Bay, Tonmiel, and Malua Bay.

Robert and his wife, Leah, came from Ambrym to instruct the company at Tonmiel. A little church with a lime-cement floor was built in co-operation with the leading convert, Barl. Big Nambus witchdoctors objected to mission inroads and instigated a raid on the Tonmiel com party. As they encircled the village they were spotted sneaking through the long grass and the alarm was raised. Volleys rang out on the gathering worshippers but no one was hurt. This incident led the believers to ask if they could be relocated on Ambrym. However, Nicholson visited and received assurances from the Big Nambus there would not be a repeat attack.

The Tonmiel group went about trying to persuade their traditional enemies at Espiegle Bay to accept an Ambrymese missionary too. Their endeavours broke down some barriers and also encouraged a

request from the Big Nambus to open a station at Malua Bay. However, such bright prospects received repeated set-backs. First, a tense situation arose when a man from Matanavat stole a young girl from Tonmiel. Only government intervention forced the return of the girl a year later. On another occasion a sick Big Nambus man and his wife came to the coast seeking help at Tonmiel but the man died and his wife refused to go back to the mountains. The Big Nambus witchdoctor made death threats and insisted she return. That crisis defused itself when the witchdoctor himself died shortly after.

More serious was the 1924 killing of four Malua Bay people bysome of the heathens in the Tonmiel region. In addition, some at Malua Bay killed the chief's father at Espiegle Bay and there followed a murder at Malua Bay in retaliation. In an effort to calm the area Will and Louisa Smith settled into a primitive native hut at the Tonmiel station. Once, when the Smiths were attending meetings at Atchin, the Big Nambus bushmen vandalised the church, ripping up the picture rolls and smashing the school slates. One grievance appeared to be the mission's teaching about monogamy. Second and third wives were seeking refuge at the mission station as they saw their opportunity for a happier life. When Smith returned the bushmen agreed to a truce.

The bushmen's truce was short lived. During 1925 tense times persisted for the Smith family on Malakula. The Ambrymese missionaries, Robert, Masig Nalo, Bong, Bogmasa, and brothers Joel and Joe, all experienced confrontation with the Big Nambus. Joel stepped into his hut at Tonmiel after visiting Espiegle Bay one day and the building was riddled with musket fire. Miraculously, no one was hit. Joe, who was stationed at Malua Bay, and a leading convert called Harry, were lured to the mountains on another occasion with the phoney offer of starting an out-station among the Big Nambus. They were surrounded, guns were levelled at their heads, and the order given to shoot. But a friendly local shouted in the nick of time and interceded to save their lives.

On another occasion Harry was ambushed as he drank at a stream. A bullet lodged in his thigh but he struggled back to the village. There, his friends unsuccessfully tried to cut the lead out with a piece of broken glass. The news was relayed to headquarters and the ERAN immediately came to take him to the French hospital on Santo. When he came back a few months later he sought out his assailant, prayed with him, and told him he forgave him.

The Smiths bravely transferred from Tonmiel to the danger zone at Malua Bay in order, once again, to foster peace and encourage the company to remain loyal to the mission.

Even those on the mission station at Malua Bay kept themselves armed for self-defence. Early in 1926 a large contingent of Big Nambus men encircled the station one night with the intention of wiping out everyone there. The village dogs began to bark and shots were fired into the darkness to scare off intruders. The next morning the company found food scraps in the bush as evidence that the Big Nambus had been there.

Soon after the night visit, early on a Sabbath morning, Smith went to milk his cow. Halfway down the hill he was accosted by a Big Nambus warrior armed with a gun and told to go back. Smith obediently turned, put the bucket over his head for a little protection and began to retrace his steps. At that point a shot rang out. It was purposely fired into the air to panic the villagers and bring them running out of their huts. A woman looked out and saw Smith, then shouted the false report that he had been hit. On hearing these words a leading convert, Lilitil, snatched up his musket and ran down the path to protect Smith. Instead he was killed in a hail of gun fire from Big Nambus marksmen hidden in the tall grass.

The Big Nambus bushmen thought that their continued harassment would frighten the company into returning to heathenism. Their ploy failed. The converts remained loyal even after the tragic murder of Lilitil. Finally the bushmen admitted the mission was not there to "play play". Indeed, nine people from the Tonmiel company were

baptised in Espiegle Bay later that year (1926) and little groups of believers continued to worship along the north-west coast of Malakula.

The out-stations on Malakula were always serviced by the headquarters launch, ERAN. In 1923 the ERAN was wrecked in a hurricane while visiting Big Bay, Santo. It turned over while anchored and split open like a book. James cramped it together again and took it to Malo Island for further repairs. It was taken back to Atchin but finally declared unseaworthy in 1929. James himself had a small launch for his own use in Big Bay. Its name was TILA and later was used on the Malakula coast. Another boat, named KAORIOF, meaning "tell out the light", was an eight-metre launch similar to the ERAN. Nicholson used it while based on Ambrym.

The three boats were safe for coastal hugging only. On occasion they were taken on risky open-sea voyages, inviting catastrophes in tide-rips and storms. Travellers reported long delays trying to start the motors in damp weather, hair-raising trips buffeted like driftwood, and having to put into isolated shores to wait out rough weather for days without sufficient supplies. Not until 1927 was a larger boat provided. It was named LOLOMA, meaning "love", and was nearly fifteen metres long with a 19 horse-power engine, i.e., more than twice as powerful as the previous vessels. By 1932 two more large boats were in use throughout Vanuatu. They were named LE PHARE and RANI I.

Two further advances were made in the 1920s. A translation of 126 hymns was published in 1925, and a site for a central training school began to be developed in the same year. The school project experienced lengthy teething problems.

On October 22, 1925, a contract of sale was completed for 976 hectares on the south-west corner of Aore Island. The price of $1227 was paid on February 1, 1926. Parker, Nicholson, and James all agreed it was an ideal tract of fertile land which faced the cool breezes and possessed safe anchorage for boats. It had originally

been sold by the local people to a British descendant of the Huguenots, George de Latour, in 1885. Five years later the same people murdered him and the estate was purchased by a planter on Erromanga Island, Sidney Martin. However, neighbouring French planters and a co-operative called Societe Peyrolle contested the ownership of large portions, making claims that they owned papers that pre-dated the Adventist contract.

The Aore property included two small off-shore islands, the larger called Ratua Island. James first erected a shed on the mainland and placed goats on Ratua Island. With the help of mission lads gardens were planted and building materials for a sawmill and European-style home were landed. Late in February 1927 Jack and Rose Radley arrived to build and develop this major station. Rose was a trained nurse and Jack was a wizard with engines, construction work, boating and anything practical.

Prior to the coming of Radley the French began encroaching on the estate, harvesting coconuts and felling timber. Three days after Radley set foot on the shore he was challenged by five Frenchmen. Weeks later he had a shotgun levelled at him and was ordered off, but Radley stood his ground and the group soon grew tired of the continual hassle. Despite the fracas it was reported that the training school opened on October 27, 1927.

Another Frenchman challenged a different section of the property which included Ratua Island. He persisted in driving pigs into Radley's garden. Over a period of months Radley methodically shot nearly fifty of them. Each time he despatched a message to the Frenchman who sent some lads to fetch the carcasses and these were then eaten by the French gang. Next, goats and then cattle were allowed to wander throughout the estate and Radley followed the same procedure. Repeatedly, Radley sought advice from the British government but they admitted the Frenchman would have to shoot him first before they could act. In the presence of a government official the Frenchman did indeed threaten to shoot Radley. He came onto the property armed on several occasions.

Compromises were desperately sought by the Adventist mission. In 1927 they suggested a strip of no-mans-land be established around the property. In 1928 they offered to reduce their claim to only 405 hectares. Neither of these offers were accepted. Later, the mission further reduced their claim to a mere 324 hectares, about one third of the original size. For years the wrangling went on, reaching flashpoint in 1931. The following year a joint court ruled in favour of the French. The British magistrate, noting procedural illegalities by the French magistrate, procrastinated when counter-signing the papers and buried them in his office files. No real legal settlement was therefore reached, so in 1944 and 1945 there were more court hearings to resolve the case. The Aore Training School remained but its early history proved to be one of the most frustrating sagas for the Adventist Mission in the Pacific.

By 1940 Adventism had spread to the islands of Malo, Aoba, Pauma, Tongoa, and Tanna. The latter especially became a stronghold but most members, like other Christians on the island, apostatised during the Second World War when they joined the locally conceived cargo cult of John Frum. Among his tenets of faith was the sacredness of Friday. It was very difficult to rebuild the mission work on Tanna in the post-war years. In addition there were more inter-tribal fights and murders on Malakula during the 1950s which hindered progress. However, by 1950 Vanuatu overall had regained its pre-war membership total of approximately five hundred. Membership continues to grow.

Conversions in Vanuatu were all the more amazing because of the culture from which they emerged. Murder, cannibalism, polygamy, a pay-back system, sorcery and witchcraft were so foreign to the gospel. The Adventist Mission suffered many reverses as the devil contested every advance move. Both missionaries and converts were often in perilous straits. Nevertheless, the numerous victories in changed hearts demonstrated the power of God.

Major sources for this booklet are the "Australasian Record", the "Missionary Leader", the Alma Wiles diary, the Aore papers, and the author's personal collection of pioneer data.

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