

Savages of the New Hebrides.

ERROMANGA. THE MARTIN ISLE.
By the Rev. H. A. Robertson, Erromanga.
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Erromanga, one of the islands of the New Hebrides, always had a bad reputation; and deservedly. When visited for the first time by Capt. Cook in 1774, from his own account, he tells how he nearly lost his life there, owing to the treachery of the natives. The Erromangans showed themselves to be thieves. They did their best to lure Cook and his few followers into an ambush. Acting strictly on the defensive, two of the natives were shot. The author writes that the tale of the first appearance of "strangers has been handed down to the children and children's children of the people who saw Cook on this occasion." On some of these islands the sandalwood grows. This wood was in great demand by the early European traders, and the natives were cruelly treated. The islanders seem to have hated the white men, and reprisals were frequent. Certainly these islands were no pleasure grounds for the missionary.

Anthropologically considered, the inhabitants of the islands of the New Hebrides would stand low in the scale of humanity. Possibly they show a mixture of Polyneesian and Papuan blood. In color the Erromangans are rather dark brown to black. They are short in stature, "the usual height being about five feet four inches." Mr. Robertson writes: "On my first visit to Erromanga I was struck with what seemed to me to be the defiant, sullen appearance of the natives. This, I think, is due to the deep-set eyes and projecting forehead. The nose is not large, but, having no bridge except in rare cases, it seems very big; the mouth is large, but not always ill-shaped." The missionary himself, who was doing his best to bring about the betterment of these uncomfortable people, thus describes his early impressions of the Erromangans.

Sometimes a party would honor the mission house with a call, and what impudent callers they were! They would sit on the chairs, sit on the tables, sit on the beds, and we had to put up with it all. They would examine and actually smell everything in the house. When a crowd of them, with their unwashed bodies and painted faces, crammed themselves into the rooms, by the time they had got fairly through them we could scarcely stay in the house for the odor. They would never shake hands with us, and, in taking anything from us would carefully place a leaf in their own hands so that ours might not by chance touch them. This was to prevent the possibility of our "sorcery" taking effect on them.

The apostle of the New Hebrides was John Williams, who, after twenty-two years of mission work in the Eastern Pacific, made his fatal visit to the New Hebrides. That was in 1830. He was accompanied by Mr. Harris. Bent on a mission of peace, the two sought a landing, and both were murdered by the savages. There is evidence that the bodies of the two Englishmen were eaten by the natives. In 1857 the Rev. George Gordon and his wife reached Erromanga, and met with the same sad fate. Man and wife were butchered. Conditions concerning the massacre of the Gordons were even worse than those when Williams was killed. The Gordons had lived some time on the island, and were known by the savages as bent on doing good. Later on, another Gordon, the brother of the missionary was also murdered there. It certainly required a great deal of courage on the part of Mr. H. A. Robertson to make another attempt toward giving these wretched people the chance of becoming acquainted with the advantages of religious teachings.

Fully determined to advance Christianity in these islands, Mr. Robertson and his brave wife have been fairly successful. There is a mission church there now, and there are numerous followers, who are taught the lesson of Jesus Christ. Here are some additional traits which show how difficult the native must be to deal with:

The Erromangan has no respect for his elders, and obeys no one, and studies no one's interest but his own. He gives away nothing; there is no such thing as a bona fide present. There is also no forgiveness. . . . Truth in heathenism was told only when it suited best, and no heathen would hesitate to tell a lie if it suited his immediate purpose better than the truth; or, in short, he never told the truth if a lie suited him better.