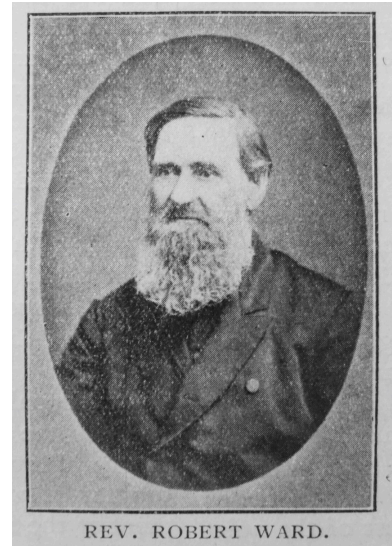


Robert Ward of New Zealand

Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by James P. Langham in a series entitled Pioneers Family

“It needed the hearts of lions and the brains of men to accomplish what they did.”

As we look at the portrait of Robert Ward it is easy to see that he was strong, courageous, level-headed, but withal genial and kindly. These qualities fitted him for the hard life of a missionary pioneer. Though his work was chiefly amongst colonists, he embraced every opportunity to carry the evangel to the natives. Long journeys, involving much exposure and frequent privation, were accepted by him as “all in the day’s work,” and his road from one preaching station to another was starred by preaching, conversation and prayer—resulting in many conversions. A few extracts from his diary, furnished by his son, the Rev. C.E. Ward, now himself a superannuated minister at Christchurch, will serve to show “what manner of man he was.”



“The Maoris are a very superior race —probably the finest native race in the world—manly, intelligent, of real courage, brave to rashness, of great capacity—a natural orator, a natural gentleman.” On his arrival in New -Plymouth, having mastered the native tongue, he made many successful attempts to evangelise these people.

“September 25th, 1866.—Walked to the Omata Pah, a native village a few miles to the southward. It is situated on a high cliff, among which the rocks are in grand confusion. When I entered I was immediately accosted by a woman who knew me. Being cold and wet, I requested a fire, which was at once kindled, and an old man spread a mat for me to recline on. Within a few minutes I was surrounded by natives, to whom I read the fifteenth chapter of St. John, and then preached. They seemed very attentive, and wished me to come again. My whole soul desires to be useful to this people.”

“November 1st, 1866.—Entered a Pah to-day, in which I found a ring of men reading a New Testament in rotation. The system of taking places was adopted. I joined the ring, taking the bottom place. In a few minutes I was head scholar and then monitor. After reading they wished me to catechise them, and I gladly complied. Then I availed myself of the opportunity to preach salvation to them through faith in Jesus Christ.”

“November 17th, 1866.—On entering a village to-day a man who was lying down wanted to know my business. I told him I had come to preach to the natives. He said I should not be allowed to preach. I made repeated attempts to preach, or converse, or pray with them, but on every attempt was foiled. On my homeward journey I found myself yielding to despondency, when I saw a fire in the bush, and heard voices. On approaching I found a party of natives, who had come from Mokau. They pronounced me a missionary, and I proposed to preach, to which they assented. The subject was our Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus. The scene was novel. Stars gleamed through the

foliage of the trees, the fire lighted up the swarthy countenances of my hearers, and at few yards' distance the darkness wrapped us round. After this interesting service I went through the rest of my journey with a thankful heart."

Having planted a number of churches amongst the colonists and gained the love of many natives, he expected to gather in an abundant harvest. But he was doomed to bitter disappointment. The gold fever swept the colony of its inhabitants and decimated the infant churches. The men rushed off in swarms to distant California and near Australia, ignorant that the country they were forsaking was also rich in gold.

After the gold fever had subsided and things were taking on their normal aspect, Mr. Ward returned to Taranaki, where he spent nine eventful years—years crowned with abundant victory. But the first part of that period was crowded with tragedy. The Maori war burst in all its horrors around his home. He literally heard the first shot fired, and was compelled to remove his family to the shelter of the neighbouring town. All the country chapels were closed—one being riddled with bullets and outside another some boys were tomahawked. The family was domiciled in the Independent chapel, where the pulpit was converted into a cupboard and the pews into sleeping bunks. Three of his sons were pressed into military service and experienced the usual dangers of war, one of them being wounded in a skirmish with the Maoris. Thus two great curses of mankind—lust of gold and greed of land, postponed for years the evangelical triumphs for which he lived and prayed. But when the long-delayed harvest was gathered in, its abundance and high quality were sufficient reward for long delay and weary waiting. At New Plymouth a new church was built with the willing contributions of men, "whose stock had been killed, homesteads burned, and farmsteads desolated by the Maoris." Then came the great ingathering, and more than a hundred of his own congregation swore allegiance to our Lord Jesus. The congregations of other churches were equally stirred and blest.

To the very end, which came in October, 1876, he lived a strenuous life. Literally he "ceased at once to work and live." So full was he of zeal for the Kingdom that just before his death he made out a list of "Work to be done during the next three months." Though he kept his room till noon each day, he continued to preach.

On Sunday, October 1st, he appeared at breakfast, to the great surprise of the family, saying, "Now, mother, isn't this better than lying in bed?" When urged to rest he said, "It would do me no good; the decree is gone forth; I cannot even pray to be better; for I feel it is not God's will, and, if I attempt a petition of the kind, I cannot get it out." He preached at both services on that day. As the evening service proceeded he seemed to gather strength, and his sermon thrilled the people. His voice grew loud and clear, and he preached as powerfully as in the prime of his ministry. But it was his last utterance from the pulpit. He could scarcely pronounce the benediction. When brought into his house he said, "I have dropped in the harness."

References

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