



JOHN PATON

MISSIONARY TO THE NEW HEBRIDES

Christian Biographies
Richard D. Phillips
Second Presbyterian Church



PATON'S EARLY LIFE

- Born May 24, 1824 on a small farm near Dumfries, Scotland
 - Son of devoted heirs of the Covenanter tradition.
 - His father's trade was a stocking maker, members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. He "established his house as a true nursery of godliness."
- Influence of his father's piety and prayers
 - Family prayers began and ended each day.
 - In the family's poverty and faith, he learned God's faithfulness to answer prayer.
 - Paton vowed "by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonour such a father and mother as He had given me."



EARLY LIFE

Passion for Missions

His father kept a globe, from which they spoke of the need for the gospel in “heathen” lands. Also kept abreast of missionary literature.

“On his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the heathen world to the service of Jesus.”

From this, Paton gained an ambition to serve as a missionary of Christ.

PREPARATION FOR MISSIONS

Early Zeal for Study

At 12, began his studies in Greek and Hebrew

In order to attend college, he took a position in Glasgow as a local evangelist.

It took ten years for Paton to complete college & seminary.

Calling to the New Hebrides

Since Scotland had evangelists, he wanted to go where there were none.

When, in answer to his prayers, a call was made for a missionary to be sent to the New Hebrides, Paton volunteered.

“The wail and claims of the heathen were constantly sounding in my ears. I saw them perishing for lack of knowledge of the true God and His Son, Jesus, while the Green Street people had the open Bible and all the means of grace within easy reach.”

TANNA: 1858-62

- Arrived on Tanna and moved into an unoccupied missions house with his wife
 - The plan was to live among the people, learn their language, and preach the gospel
- First encounter with the New Hebridians
 - While moving in, they witnessed a battle between native tribes, learning that the losers had been eaten at a feast.
 - “The depths of Satan outlined in the first chapter of Romans, were uncovered there before our eyes in the daily life of the people.”
 - Local religion was controlled by “Sacred Men” who employed black magic.
- Death of Paton’s Wife
 - Gave birth in Feb. 1859 but within weeks mother and child had died.
 - Paton sat on her grave to protect her from cannibals.
 - Left alone, together with communion with Christ.





SURVIVING AND MINISTERING AMONG THE TANNESE

Hostility of the Natives

Paton was blamed for every difficulty, including drought or hurricanes.

Ceaseless threats were made, to which Paton responded with prayer and peaceful self-protection.

Learning the Tannese language, he began preaching and making some converts

He survived in part due to tribal rivalries, with one chief vowing his death so that another protected him.

When surrounded by spears or muskets, Paton prayed to Christ “either Himself to protect me, or to take me home to His glory.”

The White Traders

Perhaps his greatest trial: white traders who abused and exploited the Tannese, who hated Paton in response.

The traders deliberately spread measles, killing 1/3 of the island, including some of Paton’s key converts.

SURVIVING AND MINISTERING AMONG THE TANNESE

Departure from Tannah

Among his converts, Kowia's (a tribal chief) dying words: "I fear God is taking us all away from Tanna, and will leave my poor people dark and benighted as before. . . . Farewell, Missi."

A war chief made clear their intention to kill Paton: "We hate the Worship; it causes all our diseases and deaths, it goes against our customs, and it condemns the things we delight in."

Paton realized that his Christian was to depart from Tanna so as to avoid being put to death.



RAISING SUPPORT

Realizing that he needed others to join him, Paton traveled to Australia and Scotland from 1862-1866

His main need was funds to support a missions ship, the *Dayspring*.

Wrote the first volume of his autobiography, not containing the record of his success but of his failure. Inspired many to missions.

While home in Scotland, met and married his second wife, Margaret.

Meanwhile, the British navy sent a ship to punish the islanders for their persecution of the missionaries, including Paton. Two villages were shelled on Tanna, with many killed. Paton was accused in the press of participating in the atrocity, causing him scandal and accusation.



ANIWA: 1866-1881

Welcomed by the tribes, who asked him to build his house on sacred land (thinking that their gods would kill him.)

Ministered to their medical needs, learned their language, and preached the gospel

Again they were blamed for all troubles and subjected to violent threats (and attempts). “Often have I had to run into the arms of some savage when his club was swung or his musket levelled at my head, and praying to Jesus, so clung round him that he could neither strike nor shoot me till his wrath cooled down.... At other times, nothing could be done, but stand still in prayer, asking God to protect us.”



YEARS ON ANIWA

Paton developed friendships with important chiefs, leading several to a firm conversion to Christ.

Boldly preached from Scripture against the prevailing sins of the people, finding that the Word brought repentance and saving faith.

When some chiefs discovered him communicating with his wife through written notes, they asked to discover “the magic” involved and began learning to read.



VICTORY AT THE WELL

- The only water supply was a water hole controlled by the “Sacred Men.” To oppose them, Paton began digging a well on his own land. This required a hole at least 30 feet deep, through coral and earth, and was likely to produce only salt water.
- His native friends declared that he had gone mad and set guards to keep him from taking his own life in despair. Half-way down, the digging collapsed, almost burying Paton, who relied on prayer.
- At 30 feet, Paton announced that the next day would reveal fresh water. The people gathered as he dug, as fresh water bubbled up. The leading chief exclaimed: “The Jehovah God has sent us rain from the earth. Why should He not also send us His Son from Heaven? Namakei stands up for Jehovah.” As a result the entire island converted to Christ.



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ANIWA

Three years after arriving on Aniwa, Paton organized the island into a church, joining with Christians from other islands to hold the first Aniwan communion service. Afterwards, Paton began a series of classes on the Shorter Catechism.

“At the moment when I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of cannibalism, but now stretched out to receive and partake the emblems and seals of the Redeemer’s love, I had a foretaste of the joy of Glory that well nigh broke my heart to pieces.”

Bible teaching was held throughout the island, resulting in a new society based on Scriptural principles. Many preachers and evangelists arose, including some who traveled to Tanna and were used for the conversion of that island.

PATON'S FINAL YEARS: 1881-1905

Departing from Aniwa, Paton placed the church into the hands of its elders. He returned in 1886 to present his New Testament translation in their language. He found the elders leading the island in biblical worship, confirming converts, catechizing and preaching, and holding prayer meetings for Paton's well-being.

In his older years, Paton traveled the world for the support of missions and worked for the reform of the church in Scotland.

In 1902, Paton returned to Aniwa to present a hymnbook and translation of the Shorter Catechism in their language.

“Oh, how I long for the holy Sabbaths of Aniwa!”

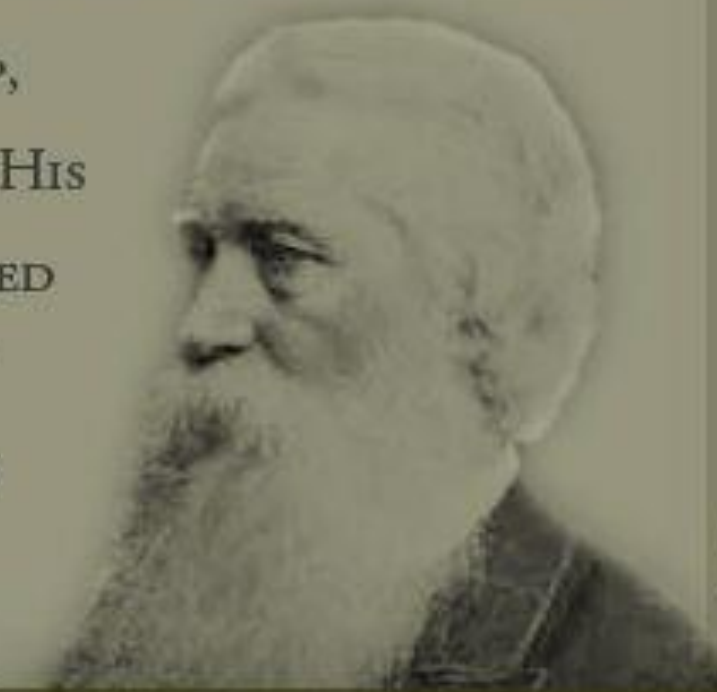


ANIWA'S TRIBUTE TO PATON

Long ago, Dr. Paton, the aged, was a young man and he said within himself, 'I must not hide this light, I must let it shine.' And so he left his own land and brought the light of Jesus to Aniwa. Aniwa was then a dark land, but now it is full of light. Men and women of Aniwa, don't hide your light, let it shine. There is a dark land across the sea there; take the light of Jesus there and let it shine till that land is full of light like your own.

“THUS WERE THE NEW HEBRIDES BAPTIZED WITH
THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS; AND CHRIST THEREBY
TOLD THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN WORLD THAT HE
CLAIMED THESE ISLANDS AS HIS OWN. HIS CROSS
MUST YET BE LIFTED UP,
WHERE THE BLOOD OF HIS
SAINTS HAS BEEN Poured
FORTH IN HIS NAME!”

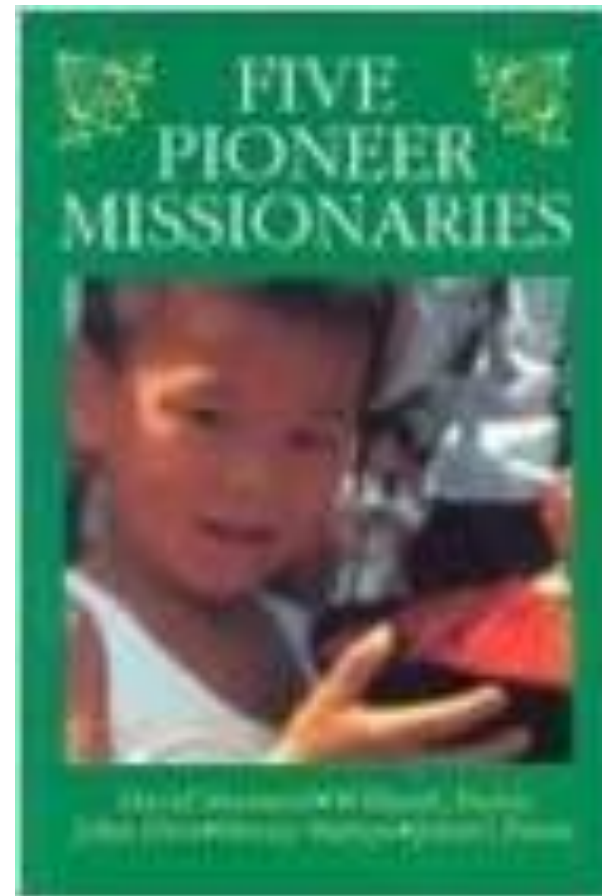
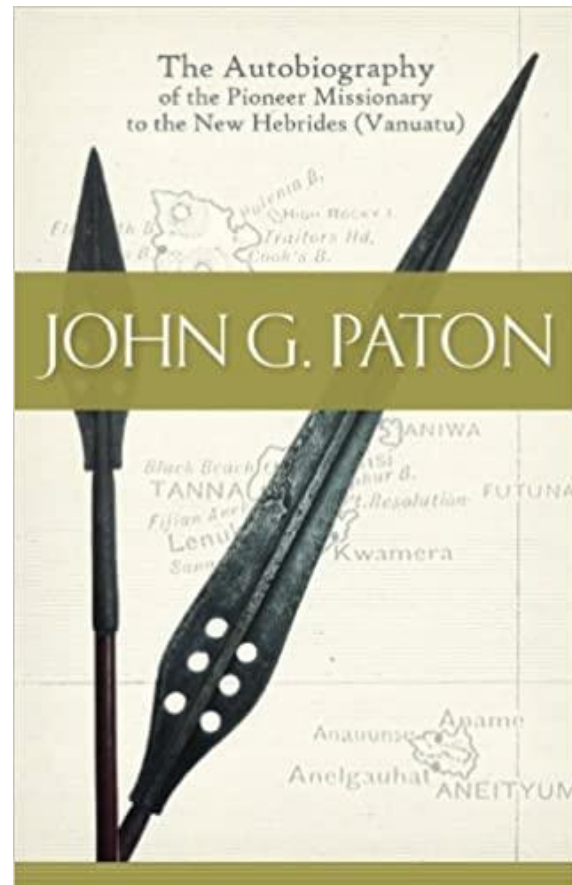
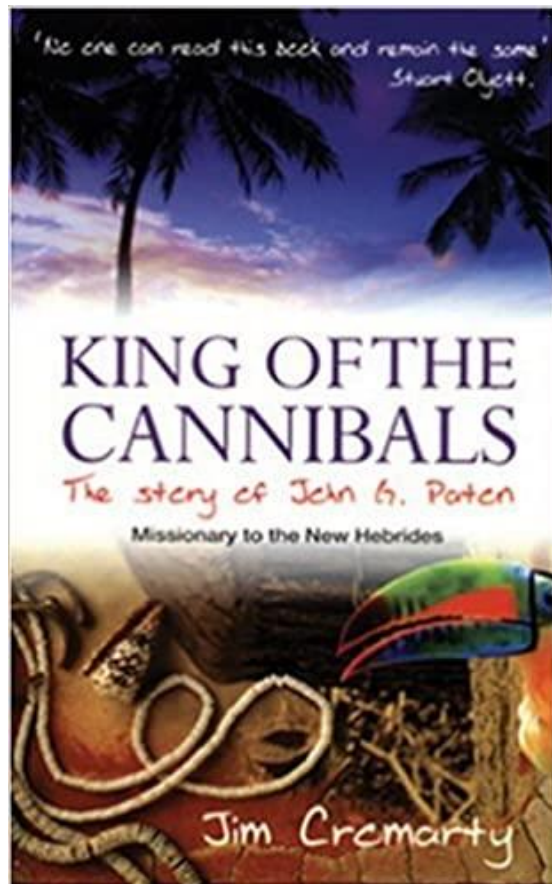
- JOHN G. PATON



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