

JAMES CALVERT

The Printer-Missionary to Fiji

When James Calvert went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the ship captain tried to turn him back, saying, "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages". To that, Calvert replied, "*We died before we came here*".....

THERE seems to be no profession or trade that a missionary may not find useful in both home and foreign fields. James Calvert, who was born in England a hundred years ago, was apprenticed to a printer, bookbinder, and stationer, for seven years. He had some education first, and seems to have made good use of all his early opportunities. The young man's heart turned to the foreign mission work, and in good time he was appointed to labor in Fiji, and went bravely to the field to which the Wesleyan Missionary Society sent him. It took three months' travel to reach the island, in 1838. One of the first tasks that came to the heroic missionary was to gather up and bury the bones of eighty victims of a cannibal feast. You see what he had to deal with in his new field, and what the young bride had to face. But they had no thought of turning back-not they. Six months after landing in Fiji, Mr. Calvert had charge of thirteen towns that had no roads at all connecting them, and of twenty-four surrounding islands, some of them a hundred miles away. To reach his island-field, the missionary had only a canoe that was hardly seaworthy, but he used it somehow, and was kept from drowning, and from being killed and eaten by the savages. He and his wife mastered the queer language very soon, and showed very great courage and tact in dealing with the natives.

The name of the king was Thakombau. The conversion of his daughter had a great influence upon the savages. There was a custom in the islands of strangling the women of the household when a king died. Mr. Calvert offered, Fiji fashion, to have one of his own fingers cut off if Thakombau would promise not to strangle any women when the old king died. Just this offer showed the cannibals what sort of stuff the man was made of. He did a great deal to abolish the dreadful custom.

When, by and by, the king of the Cannibal Islands became a Christian, he ordered what had been the old "death drums" be used thereafter in calling people together to worship the true God, in whom he now believed. He openly confessed his faith and put away his many wives. Among his last acts was the ceding of Fiji to the Queen of Great Britain.

Mr. Calvert's knowledge of printing and bookbinding was very useful indeed, as was the printing-press set up not long after his arrival. The press was carried from one island to another, and thousands and thousands of printed pages were scattered abroad. In 1847 the New Testament, well bound and complete, was ready for the natives.

After seventeen years of labor in Fiji, the missionary spent some time in England, then went on a mission to Africa. In 1855 he attended the Jubilee of Christianity in Fiji. **He found over 1,300 churches, ten white missionaries, sixty-five native ones, 1,000 head teachers, 30,000 church-members, and 104,585 church attendants. He died in 1892.**