ROY BRANDSTATER

Pacific Press®
Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho | Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
www.pacificpress.com

CHAPTER 1

MAN-EATERS OF MALEKULA

Of the eighty islands of the New Hebrides group, Malekula was the most primitive, the most heathen, and the most savage. Andrew G. Stewart, pioneer Adventist missionary to the South Pacific islands, wrote: "This is the saddest point in all the Pacific." John Geddie, Presbyterian missionary of the nineteenth century, wrote in his journal, "This is truly one of the dark places of earth, where all the abominations of the heathen are practiced without scruples and without remorse." My brother, Gordon Brandstater, who spent some twenty-five years supervising mission work in the Pacific, told me, "There is no place on earth where I have been that shows the degradation of mankind as I have seen on the island of Malekula."

Crimes of every kind were commonplace. The people considered theft and licentiousness honorable. There was apparently no human love, but in its place disaffection and malice. There was cruelty instead of sympathy; brutality instead of mercy; suspicion instead of trust; sullenness instead of smiles; warfare instead of peace; and fear instead of faith. No adult male went about unarmed; every man carried a club or a spear—or both—until the white trader came and provided muskets.

Pigs were the main article of barter until recent years. A wife cost an average of ten pigs. The animals shared human living quarters and were treated as prime property. In March 1980, Pastor Sam Dick, a native of Malekula, visited me in my home in Redlands, California. I asked him about his parents. In reply he said, "Oh, my father killed my mother."

"Why would he do such a terrible thing?" I asked.

As if it were not an unusual thing to do, he answered straightway, "Oh, he had a very special pig, which had to do with our tribal worship. It was kept in the house; mother was its keeper, and it must not be let out. Somehow it found its way to freedom, and father saw it outside wallowing in the mud. He was so angry he took his club and killed my mother. Then he took me as a baby to a widow to care for me. She said, 'No! You killed your wife; now you take care of your own baby.' So he killed her also. Then he gave me to my mother's sister, who was just a girl at the time, warning, 'Take care of this baby or I will kill you too!' "

THE EXPLORERS

Malekula is the second-largest island of the New Hebrides group, whose eighty islands reach out over the Pacific Ocean two thousand miles from Australia like two arms forming the letter Y. The islands were discovered by Pedro Fernandes de Queirós, a Spanish explorer. In 1605 he was searching for the "Great South Land," under instructions from the king of Spain, when he stumbled on one of the larger islands of the group.

When it became generally known that the earth was not flat but a sphere hanging in space, explorers and philosophers argued that there had to be a great land mass down under to keep the balance. This must be hidden away south of the equator, which was thought to be a blazing, impassable furnace.

In the fifteenth century Spain and Portugal were the world superpowers, competing for trade, treasure, and colonies. The pope, anxious to contain dangerous rivalries, divided the world between the two. They could now go their way and discover new lands and people, but they were committed to carry their religion to every race of people they might find.

Queirós, a deeply religious man, acclaimed this strange new outpost to be the "Great South Land of the Holy Spirit"—"*Australia del Espiritu Santo*." When his men mutinied and provisions were almost exhausted, Queirós spent only fifteen days in this area, then sailed northwest through the straits separating Australia from New Guinea. Torres, his navigator, was left behind on another ship. Torres sailed through those same straits, giving them more attention, so that they were permanently named "Torres Straits." Likewise the island of Santo, New Hebrides, still retains the name Queirós gave it.

For 168 years after Queirós, these islands remained in isolation. Then in 1774 came the colorful Captain James Cook of Britain, searching for the "Great Southern Continent." His instructions were: "If you discover nothing westward to Tasman's New Zealand, you are to observe with accuracy the situation

of such islands as you may discover in your voyage that may not have been discovered by Europeans, and take possession for His Majesty; and endeavor by all proper means to cultivate friendship with the natives." Captain Cook rediscovered the New Hebrides and identified Santo and the Bay of St. Philip and St. James, named by Queirós. Then he charted this island along with other islands of the group, putting them accurately on the map, and named them after the Hebrides off the coast of Scotland.

The explorer wrote, "The people . . . are of a dark color, a little slender they have thick lips and flat noses; and monkey faces, long heads and wooly hair. What adds to their deformity is a cord, or belt around the waist, just under the short rib and over the middle of the belly, that is tied so tight they look as if they had two bellies." Captain Cook apparently did not venture far inland, nor did he elaborate on their habits. That remained for later visitors to describe.

ENTER THE MISSIONARIES

"You will be eaten by cannibals!" an elderly parishioner warned John G. Paton when, at the age of thirty-two, he decided to leave his congregation at Green Street, Glasgow, for the hate-filled heathen of the New Hebrides, a people little different from the wild beasts in their treatment of visitors.

"If I can live and die honoring the Lord Jesus," Paton replied, "it will make no difference whether I am eaten by cannibals or eaten by worms." Four months after leaving Scotland, when he landed on Tanna, he wrote, "I must confess, my first impressions drove me to the verge of utter dismay. On beholding these natives in their paint and nakedness and misery, my heart was as full of horror as of pity. Had I given up my work in Glasgow, with so many delightful associations, to consecrate my life to these degraded creatures? Was it possible to teach them right and wrong? Could we Christianize or even civilize them?" But he added, "That was only a passing feeling."

Cannibalism was a way of life, along with vicious, inhuman warfare. After the fight, victors ate the vanquished. John Paton and his wife had hardly arrived on Tanna when they were treated to a display of tribal warfare. "The discharge of muskets and the horrid yells of the savages informed us that they were engaged in deadly fights," he wrote.

> Excitement and terror was high. Armed men rushed around in every direction, with feathers in their twisted hair. Faces were painted red, black, white, some had one side painted black and the other red, others the brow white, the chin blue, in fact any color on any part—the more grotesque

> the higher the art. The women and children rushed to safety. We hid in a native house. We were told that six men had been killed and their bodies were cooked and eaten that night at a boiling spring. The next morning we were unable to use the water, it being polluted with the bodies and blood.

Paton said their mission boy was more upset about being unable to obtain pure water than about the cannibal feast, which he took for granted.

Trading ships were sometimes captured and the crews killed and eaten. A Sydney whaler, the *Royal Sovereign*, was wrecked on the island of Efate. The natives pretended to be helpful but suddenly attacked the crews. Only one man, John Jones, managed to escape with the help of a Samoan mission teacher, Mose. One missionary said that he saw a native slice flesh from a victim and eat it raw.

In 1853 a London Missionary Society ship left two Polynesian teachers with their wives and one little boy on the west coast of the island of Lelepa. John Feddis, who was there at the time, wrote of the warm reception given the teachers. But the natives were treacherous—nineteen days later the four mission workers were killed and eaten. The boy was spared, as the people thought to keep him. However, he kept crying, so they tied a stone around his neck and dropped him into the sea.

Christianized teachers from other islands were no less consecrated to their task. Two Samoan teachers, Apela and Samuela, were placed on the island of Futuna, where the chief promised to protect them. They were still there twelve months later when the mission ship returned, so the mission boat left Samuela's wife and daughter off on the island. When sickness broke out on the island, the natives blamed the mission teacher. The natives killed Apela, Samuela, and his daughter in their garden and then rushed to the house, where Samuela's wife was alone. The native leader, Nasaua, offered to spare her life if she would become his wife. This she refused to do, so he struck her down with a club. They took the teacher's goods, burned his house, and decked themselves with the family's clothing for heathen dances. Variations of this tragedy were repeated throughout the history of missions in the New Hebrides. One must wonder at the fortitude and dedication of those servants of God, brown and white, who risked everything to take the light of the gospel to those who sat in darkness.