

# CROCODILES AND WEDDING-CAKE

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particularly in regard to medical care. Tropical ulcers are very common among the Papuans, and these can be cured fairly easily by injections. But it takes three injections, and it's very hard to get the sufferer to come back for a second or third dose. If you manage to persuade them to have the first injection, they will go back home and then decide that the white man's magic is no good. However, once you've cured a number of people, they'll tell the others, and it's a good advertisement for the white man's medicine. But if you happen to be treating a patient and he dies, you get all the blame for it.

"We tried very hard to educate the women to look after their children properly. Very few children die at childbirth, which has few complications for a Papuan woman, but later on, the mortality rate is very high. The mothers cannot always feed their babies themselves, and they have no knowledge of artificial feeding. They either let the baby die of starvation or feed it on bananas, which is usually fatal. The little stomach swells up, and they try to cut it with a knife, to 'let the pain out.' This is the recognised treatment for any kind of local discomfort.

"At Wasua, too, crocodiles were a big problem. All washing is done in the river, and it is fairly common for a crocodile to slide up unnoticed. One of the washers will disappear from the group and is never seen again. We used to find it difficult to persuade natives from the other side of the river to come across to church on Sundays. They were perfectly willing to make the the crossing every Sunday if the White God would guarantee that the crocodiles wouldn't get them. As He didn't, they probably decided He wasn't a very strong God and perhaps hardly worth cultivating."

## Housekeeping Difficulties

"Were you looking forward to life among the Sukis?"

"Yes, I thought it would be very interesting. Of course housekeeping on a

missionary station presents a number of difficulties. If you forget to order the flour (as I did once at Wasua), you can't just ring up the grocer. Instead, you have to go without for perhaps the next three months. Transportation is very irregular and very infrequent. One of the reasons why we had to leave Wasua was because it would no longer be possible to get supplies of any kind, and though you can perhaps exist on native fruits and animals, it's difficult to go without flour and kerosene. The supplies even of things like bananas and paw-paws were erratic. We had to rely mainly on tinned food, and I learnt to make bread in a clay oven. There are certain native meats—cassowary and wild pig—but cooking them was almost the greatest housekeeping problem. Even after they've been simmered for hours, they remain difficult to chew.

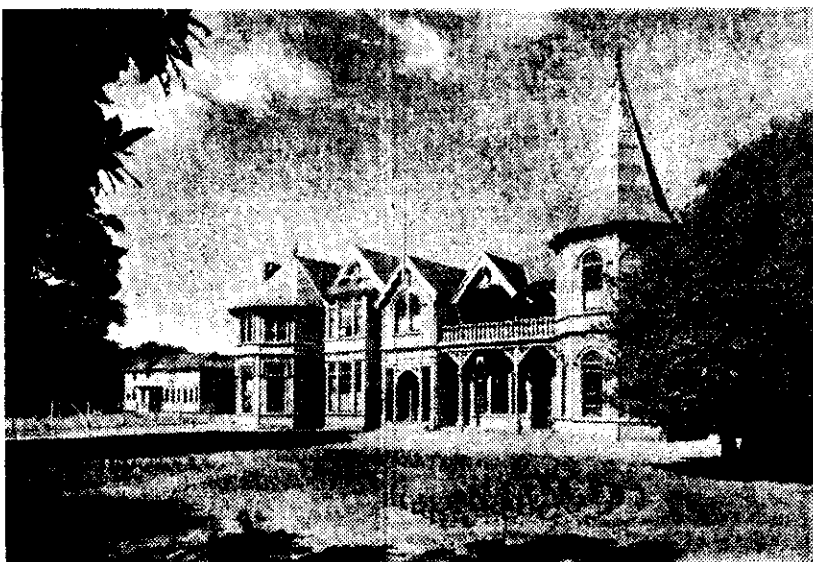
"Apart from that, housekeeping would have been fairly easy, because the houses are built of leaves and bark, and there isn't much to do except make the beds. But part of the educational programme of a mission station is training the girls in household duties, so a missionary's wife usually has to have one or two native girls in her household. Supervising their work is a much more difficult task than actually doing the housework yourself. Of course all the girls are very keen to work in the white woman's kitchen, because it gives them a very high social standing."

## Jack-of-all-trades

"You must require to have a very thorough training before you can become a mission worker."

"Yes. I trained as a teacher, spent six months in a Bible Training Institute and six months nursing in a Melbourne hospital. And before I went to Papua I had to learn things like baking bread, so that I could teach the native women. You need to be a jack-of-all-trades if you're going to be a missionary."

—M.B.



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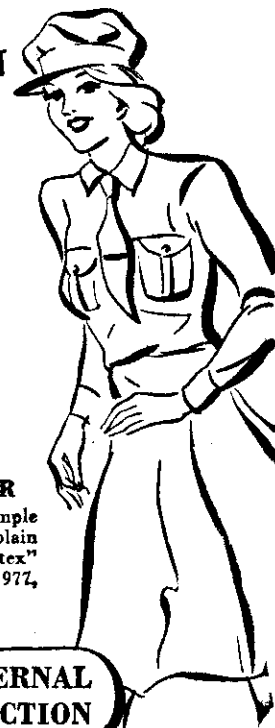


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