

# NOTES

By Eileen Duggan

## A Glimpse of Tonga

One had some months since the privilege of receiving the works of his Lordship the Bishop of Tonga, who visited this country last year. The Bishop is from Provence and his writings are in his native tongue. It is with his work on Tonga that one will deal here. Many have chosen to write of the ocean islands, and their books have found New Zealand appreciative. This book, *Chez les Meridionaux Su Pacifique*, because it is written in French has found its audience in France. Bishop Blanc explains that the title of his book is merely a translation of the native word, since Tonga means the south. Will the author forgive a halting translation of a paragraph of his preface?

He explains that if he had chosen he might have made it a book of romance. He chose, like Daudet, to write the strict truth, the thing seen by the eyes of himself or of others equally dependable. "The Ocean with its isles is a vast field lying wide to the imagination. Here, I have limited myself to dealing with fact as I have lived it, of things as I have seen them, or as eye-witnesses have shown them to me."

There is scarcely an aspect of Tongan life that is not touched upon. The author has brought to his task a mind purged of love of worldly possessions, a mind stored with the riches of the classics. Palestine, Rome, Provence, Oceania—there are echoes of them all in this book on Tonga.

Any mention of the ocean islands brings a memory of his countryman, Loti. The author himself mentions Loti's descriptions in a paragraph of fine French prose:—

"Pierre Loti has confessed his discouragement when he tried to describe the charm of the islands of Oceania. He defies the reader to understand until he has heard the plaintive sound of the flute of Pan or the faraway murmur of a sea-shell at night on the white coral shores of Polynesia.

But this strange sadness which, according to Loti, broods over all the islands of Oceania, is it truly the breath of the poesy of things? Is it not that the poet believes himself free of it, while it flows from his own heart? Without doubt the majesty of the ocean is shaded with sadness wherever a land arises from its waves. But these groan of Nature in travail, these sighs that she breathes for the deliverance of the last day are heard by men under every sky. Everywhere life and death are in combat. And if the effort of the creature towards a state more perfect has something more of pathos in Polynesia, it is because a race is dying there."

A penetrating passage, that! At first sight it would seem that the author by writing it was disproving his own correction of Loti. On second reading the mournfulness disappears, and the calm and resigned declaration of the way of nature, of the impulsion of life, the inevitability of death stands out

clearly, almost triumphantly. "No man at all can be living forever," says old Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*. It is the same thought in different words but the sad under-surge of the sea underlies them both. They have gone to school to the sea. So Loti was not utterly wrong.

## Descriptions

As an example of the quickwittedness of the Tongans he relates this story:—

"An old Catholic happened to be at a Kava party where divorce was discussed. A non-Catholic, a fine speaker, believed that he had proved its legitimacy, and for a final stroke said, 'Besides the Gospel declares that if your hand scandalises you you must cut it off, and if your eye scandalises you you must tear it out. Consequently, an intolerable woman—one must separate from her.' And the old Catholic replied: 'It is true. But though I am not very strong in religion, I do not believe that the Gospel says to replace the hand cut by another hand, or the eye torn by another eye.'"

He describes the copra industry, and the shark fishing. Everyone can enjoy the old chief's description of how the shark come at his call. "I cry 'Haou (Come) Haou' until they come. This time I had not called as long as the hen that has laid an egg when the first shark showed itself.

"When it appears you must soften your voice and say to it, 'Malie' (Very good). Then when it is a little nearer, 'Tafoki atou' (Return), and he turns as if to go. One says again, 'Malieu mai' (return right here). And he returns to his station by the boat. One of us puts a little roast pork on a bit of wood. Meanwhile I make compliments to the shark as he waits, 'Oh how lovely your skin is, how nimble your fins! How sweet are your eyes! Come to our feast that is preparing for this evening.' The shark listens with one eye on the pork it is presumed. He raises his head, and lo, the noose is thrown and there is one shark the less in the maw of Hine moana.

The day the first shark does not answer the crew returns and there is no fishing that day. The Bishop explained to them that the tapu or rather the violation of tapu by which they explained their failure was a fallacy fathered by cunning. They appear receptive.

## The Human Touch

On that same fishing expedition the crew went out of sight of land, and one young Tongan sailing for the first time lay flat in the boat and wept when he saw the rim of the shore sink away.

Another young Tongan was dying. He was only eighteen, and so calm, so beautiful before death that the Bishop was touched to tears. One can imagine the scene:—"Seizing my arm, he said with a great as-

tonished smile, 'Do not weep.' Then he died, singing a hymn." There are other stories like that, giving their virtues. On the other hand there is pity but no blindness for their faults. They are children, he says, loving, grieving, laughing, mocking, in a breath.

Their legends are set forth, too, gracefully and tenderly. Well might the Bishop of Quimper and Leon say of his *confrère*: "*Vous racontez en historien, et vous décrivez en poète.*"

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## DIOCESE OF DUNEDIN

The students of Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, assembled last week to resume studies after the Christmas vacation.

By permission of the Health Department the Christian Brothers' School re-opened on Monday for pupils over sixteen years of age.

There was Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from the eleven o'clock Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral on Sunday, many attending in adoration during the afternoon. His Lordship the Bishop officiated at Compline in the evening; and in the procession and Pontifical Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The usual monthly meeting of the men's Confraternity of the Sacred Heart was also held, the attendance being remarkably good.

Lenten evening devotions at St. Joseph's Cathedral include Rosary and Meditation on Mondays and Tuesdays, Rosary and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on Thursdays, and Stations of the Cross on Fridays.

His Majesty's Theatre and annexes have been definitely engaged for the De Luxe Carnival and spectacular display entitled "Mexicano," to provide funds for the erection of a new convent for the Dominican Nuns of the North-east Valley. The opening date will be March 23, and the carnival and stage performances are to be continued for 15 nights.

Arrangements are well advanced for the annual national entertainment in celebration of St. Patrick's Day. As in former years, this popular concert will be given both at Burns Hall in the city and Town Hall, South Dunedin, the performers being motored between the two halls and presenting a similar programme. The promoters have been successful in securing the services of some of the best local talent, so that patrons will be favored in having an evening's entertainment of rare excellence staged for their enjoyment.

Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Woods, who left by the north express on Saturday, to join the Maunganui at Wellington, on a holiday trip to America and Europe, had a cordial send-off at the Dunedin railway station. Relatives and friends in large numbers, among them being his Lordship Bishop Whyte, assembled to wish them a final *bon voyage*, and those popular citizens received a farewell which will be a pleasant memory to them during their lengthy tour abroad.

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We do not ask in the name of our Master what we ask otherwise than by our Master's rules.—St. Augustine.

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