

make simple wooden articles—knife-boxes, stools, brackets, bookshelves, and dolls' furniture. Encourage the small children to save their pennies to buy nice things at the Toy and Sweet Stall. Encourage the fathers and big brothers to drop a substantial coin each week into a special savings box for the mothers to spend at the Sale on the 23rd of September.

A NEW CULT IN PAPUA.

BAIGONA OR SNAKE-CRAFT.

I HAVE written elsewhere, at the Governor's request, as much as I knew of the origin and progress of the Baigona Cult. I think it is worth while looking at it from another point of view. What does it tell us, with regard to our work of introducing the Christian Religion?

In the first place, we may see that the natives are willing to consider a new religion. They are not hide-bound, like Moslems, for instance. Their ceremonies and ideas inherited from their ancestors are not so satisfactory to them that they are unwilling to receive light. Be it ours to see that the light that comes to them be not darkness!

There are two subsidiary points in this connection. 1. The Baigona Cult started from the Cape Nelson district and worked its way north, not south, where it would have met with a well-worked Mission District. It had nearly 100 miles of coastline to occupy before it came in contact with the next Mission teaching. It had plenty of room to take a good hold. This gap, Dyke Acland Bay, and the coastline off the Hydrographers Range, still cries to us for occupation. 2. Some of those who come out of this cult seem to be more ready to study Christianity. They have given up the cult, but they can't go back readily to the know-nothing system that used to content them. Their mental and spiritual activities have taken a start and though it was in a wrong direction, the movement will now lead them to study Christianity.

In the second place, the cult gave us a basis on which to make an appeal. And our appeal was both to and against it. First, we said: "This Baigona talk is a Religion. You are willing to embrace a new Religion. Ours is a Religion. Study it. Compare it with that of yours. As you have embraced that so we wish you to embrace this." I can't prove that the

Baigonas got any of their ideas from Christianity. They had their head men and their followers, as in any other teaching. They had a Washing Ceremony for initiation, but I don't think Christian Baptism by immersion was heard of by them till after they had begun their Bathing Ceremony. But it proved that Baptism was an easy matter to explain to them. Native Christians have called my attention to the similarities of the two rites. In each, a new name was given. We may yet find the originators of the Baigona rite had heard of Baptism and got an idea as to its meaning.

But on the other hand we had to appeal against the Cult. True there was the power to cure sickness, and some of the Baigonas exercised that power only. But others added all sorts of wickedness. Blackmail, sorcery, necromancy, clairvoyancy are always in evidence outside the Cult. But they become powerful instruments for evil in the hands of these men who claimed and were believed to have extraordinary powers. So we claimed that their snakes were the representatives of the Serpent of Eden, and the servants of the same evil one. "You have two ways set before you," we cried, "the Cult and the Religion. You can't follow both. You must choose between them. Judge them by their fruits. Christ's Religion speaks of holiness; the Baigonas use their powers to help the gratification of their own lusts. Are you going to follow men who, under the protection of their snakes, commit adultery, murder and theft?"

But then, lastly, it was not all wrongdoing, and we had to admit that we could not prove everyone in the wrong. For instance, there were the Baigonas already mentioned, who healed their neighbours. Some of them would take no pay. They were animated apparently by benevolence only. Again, a young man found himself possessed of the power of curing certain diseases, fever, and chest complaints. He had not exercised it

for gain or outside his own social circle. He had begun by making incantations, but gave that up. He was not a Baigona. He was once a Catechumen, and said to me "If I had forgotten God's words I could have been a Baigona." Once more, a party of men obtained success in hunting; they ate a bit of pig that had been killed by their craft, and then went out into the bush and called, and other wild pigs would come to be killed. They offered to give me an ocular demonstration of this, and though I did not go out with them they got the pig as they said they would. I talked this over with some Christian boys and they insisted that there was no harm in it. These same people would chew an uncooked taro and then go out and plant some more, confident that it would flourish in consequence.



MOUTH OF THE OPI RIVER, PAPUA.

How were we to prove to the natives that these things were evil, and had to be renounced before they could take the first steps to Christianity. The Government cut the Gordian knot and imprisoned everybody who claimed any of these extraordinary powers. It may have stamped them out, or they may crop up again in another form. But what should be the Christian policy in such cases as these? The more you know about them the harder you find it to answer the question.

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