

PAPUANS BECOME CHRISTIANS.

A series of articles, under the above general title, written by Canon James Benson, appeared in The Anglican newspaper (Sydney) between February 18 1955 and February 10 1956.

I believe I first became aware of them through two being included in the Bibliography to Eric Schwimmer's 1969 monograph, "Cultural Consequences" (however both it, and his 1973 book, wrongly stated they were from The Anglican, Melbourne).

The second of these, "Kikiri and Gataru", is the fifth of the series. For some reason I assumed that was the end of the series. Copies of these five (or some of them) went to certain interested parties in the last couple of years.

More recently my attention was drawn to the following entry in Evan Gill's "New Guinea: catalogue of books from the library of Evan R. Gill" (Liverpool, 1957):-

F34 Benson, Canon James Papuans become Christians. A series of articles contributed to "The Anglican", No.14 July 1, 1955 to No.38, Feb.10, 1956. Brisbane: The Anglican.

Again, the wrong city. This confusion was overcome, after some dithering. Also the fact that the numbers refer to the series, not the paper; then all was plain sailing.

A full listing of the series follows, for information. All appeared in The Anglican, Sydney, so this information will not be repeated; the page and date of issue will be given though. Most were under the Papuans Become Christians series heading, with the number in the series; this will be indicated in those cases but in abbreviated form.

- PBC 1 "Of the Jajera and the brothers Gau" (p.6, February 18 1955)
- PBC 2 " " " " " " " " (p.8, " 25 1955)
- PBC 3 "The Bapa Saga and the brothers Ambo" (p.6, March 4 1955)
- PBC 4 " " " " " " " " (p.8, March 11 1955)
- PBC 5 "Kikiri and Gataru" (p.6, March 18 1955)
- PBC 6 "Landings in New Guinea" (p.8, March 25 1955)
- PBC 7 " " " " " " " " (p.6, April 1 1955)
- PBC 8 " " " " " " " " (p.6, April 8 1955)
- PBC 9 ""Tama" and "Sina" and the Siragakapakapuna" (p.6, April 15 1955)
- PBC 10 " " " " " " " " (p.6, April 22 1955)
- PBC 11 "The Lime Pots of Uiaku" (p.8, April 29 1955)
- PBC 12 " " " " " " " " (p.6, May 6 1955)
- PBC 13 " " " " " " " " (p.10, May 13 1955)
- PBC 14 "With the Bishop of New Guinea in the Mamba Mud" (p.6, July 1 1955)
- PBC 15 " " " " " " " " " " " " (p.6, July 8 1955)
- PBC 16 " " " " " " " " " " " " (p.9, July 15 1955)
- PBC 17 "The Story of Daruruk" (p.9, July 22 1955)
- PBC 18 " " " " " " " " " " " " (p.9, July 29 1955)
- PBC 19 "One Week in Samarai" (p.9, August 5 1955)
- PBC 20 " " " " " " " " " " " " (p.9, August 12 1955)
- PBC 21 " " " " " " " " " " " " (p.10, August 26 1955)

FBC 22	"Gill of Boianai and of the Mamba"	(p.9, September 2 1955)
FBC 23	" " " " " "	(p.8, September 9 1955)
FBC 24	" " " " " "	(p.8, September 16 1955)
FBC 25	" " " " " "	(p.10, September 23 1955)
FBC 26	"Ku-ne Kane Koya"	(p.10, September 30 1955)
FBC 27	" " "	(p.6, November 4 1955)
FBC 28	" " "	(p.9, November 11 1955)
FBC 29	"As It was in the Beginning"	(p.8, November 18 1955)
FBC 30	" " " " " "	(p.9, November 25 1955)
FBC 31	"After the Deluge"	(p.9, December 23 1955)
FBC 32	"Christian Co-operatives"	(p.9, December 30 1955)
	"Evangelism and Building"	(p.5, January 6 1956)
FBC 34	"The First Co-operatives"	(p.10, January 13 1956)
	"Siai and Lemington"	(p.8, January 20 1956)
FBC 36	"Back to the Primitive"	(p.9, January 27 1956)
FBC 37	"A Church is Born"	(p.10, February 3 1956)
FBC 38	"Three Days of Great Grace"	(p.10, February 10 1956)

A note appeared in The Anglican on December 2 1955 advising that subsequent stories were post-war, so some extracts from Benson's book ("Prisoner's Base and Home Again" (1957)) would be given first. These appeared on p.6, December 9 1955, under the heading "The Sign of the Cross".

The following brief notes may help indicate the subjects of some of the stories:-

- a) FBC 6-8 are on arrivals of missionaries
- b) FBC 9-10 are on the Tomlinsons at Mukawa (for Siragakapakapuna (sic), see p.12 of "The Road from Gona")
- c) FBC 11-13 deal with happenings in Collingwood Bay in 1920, and of the sorcerer's power reposing in his lime pot. This will be looked at in more detail in my forthcoming typescript, BAIGONA.
- d) FBC 14-16 deal with a trip up the Mamba, and across to Siai - in March 1940. Benson's track description was used, in a fashion, in 6. of URIPA - II. (my typescript of 29.8.75).

It should be noted, however, that item F36a in Gill's Catalogue (see previous page) is Benson "With the Bishop of New Guinea in the Mamba Mud.", a 1936 6 foolscap page typescript. The Mitchell Library, which acquired the Gill Collection, does not seem to have received this item. Consequently I am not able to ~~say~~ resolve the potential confusion.

- e) Daruruk (FBC 17 & 18) is the Wanigela "culture hero" story - Daruruk, the Giver of Knowledge. It has an appropriate emphasis for 1975, International Woman's Year. Benson commented that, although the story really belonged to Wanigela, ~~he~~ it extended as far as Taupota, and he had even heard echoes of it at Gona.
- f) Ku-ne Kane Koya, the title of FBC 26-28, means "Hill of the Dog", the famous hill adjacent to the Mukawa Mission Station to which the dog brought fire (from Goodenough Island). Benson's version is the most detailed I have seen and describes how Sebare (a man) and his dog brought the fire from Voyara (Goodenough).

- g) As noted in URIPA - II., EBC 29 & 30 are an expanded, and very much easier to follow, version of pp.9-11 of his book (the origin story).
- h) EBC 32 is of great interest (see my 25.8.75 typescript, NORTHERN DISTRICT CO-OPERATIVES - the early days., and its sequel); EBC 34 also deals with co-operatives.
- i) EBC 36 looks at potential fights between Iega (sic) and Eroro, and between Bakunbari and the Bapa of Kurou.
- j) EBC 37 & 38 are on the first baptisms in the Aiga, at Siai on December 1 1951, and the prelude to this (see pp.95-6 of "The Road from Gona"). No.35 is also on Siai, and Stanley Tago, etc. (Siai and the Tagos are also featured in several earlier stories too - 16, 29-31).

Among the minor pieces of information in the series, but something which could be important under the circumstances, is the fact that Mrs. Wardman was Benson's niece (EBC No.35) - the Wardmans came to Gona on October 11 1951 (EBC 37), and Rev. J.L. Wardman was missionary in charge there 1953-1961 (see p.55 of N.G.R.B. 13).

I do not believe that the series can be regarded as completely accurate (free from error), and would suggest three examples:-

- (i) In EBC 15 he says Green was murdered on the Mamba in Copland King's time. In fact Green was killed on 14 January 1897 (PNG AR 1896-97:28), while King only left Dogura for the Mamba on 6 February 1900 (see p.39 & ff. of White's 1929 book "A Pioneer of Papua").
- (ii) In EBC 37 he describes Am Wardman as "the first white child ever to live at Gona." It is my understanding that this honour belongs to Frances Mary Gill, the infant daughter of the Mission's first Doctor, Cecil Gill, who came to Gona in 1926. (Frances Mary died in Papua, where I've not found out yet - for both references, see Tomlin, 1951). Of course one could split straws, claiming that the Gills weren't really at Gona - they were at Kikiri, over the creek.
- (iii) Also "we offered the Divine Mysteries for the first time in the Kunusi country;" (EBC 37) is open to question, depending a lot on what is actually meant. King had services in the Aiga in 1902 and again in September 1906 (see Missionary Notes, 27th November 1906 - quoted in 1. b) of URIPA - II.).

Often, I think, Benson must have had to depend on oral sources. It seems that many of the events described must have been remembered over many years - 35 years in the case of "The Lime Pots of Uiaku" (as we shall see in BAIGONA). However EBC 3 corresponds closely with what the Gona Mission Diary had to say on the Mt. Lamington eruption.

Bearing in mind the necessary reservations, I regard the series as a valuable reference to the Anglican Mission, and the N.D. in particular. They are known to some (e.g. Schwimmer, and I think the quotation on p.96 of "The Road from Gona" is from EBC 38), but generally neglected, not even being listed in ANU's Ethnographic Bibliography of New Guinea (though Benson on Co-operatives, in the A.B.M. Review, is).

This may serve to help correct this neglect.

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