

## A FORGOTTEN MISSION (2)

The Brothers' charge consisted of some fifty boys, ranging from school beginners of five or six up to the "grands garçons demi-blancs" one missionary Sister (O.L.S.H.) referred to in a letter describing the situation. This figure of fifty is derived from the official returns sent by Brother Urban to the Generalate at the beginning of 1919.

Our Brothers taught as best they could a German elementary programme, but there was also considerable emphasis upon trade skills, in the imparting of which they co-operated with the M.S.C. lay-Brothers. One very old gentlemen of mixed race who assisted the Brothers in their work died only a few years ago. His son is today a prominent man about the mission.

When the Brothers withdrew in 1921 the M.S.C. Sisters who had continued to run the girls' section of the *School for Mixed Races* resumed charge of the boys' section. The girls' section of the school has continued its existence under change of names and locale until the present. The boys' section more or less petered out in the early '30's', and forms of schooling for the native Catholic population replaced it.

Vunapope was a flourishing centre of a very active and extensive missionary endeavour, at that time under the guidance of its first Vicar Apostolic, Monsignor Louis Couppé (Bishop from 1890 to 1923). Monsignor Couppé was an outstanding administrator and, despite the fact of his French nationality, succeeded in working harmoniously not only with his German missionary colleagues but also with the German colonial authorities. And during the Australian occupation his French nationality proved of considerable assistance in helping the continuance of the smooth running of the mission.

Scarcely had our Brothers been established in Vunapope (they arrived on April 12, Easter Sunday 1914) than World War I broke out; Australia moved in to the conquest of this isolated German dependency, and by the end of 1914 the whole of the former German holdings in present day New Guinea were under Australian administration. Happily, the German authorities, who had so little military resource at their disposal, saw the futility of sustained resistance and the mission complex suffered no damage or disruption beyond a little initial excitement.

Under Australian military occupation the German administrative structures were allowed to continue to function and the planters were left in possession of their estates for the present. At the *Sacred Heart School* instruction went on as before except that gradually (as the fortunes of war on the European front became clearer) English came to supplant German as the medium and content of instruction. (The oldest surviving witnesses of that era among the native population are still able to recall their German).

Unhappily for our Brothers, as has been mentioned earlier, Brother Viktorinus died, on 21st November 1915, and some time probably soon after this Brother Hubert (Peter Noss) withdrew from the community and the Institute.

Following the death of Brother Viktorinus, Monsignor Couppé, unable to make contact with Europe, appealed instead to Brother Paul Andrew Phelan, the Australian Provincial. Exactly in what sequence is not clear, since on the Australian side there seems to be no record remaining. Brother Paul visited Vunapope and, on his recommendation to the Superiors (via the American Assistant), Brother Urban Hinkes was named Director. In subsequent correspondence Brother Urban dates his obedience as Director from May 1916. Some time subsequently, probably in 1917, Brother Fridolin Blackwell visited Vunapope as Brother Paul's deputy.

The community now consisted of three Brothers, one of whom, Brother Otto, suffered progressively worsening health.

With the ending of World War I and the definite loss to Germany of her colonies and overseas dependencies, the position of our German Brothers' mission was quite uncertain. The Australian civil administration which replaced military rule was less benign; the German planters were expropriated and extradited to Germany. For some time the fate of the Vunapope mission was in grave doubt, since there was question of expelling all German nationals. However, by the end of 1921, the Australian administration had decided to grant the missionaries seven years' reprieve (and before those seven years had elapsed their continuing presence was conceded without further difficulty).

In Germany, Brother Philippus Neri was still Visitor, and he was anxious to avail himself of the opportunity afforded by a more tolerant Republican Germany to re-establish his "District" in the homeland itself; and seeing that the Vunapope mission was now in alien territory and noting the evident distress of the three remaining Brothers, decided to bring them back to Germany. Because, however, of the canonical complexity of the mission structure and the natural reluctance of the Vicar Apostolic to lose the services of the Brothers, negotiations dragged on until 1921.

Finally at some date not now ascertainable (but towards the end of April or beginning of May 1921) our Brothers sailed via Australia, to Europe and reached the newly established provincial head-

quarters in Kirnach-Villingon, Baden before the end of July of the same year.

On return to Europe one member of this group of three left the Institute within a few months (he was still in temporary profession). This was Brother Hermann, whose official religious name was Macedone-Adrian (also known in Germanic style as Leonhard-Siegfried) and whose civilian name was Georg Hahn. It is sadly ironic that, despite his seven years of missionary work in the Institute, there is practically nothing recorded of him other than this exotic range of names.

Of the remaining two, Brother Urban Hinkes spent another four or five years teaching in various schools in the newly constituted District of Germany; he also made his second Novitiate at the Generalate in Belgium in 1924. After considerable hesitation (including leaving and returning) Brother Urban finally left the Institute at the end of 1925. He became a school teacher in the state service and eventually a primary school principal in the region of Lake Constance. It was there he died in 1975, having survived the vicissitudes of personal and national life until the advanced age of eighty-eight.

Brother Otto Thalheimer returned to study to acquire the qualifications which his early departure for the mission field had precluded his obtaining before. He then taught for some years in various parts of Germany, though his health continued to be uncertain, and was for a short time Director of a community. In the late thirties, foreseeing the Nazi menace, he transferred to the London Province of the Institute and was a member of the Beulah Hill community for two years, 1937-1939. Again, probably foreseeing the ambiguity of his position in the case of the inevitable war between Britain and his native Germany in May 1939, he moved once more, this time to the mission fields of South America. He spent the next decade of his life in Columbia and Equador, exercising various charges and was for a short time Director of the community of Riobamba. Finally in 1950 he went to Chile to join a community where there were other German refugees like himself. By this time, however, he was suffering from terminal cancer and he died 4th November 1950. Despite the Impression of instability which his wanderings suggest, Brother Otto seems to have left behind him in Germany and in the various parts of South America where he lived the memory of a fer-

vent religious and a devoted teacher. We may with some confidence assume that his many uprootings had contributed to a corresponding spiritual detachment, and that his wanderings may be interpreted as a determined loyalty to remain true to his original religious commitment, (which is not to discount or overlook the many individual German Brothers who have served so generously in so many mission fields).

To my knowledge the foundation of Vunapope was the only missionary enterprise founded directly on the initiative of the German Brothers as a District. Hence the greater need to appreciate and preserve its memory.

The Australian District has a special interest in the venture. First, by reason of the intervention in its fortunes of Brother Paul Andrew, Visitor and his deputy, Brother Fridolin of Mary, in the years 1916 and 1917, and second, because the Australian District in 1946, after a lapse of a quarter of a century renewed the Lasallian presence in New Guinea, even if in a different region.

It is the Congregation of Christian Brothers (of Ireland) who may, with some historical credibility, be considered to be the real successors to the German Lasallian Schulbrüder of the First World War period, in-so-much as with their secondary school at Vuvu and their Teachers' College at Vunakenau, as well as other enterprises within the area of what was originally Bishop Louis Couppé's jurisdiction, they have realised most of the hopes that vigorous and courageous prelate entertained for the Christian education of the people of New Britain.

The De La Salle Brothers thank and congratulate them for taking up the burden which historical and human circumstances forced them to drop.

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*POSTSCRIPT: We are pleased to announce that the full study on which the above articles were based has now been published in a handsome, well-illustrated volume of seventy-five pages. It is available from the Author at the above address, at the price of 10 dollars (U.S.A).*

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