

A TALE OF TANNA.

A missionary book written with admirable sincerity and no small literary skill is "Lomai of Lenakel," by Mr. Frank H. L. Paton (Hodder and Stoughton, London). It is practically the history of the founding and first six years' conduct of the Presbyterian mission on the west coast of the New Hebridean island of Tanna. Mr. Paton, a son of the venerable missionary, Dr. John G. Paton, was one of a band of intrepid men who, in 1896, pulled ashore at Lenakel, and hazarded negotiations for a settlement there with the fiercely-painted warriors who confronted them on the beach. For a time there seemed little chance that the chiefs would consent, but a site for a mission-house was eventually given, and there Mr. and Mrs. Paton and their helpers began the patient and heroic work which has resulted in the planting of civilisation and Christianity in what was a few years back one of the darkest haunts of savagery. Among the natives who gathered to meet the landing party was a short, thick set man of splendid proportions, with shaggy hair and beard, but most gentle voice. He was Lomai, whom the author terms upon his title page "a hero of the New Hebrides." Lomai became one of the earliest converts and most invaluable auxiliaries to the missionaries, and it is evident throughout the book that the deepest affection sprang up between him and his teachers. Domestic troubles—the illness or death of children to whom the native was devotedly attached—first drew Lomai to the mission-house. He had learned some English in Queensland and elsewhere, and had only relapsed into complete savagery after returning to Tanna. Lomai was a pioneer in every movement that contributed to swell the number of what Mr. Paton calls the "worshippers," and decrease that of the "heathens." Church and school are one stage, the putting on of clothes seems to be another, the discontinuance of polygamy is a third, the abandonment of murder and internecine warfare (all Tanna natives had the white man's guns) is a fourth. Even so fine a character as Lomai was prone to relapse in the days of early effort. News came to the dismayed missionaries one Sabbath morning that he had unmercifully thrashed his wife overnight. He admitted his fault with all penitence and remorse when remonstrated with, and was for a time deposed from his position of interpreter in school and church. One of the severest tests of moral courage in native converts is the wearing of clothes. Mr. Paton and his colleagues evidently regard this as a matter of prime importance, for we read of their hearts being filled with joy and thankfulness the first time Lomai so far conquered his shame as to don a red shirt. His example was bound to be followed shamefacedly at first. The missionaries must have experienced moments of amusement as well as pride, for occasionally a man would attend church in nothing but a waistcoat and a tall silk hat; a woman as often as not appeared in a man's jacket, and sometimes a family possessing only one dress among them wore it each in turn, from the father and mother to the youngest boy. After a short absence from West Tanna Mr. Paton brought from Norfolk Island two horses for use in the mission work. They were landed amidst the delighted yells of the natives. But when the missionary took his first ride the mingling of alarm and curiosity would have raised laughter in a stoic. Men took frantically to flight when the horse's head was turned in their direction; a snort drove

them into the tree tops. Making all due allowance for the fervour of Mr. Paton's feelings towards his special protege and convert, there is quite sufficient evidence of inherent nobility in the nature of this New Hebridean savage. Lomai came of his own accord, after mental wrastlings, to consult the missionary on the delicate subject of his two wives. He was minded to put one away, but doubtful how it could be done with kindness. His teachers did not urge precipitation, but advised him to bring both wives for a time to school, and see whether a path would open to free the trio from their embarrassment. It was so. The bright idea struck Lomai of presenting wife number two to a young relative just coming of age. The transfer was effected with much feasting. Better testimony of Lomai's sterling worth is supplied by his conduct in a time of inter-tribal warfare. He ran the gauntlet of great danger in the effort to bring in defeated and starving natives, leading forlorn hopes to rescue sick women who had been left alone to die. Mr. Paton's health has obliged him to quit Tanna, but he has raised a tower of strength for the mission in Lomai of Lenakel.