



# Missionary Patriarch

## The True Story of John G. Paton

**Book Review**

— Autobiography

“**A**t that moment when I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of Cannibalism, but now stretched out to receive and partake the emblems and seals of the Redeemer’s love, I had a foretaste of the joy of Glory that well nigh broke my heart to pieces. I shall never taste a deeper bliss till I gaze on the glorified face of Jesus Himself.” (John G. Patton, pg 376)



There was nothing easy about it! Young John Patton knew that as he was dumped on the shores of an island in the Pacific where his predecessor had been murdered. Hostility and fever attacked him upon his arrival and not even four months had past before he placed his wife and child in their early grave amongst cannibals who desired his flesh for their

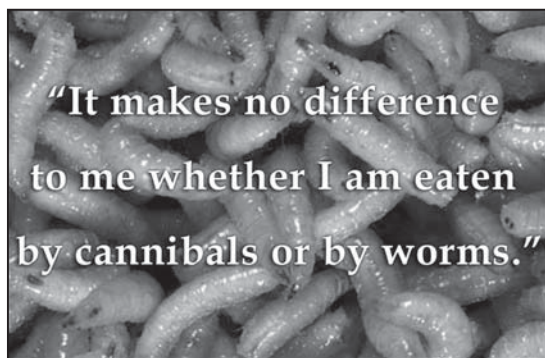
food. Patton himself was nigh to death with fever as well but said, “The ever merciful Lord sustained me to lay the precious dust of my beloved ones in the same quiet grave, dug for them close by at the end of my house....I built the grave round and round with coral blocks and covered the top with beautiful white coral... and that spot became my sacred and much-frequented shrine in the months and years when I labored on for the salvation of these savage Islanders amidst difficulties, dangers and deaths...But for Jesus and the fellowship He vouchsafed me there, I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave.”

John Patton was from a country home in Scotland and reared and catechized by godly and devoted parents. His early life vividly portrays providential guidance and preparation for his great life’s work. As he became directed towards the foreign fields, he received much questioning and was often confronted with the argument, “You are wasting your life to be eaten by cannibals.”

To this he replied, “It makes no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms.” (John Patton pg. 56)

Years later, light flickered on leveled muskets and the vilest of faces surrounding the mission house where John Patton and a fellow missionary stood. The light was a fire. It had been lighted on their compound fence to burn the house and its residents. Men swarmed around the place with clubs raised and muskets leveled. All hope of earthly life was lost. This wasn’t the first time John Patton had found himself in the midst of such a scene. How often the very ones to whom he ministered, sought his life. As the fire approached the house along the fence their prayers were fervently

ascending. John Patton, with power only given of God, walked out of the house with a hatchet into the murderous gloom and proceeded to cut down the fence, thereby blocking the path of the fire. Seven men surrounded him with clubs held high. "Kill him; Kill him; – Kill him;" they screamed, men grabbed for him and attempted to shoot and club him but nothing could harm or touch him while he was protected by heaven. At that moment a peal of thunder and roar of approaching tropical rain stilled the clubs and guns. Patton quickly drew into the house and moments later a drenching rain put out the fire and caused the would-be murderers to quickly retreat.



John Patton's autobiography is a book full of dedication and a testimony of the way God works with and through His men. The account above is merely a rendition of the dozens if not hundreds of challenges and or life-threatening obstacles that he met and overcame one by one with only one purpose and only one Help. This book describes the pitiful and gruesome life of the cannibals of the New Hebrides in which Patton worked. He tells of his accounts and struggles against the utter debauchery of the "civilized" English and French traders and sailors who hindered and hurt him continually. He shares the personal and hard issues of missions and relations of churches and boards. In contrast the later chapters describe beautiful islands with the inhabitants serving and worshiping The One True God with fervor and zeal, and burning with a desire for others to know The True God. This book depicts the Amazing Love of God that transformed cannibals into missionaries and constrained John Patton and his fellow workers to

pour out their lives and in some cases even lose their lives for the salvation of these peoples.

Behind the big picture and excitement of the story are little amazing things to wonder at and inspire us. For example, throughout the entire book there are native teachers that work with the missionaries. These teachers are from only one island and that island was only converted to Christianity a few years prior to John Patton's work. But these teachers are as devoted as the missionary himself in the work. They are encouraging and often loyal protectors of the missionary as well as vital to the work. What a challenge to see these new native Christians bravely carrying on the work even under harsh persecution and for some, death.

Throughout the exciting and intriguing pages we should be rededicated and lifted to a stronger resolve in God's work while constantly being inspired to greater courage in any and all situations, for God is there!

Reviewed by Caleb Leibee

