

to prepare people for heaven.' Just before World War One, the New Zealand government sent the Minister of Island Affairs and the Cook Islands, Dr Maui Pomare, to the Cooks. He snatched the Maori people from the jaws of death, the brink of extinction, and brought them back. Tuberculosis was an enormous problem in the Cook Islands up until the 1950s, when streptomycin was introduced and the big sanatorium in Rarotonga could at last be closed."

Sir Maui Pomare was an exceptional man of his time, urging improvements in the hygiene and living conditions of Maori in New Zealand. He was the first Maori to gain a medical degree and often battled on alone in the face of opposition from many Maori, who still followed the old ways and were under the authority of Tohunga. As Minister of Health in the Massey government Pomare dedicated his life to vital health improvements for Maori and the people of the Islands.

"The missionaries did good by stopping the tribal warfare and we have to consider that they were products of their time. It was a clash of two disparate cultures and the rules they enforced had nothing to do with what Christ came to teach, which is very beautiful, but man's propensity is to control and poison what he touches. In the context of the times, the missionaries were the kind of people that you had – we shouldn't be too hard on them. They arrived after a 3-4 month sea voyage around Cape Horn, they were not likely to get back so they were stuck and had to depend on their own resources and the kindness of the native people. There they were, surrounded by new converts. They must have lain in bed at night wondering when the bibles would be tossed aside and the old club would come out. You have to admire the tenacity and fortitude of these people and the strength of their belief. This was the era when the London Missionary Society was trying to get people to all the fever places – the Congo, West Africa. It got to the point where there were so many deaths that they couldn't get people to go. They got volunteers from Germany, who went with their belongings packed in their own coffins. They weren't expecting to survive – the missionaries could only be described as heroic."



Rev John Williams  
London Missionary Society

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