

CHAPTER ELEVEN



MISSION TO PATAGONIA

Mr. Darwin has often expressed to me his conviction that it was utterly useless to send Missionaries to such a set of savages as the Fuegians, probably the very lowest of the human race.

Bartholomew James Sullivan, 1885

MR. DARWIN WAS WITNESS to what was no doubt the first attempt to actually send a missionary to such a set of savages as the Fuegians. Yet the idea itself was not new, for when Francis Drake passed this way in 1578, his chaplain Francis Fletcher made the following observation:

Neither is anything more lamentable (in my judgement) than that so goodly a people, and so lively creatures of God, should bee ignorant of the true and living God. And so much the more is this to be lamented, by how much they are more tractable, and easie to be brought to the sheepfold of Christ: having in truth a land sufficient to recompence any Christian Prince in the world, for the whole travell and labour, cost and charges bestowed on their behalf:

with a wonderfull enlarging of a kingdome,
besides the glory of God by encreasing the
Church of Chrif.

And now, two and a half centuries after the Reverend Mr. Fletcher spoke of forcing his religion upon this land, perhaps the time had come at last to put such actions to the test.

Or perhaps not, for as we already know from the incident with Richard Matthews, Jemmy Button's people were in no mood for instruction in the error of their heathen ways. For the bruised and battered missionary, the return of HMS *Beagle* was a life-saver. Literally.

For FitzRoy, the event was a learning experience, and so too for Darwin who, despite a cordial relationship with Fuegians at sea, soon discovered that Fuegians on shore were quite another matter. It's not too surprising that his opinion of the locals was not much different than his predecessors, some of whom were quoted in the last chapter. Later in the voyage he would be favorably impressed with the work of missionaries in the western Pacific and, recalling the failure at Wulaia, he formed his opinion that further attempts there would be useless—utterly useless. He would change his opinion later in life though.

Even in the years following the voyage of HMS *Beagle*, the natives in this part of the world remained in low regard by some observers, although not all observations were made at first hand.

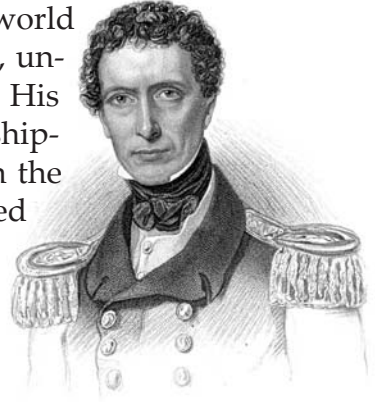
The Patagonians were a race of stalwart
giants, in the lowest depths of barbarism,
inhospitable in their manners. No attempts
to spread a knowledge of Christianity
among these savages had ever been made.

This bit of intelligence comes to us in a fifteen-page insertion found in the 1853 British edition of Captain Bourne's account of his misadventures amongst the giants of Patagonia. We met the captain—who was not really a captain—in an earlier chapter, where we learned that his British editor sacrificed the final three chapters of his story to make room for ...

THE PAINFULLY INTERESTING NARRATIVE
OF THE FATE OF THE PATAGONIAN SOCIETY'S
MISSION IN TERRA DEL FUEGO.

The quotation about stalwart giants comes from that *Narrative* (which may be more painful than interesting) and was perhaps written by a person who didn't know that the society's mission was not dealing with giants, stalwart or otherwise.

This *Narrative* brings us into the strange world of Captain Allen Francis Gardiner who, unlike Bourne, actually was a captain in His Majesty's Royal Navy. While still a midshipman on HMS *Phoebe*, he participated in the 1814 battle off Valparaiso with the United States Frigate *Essex*. Gardiner was made Acting Lieutenant and part of the prize crew that brought the captured *Essex* round the Horn and back to England.



Notwithstanding an active career on several other British warships, he found time to marry, to father five children, and to write a series of "sacred meditations" which give his readers some insight into the workings of his mind, as in this entry for Sunday, June 29, 1834:

Within the last twelve months the Lord in His wisdom has seen fit to take from me a beloved child and a tender and affectionate wife. Blessed be God! ... He has prepared her for the enjoyment of His love.

Given all that heavenly love, Gardiner knew what he must do and, according to his biographers, “From this time he devoted himself afresh to the service of God, and with all the force of his strong character, set himself upon a new course.” He left the navy and thought for a time of taking holy orders. But then he thought against it, in favor of a missionary life where he might better take comfort in pain. For he had a positive gift—if one may call such a gift positive—for placing himself and those mad enough to follow him in pain’s way even if it might kill him (and them), which eventually it did.

His new course was not smooth sailing, as he first tried his hand in Africa, then New Guinea, and later from one island to another in the Indian Archipelago. He went “from governor to magistrate, and from magistrate to governor, but all his efforts were baffled.” Another man might have gotten the heavenly message that his services were not required at present, but not Gardiner. Eventually he found South America, there “to record the triumph of faith on the shore of Tierra del Fuego.”

But even here the captain’s was no overnight success story, for it was no trivial task to deliver enlightenment to those who did not care to be enlightened. Soon enough, Gardiner realized another course change was in order.

From what I have now seen, it is my decided opinion that until the character of the natives has undergone some considerable change, a Fuegian mission must of necessity be afloat—in other words, a mission vessel, moored in the stream, must be substituted for a mission-house erected on the shore.

Apparently the missionary really believed that putting a bit of water between himself and his inhospitable disciples would be just the thing to bring them around to accept his beliefs in place of their own. In search of support he returned to England, where he would explain that his recent work had been nothing more than “a voyage of observation, showing what further means were required.” The leading missionary societies heard his appeal, and reacted with one voice: silence. But Gardiner didn’t hear the message and kept at it “... till a lady at Cheltenham, being assured that the want of money alone hindered the enterprise, generously gave £700 at one time, and afterwards £300 more that it might immediately be prosecuted.” And then, according to Gardiner’s biographers,

In 1844, a special Society was formed for South America alone, and it took its name from the country destined to be the scene of its earliest effort.

The biographers do not identify the country, which was Chile, nor do they identify the new society, which actually took its name not from the country, but from the area where it would begin its work. For Gardiner had named it the “Patagonian Missionary Society” and he would serve as its first secretary.

Along the way, Gardiner had the extraordinary good fortune to meet the Reverend George Pakenham Despard. Soon enough, Reverend Despard would steer his own course to Tierra del Fuego, but for now he agreed to serve as honorary secretary to the organization, whose first order of business was to collect a party to accompany the captain back to South America.

First in that party was Dr. Richard Williams, whose path from surgeon to catechist is a book of its own, and in fact

that book has been written. In 1854, the Reverend James Hamilton published his *Memoir of Richard Williams, Surgeon: Catechist to the Patagonian Missionary Society in Terra [sic] del Fuego*. Hamilton tells us that, despite Dr. William's excellent character, at first "there was no religion in his virtue." But that would change, and Hamilton gives us the doctor's own description of a night unlike any other in his life. After seeing the last of his patients,

I went up-stairs, and threw myself on my bed. In a few minutes I felt inexpressibly ill.

The first sensation was an amazing weight on the chest, with difficulty of respiration; the carotids of my throat striking like hammers on my head, and a feeling as though torrents of air were rushing into my brain, and the head were itself expanding. Meanwhile my mind acquired a wonderful vivacity. Unnumbered sins sprang up before my astonished conscience; Death in his terror rose up to my gaze. The thought of an offended God pierced my soul with madness.



One of God's servants—Williams identifies him only as a "Mr. M., senior"—entered the room and bid him "look to Jesus." Williams "felt an infinite joy in so doing."

My darkness was turned into light, and in a short time I felt a sweet sense of the pardoning mercy of God. After this I grew better and better, and all my symptoms remitted.

And then, a relapse.

I felt the most extraordinary sense of the bodily presence of the Power of Darkness standing by the side of my bed. But, blessed be God! On the opposite side stood, equally revealed to my spiritual senses, the Power unto Salvation. Now, I thought, the time is surely at hand.

But surely, the time was not yet at hand. Dr. Williams sat up, had his assistant bring him forty drops of tincture of opium and twenty drops of muriated tincture of iron and repeated the dose at twenty-minute intervals. "These doses, so large that my assistant afterwards wondered what could have possessed him to give them, were the means of my recovery." And then, after a profound sleep of twelve hours, "there remained no trace of my former state." Yet not all of his former state was the same.

Joyfully exulting in the interposition of Divine Providence and mercy, which had brought me out of thick darkness into the glorious light of truth, O what a heaven flitted through my soul! It was impossible that I could wilfully sin against God again. Yet here I was in darkness, and sin palpably abounding in my heart. How sad was the sight of myself!

While in this state of mind Dr. Williams read an advertisement in the *Watchman*, a religious newspaper in which Captain Gardiner invited catechists to join his expedition; The doctor applied and was accepted, as were several others.

"Mr. Richard Williams, a gentleman practising as a surgeon resigned his professional prospects to share the hardships." The Young Men's Christian Association had recommended

a Mr. John Maidment as one “whose piety, trustworthiness, humility, faith and hardihood rendered him fit for such a work.” They were joined by ship’s carpenter Joseph Erwin and John Badcock, John Bryant and John Pearce. Cornish fishermen, the three Johns were “men of high character and simple piety, who had lived together as Christians.” Soon, they would die together.

On the 7th of September, 1850, the men sailed for Tierra del Fuego on the *Ocean Queen* out of Liverpool. Three months later they were set ashore on Picton Island, along with their own boats, the *Pioneer* and *Speedwell*. The *Ocean Queen* lingered awhile, then continued its course to San Francisco. The men were left to face the elements and the inhabitants on their own. In a letter home, the captain writes of the natives:

Their rudeness, and pertinacious endeavour to force a way into the tents, and to purloin our things, at length became so systematic and resolute, that it was not possible to retain our position without resorting to force, from which, of course, we refrained. For the present, we must keep the stores and everything in the boats.

Gardiner thought he might find local help.

I purpose going to Button Island, and endeavouring to find out Jemmy, in the hope of persuading either himself or some of his relations to locate here; secondly, should we be unsuccessful in this endeavour, I intend to go still farther to the west, in order to obtain two or three boys from a different tribe, and to retain them for the purpose of learning their language.

The captain offers no explanation of what means he had in mind to "obtain" the lads, but no doubt God would attend to such little details.

I feel that the Lord is with us, and cannot doubt that He will own and bless the work which He has permitted us to begin.

But the Almighty may have been busy elsewhere, for the *Pioneer* sprung a leak off Blomefield Harbour on the first day, two dinghies in tow were lost and the *Speedwell's* anchor line parted. Not long afterwards, "the *Pioneer* was dashed upon a rock, and her bows driven in by the jagged root of a large tree." The ship's remains were dragged ashore and converted into sleeping quarters. Button Island and Jemmy would have to wait.

Our plan was now to "rough it" through all the circumstances which it shall please God to permit to happen to us.

Heaven-sent circumstances were of course nothing new to Gardiner; in an earlier attempt at enlightening natives on the mainland, he wrote of his arrival at a small village in Bolivia:

On the day after our arrival, I was attacked with dysentery, which continued for eight days. ... The Lord has laid his chastening hand on me, and I have been reduced to a great state of weakness. I accept it at His hand, as a token of His fatherly care over me.

Even more fatherly care was not long in descending on Tierra del Fuego.

Within a few days sickness commenced. Mr. Williams was the first who was seized. Early in March symptoms of scurvy showed themselves. John Badcock was the next who sickened.

Earlier it was discovered that a supply of gunpowder had been left aboard the *Ocean Queen*, and they would have to make do with the little they had on hand. And then in May their fishing net “was broken by the strength of the tide, but has not yet been hauled up, as there is too much ice on the river.” Days later the recovered net “indeed has been almost entirely carried away, so that repair is impossible,” recalling a similar mishap that befell Charles Darwin, as Robert FitzRoy explained:

Mr. Darwin tried to catch fish with a casting net, but without success. A very sharp frost again this night. The net and other things were frozen so hard as to become unmanageable and very difficult to stow.

To the men of the *Beagle* this was nothing more than a bit of bad luck. To the men of the *Speedwell* this was nothing less than a manifestation of divine will. As Captain Gardiner put it,

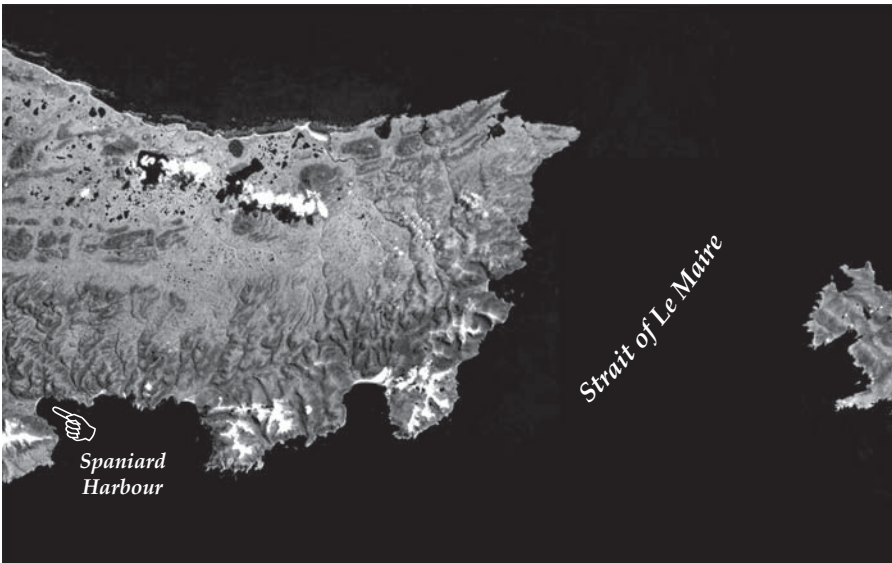
Thus the Lord has seen fit to render another means abortive, and doubtless to make His power more apparent, and to show that all our help is to come immediately from Him.

Well, perhaps not immediately. But Dr. Williams didn't seem to mind.

Ah, I am happy day and night, hour by hour. We have long been without animal food of any kind. All hands are now affected. Captain Gardiner, if I listened to his own words, is still none the worse; but his countenance bespeaks the contrary. In Mr. Maidment, great debility is now manifesting itself.

To which Gardiner adds, “Mr. Williams and Badcock are very weak, the disease having greatly increased.” Badcock asked Williams to join in singing “Arise, my soul, arise” and then his soul did just that. Joseph Erwin was next, followed a few days later by John Bryant. John Pearce and John Maidment lingered, but not for long.

For a time, there was little concern at home about the silence from abroad, for Gardiner himself had earlier given assurances that “plenty of fish and fowl could be taken at Picton Island.” In fact, the Reverend Despard later wrote that “The thought that the Mission could be in distress for food ... did not suggest itself.” But the mission *was* in distress, and had no way to let the outside world know about it.



Spaniard Harbour (now, Bahía Aguirre) and Starvation Beach (pointing hand) where Captain Allen Gardiner and the others ended their days

Gardiner was the last. He recorded his final thoughts on Thursday and Friday, September 4th and 5th, 1851.

4 Thursday — There is now no room to doubt that my dear fellow Labourer has ceased from his earthly toils & joined the company of the redeemed in the presence of the Lord whom he served so faithfully — Under these circumstances, it was a merciful providence that he left the boat as I could not have removed the body — He left a little peppermint water which he had mixed, & it has been a great comfort to me, but there was no other to drink — Fearing that I might suffer from thirst, I prayed that the Lord would strengthen me to procure some — He graciously answered my petition & yesterday I was enabled to get out & scoop up a sufficient supply from some that trickled down at the stern of the boat by means of one of my indian rubber overshoes — What continued mercies am I receiving at the hands of my heavenly Father! Blessed be his holy name —

5 Friday — Great & marvellous are the loving kindnesses of my gracious God unto me — He has preserved me hitherto, & for 4 days, although without bodily food, without any feeling of hunger or thirst —

The captain put down his journal for the last time.

Above and facing page: The final entries in Captain Gardiner's journal

Below: "Starvation Beach" at Spaniard Harbour



Eventually the outside world sensed that no news was not good news, and the American schooner *John Davison*, Captain William Horton Smyley, was sent down to investigate. Extracts from Smyley's journal tell of his discovery after a month-long voyage from Montevideo.

- 4 Thursday - There is now no room to doubt that my dear fellow Labourer has ceased from his earthly toils & joined the company of the redeemed in the presence of the Lord whom he served so faithfully. Under these circumstances it was a merciful providence that he left the boat as I could not have removed the body - He left a little peppermint water which he had brewed & it has been a great comfort to me, but there was no other to drink - Fearing that I might suffer from thirst, I prayed that the Lord would strengthen me to procure some - He graciously answered my petition & yesterday I was enabled to get out & scoop up a sufficient supply from some that trickled down at the stern of the boat by means of one of my indian rubber over shoes - What continued mercies am I receiving at the hands of my heavenly Father! blessed be his holy name -
- 5 Friday - Great & marvellous are the loving kindnesses of my gracious God unto me - He has preserved me ~~for 24 days, although without bodily food, without any feeling of hunger or thirst~~

October 22. Run to Spaniard Harbour. Went on shore and found the boat on the beach, with one person dead inside.

Supposed to be Pearce, as we cut the name off his frock; another we found on the beach completely washed to pieces; another buried, which is John Badcock. The sight was awful in the extreme.

By their journal I find they were out of provisions on June 22, and almost consumed by the scurvy, that is Williams and Badcock: and on June 28 poor Badcock died a miserable death from starvation and scurvy: but a thorough Christian. The gale came on so hard, it gave us barely time to bury the corpse (Pearce) on the beach and get on board.

The body “on the beach completely washed to pieces” was all that remained of Richard Williams. As his own end drew near, Captain Gardiner wrote his last in a letter that never reached Williams. In a fragment found by the rescue party that arrived too late, Gardiner had concluded,

I neither hunger nor thirst, though five days
without food! Marvellous loving kindness to me
a sinner!—Your affectionate brother in Christ.

Allen F. Gardiner

His letter was dated September 6th, 1851, one day less than a year after Allen F. Gardiner’s expedition set sail for Tierra del Fuego to save the heathen of South America.



The Death of Captain Allen Gardiner

When news of God’s marvellous loving kindness reached home, there were at least some who criticized those whose arrogance permitted them to send men off to find those who were not lost. Yet the missionary mind—if one doesn’t mind the oxymoron—was incapable of getting the message. Or as Gardiner’s biographers write, ...

If we acknowledge that the heathen of South America, as well as the rest of the world, are committed to the charity of the Christian Church, can we abandon the work thus heroically begun, and be blameless?

Apparently not, for as the Reverend Despard proclaimed, "With God's help, the Mission shall be maintained." Within a few years, funds had been raised and a schooner named in honor of the late Captain Gardiner sailed from Bristol bound for the Falklands. There, a mission station would be established on Keppel Island, from which to launch the next assault on the heathens beyond, and later to sacrifice yet another group of men.

The *Allen Gardiner*, Captain William Parker Snow, went over to Beagle Channel in search of Jemmy Button, and Snow described what happened as canoes approached the ship in Ponsonby Sound.

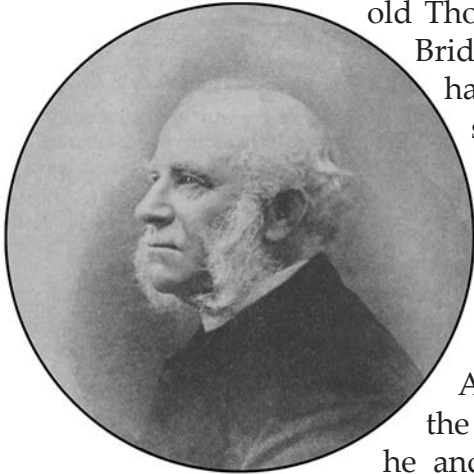
Standing on the raised platform aft, I sang out to the natives interrogatively, "Jemmy Button? Jemmy Button?" To my amazement and joy—almost rendering me for the moment speechless—an answer came from one of the four men in the canoe, "Yes, yes; Jam-mes Button, Jam-mes Button!" at the same time pointing to the second canoe.

The second canoe approached.

A "stout, wild and shaggy-looking man" was repeating "Jammes Button, *me!*" and enquiring in perfectly recognizable and casual English, "Where's the ladder?" And the next moment Jemmy Button—the very man himself—was alongside, well and hearty.

At least Jemmy was eating well, and no longer “wretchedly thin” as Captain FitzRoy had found him at their last meeting. Snow showed FitzRoy’s *Narrative* to Jemmy: “The portraits of himself and the other Fuegians made him laugh and look sad alternately, as the two characters he was represented in, savage and civilized, came before his eye.” A long conversation followed and Jemmy ended by sending remembrances to FitzRoy and the others. He doubted he would ever want to cross the ocean again, and declined Snow’s invitation to visit the mission station.

Captain Snow returned to the Falklands, and a few years later Despard, now appointed Mission Superintendent, came over on the *Hydaspes* out of Plymouth, along with his family and two adopted boys. According to legend, 14-year old Thomas had been given the surname Bridges at his christening because he had been found at Bristol Bridge. We shall hear more of young Thomas later on.



The Reverend George Pakenham
Despard

Also sailing on the *Hydaspes* was Allen W. Gardiner, the only son of the late captain. As for Captain Snow, he and Despard did not hit it off, for Despard had little use for those whose opinions differed from his own. Such people were unworthy of the simple Christian charity one might have otherwise expected from a man of the cloth; Snow was dismissed and left stranded with his wife in the Falklands, to find his way home as best he could. He managed to do so and in 1857 wrote of his experiences in *A Two Years' Cruise off Tierra del Fuego*. The work came to the attention of the London weekly *Household Words*, which devoted five pages to an account of the missionaries and of the author, who is introduced as ...

... an honourable gentleman, a sailor simply pious, who would see nothing absurd on the face of a missionary enterprise for the conversion of Timbuctoo, but who, if he were connected with it, would denounce it fearlessly, upon discovering that it concealed any unworthy principle.

Well of course Snow *was* connected with it, and spoke his mind after Despard severed that connection. *Household Words* offers his thoughts on the treatment of the natives.

As one of the Society's publications explains, "in the care of our cattle, the Patagonians will find congenial employment. ... The natives can be brought [to the Falklands], but they cannot run away." Practically, thinks the captain, this is slavery.

Slavery indeed, for a people who had found need neither for cattle nor for congenial employment in the millennia before their land was invaded by meddling missionaries.

There follow extensive quotations from Captain Snow on the deteriorating situation, after which the report draws its own conclusion,

We have told the main facts of the captain's story as we find them stated in his book, have made no comments, and shall draw no inferences.

Not that comments and inferences were needed—the reporter had seen to it that these might be left up to the reader, and he went on to write of other matters for which he is better remembered. His name was Charles Dickens.



Those who followed subsequent events might have wished the reverend had paid a bit more attention to the captain, who knew far more about the realities of Fuegian life than he did. But as we shall see, the captain was in Despard's debt, for the disgraceful behavior of the one saved the life of the other.

Left: William Parker Snow, aged 76 in 1893

What follows comes from the biography of the late Captain Gardiner, in which we hear echoes of an earlier meeting. In June 1858, the younger Gardiner sailed over to Wulaia in search of Jemmy Button. He had better luck than either his father or the captain. As before, canoes approached. As before, this Gardiner cried out "Jemmy Button!" As before, there came an answer: "Yes, sir."

Jemmy came down into the cabin and partook of some coffee and bread and butter. He remembered Captain FitzRoy perfectly, seemed much pleased at Mr. Bynoe's remembrance, and the useful carpenter's tools he had sent him. He gave me an account of a tragedy that happened, he says, not long since. A ship, with English, fell among the natives of another tribe, and were all killed. This may help to explain why shipwrecked sailors are so often picked up on the Falklands, and sometimes on Staten Island, but never from the islands of Tierra del Fuego.

Much to the delight of the missionaries, Jemmy now agreed to come over to the Falklands with his family. Mrs. Despard immediately wrote home.

Rejoice with me, for the Lord has seen fit to give an answer to the daily prayers addressed to Him, that He would be pleased to put it into the mind of some of those poor benighted Fuegians to trust themselves to our hands and come over to us here. We long to make them understand something of God, and of that Saviour who came down to save their souls.

Fortunately for that Saviour—who apparently was not up to saving the Fuegians on His own—the missionaries were equal to the task at hand; by November, the Button family had absorbed sufficient understanding of salvation that it was time to send them back to their own land, where Despard and two catechists remained with them for a month or so, experiencing none of the indignities suffered earlier by Richard Matthews of the *Beagle*. In fact, another three families agreed to visit the Falklands, where they stayed for almost a year. When it was time to leave, Despard sent them home under the care of the catechist Garland Phillips. And that was the last of Mr. Phillips.

When the *Allen Gardiner* failed to return after the allotted time, Captain Smyley was again called on. Now the owner of his own ship *Nancy*, Smyley went over to Wulaia and in time, Reverend Despard reported the captain's news:

Mr. Phillips, Captain Fell, and the four seamen and two mates of the schooner have been massacred by the natives in Wulaia. Let me pause, and weep, and pray, now that I have written these terrible words. God has tried us in the furnace of affliction. May His work be perfected!

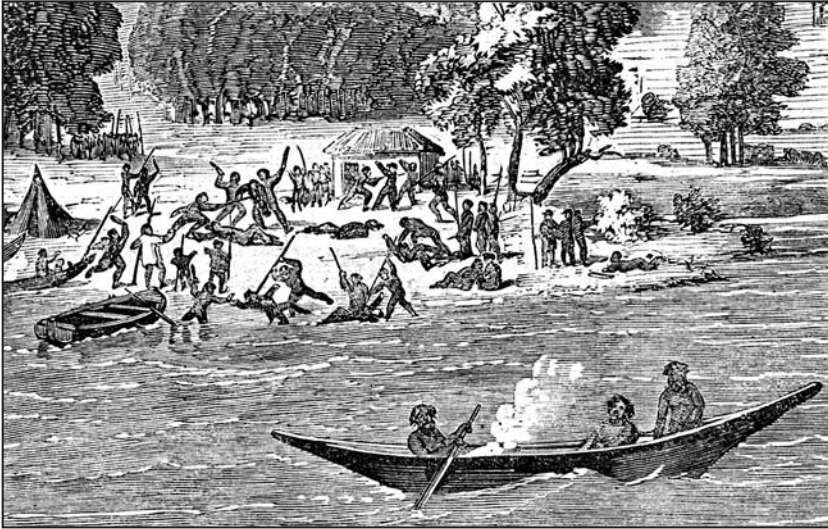
Like the others before him, Despard did not seem to get God's message, which had now been delivered twice in most gruesome manner. A more perceptive ear might have heard something like "Go away, and leave my people in peace." But on this point Despard was deaf.

May the Lord of the harvest send out others
to supply the room of those He has taken.

The massacre at Wulaia was on November 6th, 1859 (Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published a few weeks later, on November 24th), and at first its cause was unknown. The sole survivor, ship's cook Alfred Cole, later described the tragedy that began shortly after Garland Phillips led the crew ashore for Sunday services. From the ship, Cole heard a fragment of the opening hymn, but then,

... the hymn ceased abruptly, to be followed by a terrific hubbub. The natives had fallen on the party with clubs, stones and spears. Garland Phillips and a Swedish sailor named Augusto fought their way out of the hut and reached the sea under a hail of stones. Phillips waded out to the drifting long-boat and, waist-deep in water, was just scrambling into it when a stone flung by Tommy Button, Jimmy's brother, hit him in the temple. He fell back unconscious into the sea and was drowned. Augusto met with a similar fate, and ashore the rest of the party were stoned, clubbed or speared to death.

Cole was eventually captured by the natives, but according to Gardiner's biographer, "he was treated with uniform kindness by the Button family till the arrival of Captain Smyley on the *Nancy*." In addition to rescuing Cole, Smyley found that although the *Allen Gardiner* was still afloat, the natives had thoroughly stripped it of anything that could be taken ashore.



"The Massacre at Woolya" — 1860 *London Illustrated News* engraving

Once back in safer surroundings, Cole told of what had gone before, as the natives being returned to Wulaia tied up their bundles and prepared to debark the *Allen Gardiner*.

One of the sailors complained to Captain Fell that several articles belonging to the crew had been stolen. Captain Fell gave orders for the bundles to be searched. When the bundles were examined, the missing property was found in them and returned to its rightful owners.

This enraged the natives. One, dubbed "Squire Muggins" by the crew, "sprang at the captain and grasped his throat with the evident intent of strangling him." No weakling himself, the captain "flung the angry young man from him" and the offended guests were sent ashore, there perhaps to plot their revenge. Perhaps the ship's company should have paid closer heed to what Mr. Low had told Captain FitzRoy about the Fuegians:

They ought never to be trusted, as they have hasty tempers and are extremely revengeful.

But now that it was too late to remember, some of those back at Keppel Island briefly considered taking their own revenge for the lives of their comrades. Fortunately it occurred to the surviving missionaries, perhaps under the influence of a hostile press and government at home, that it might be a better plan to actually practice what they preached—vengeance had no place in a gospel of forgiveness, and so all thoughts of spilling even more blood were set aside.

Some years later, the Reverend Despard decided it was time for his family to return to England, where—with one exception—they arrived early in 1862. Thomas Bridges, now a young man fluent in the Yahgan tongue, chose to remain to do what he could do to bring his God to the Fuegians. To keep the mission going, the Reverend Waite Hocking Stirling, later the coauthor of Captain Gardiner's biography, came to the island to take over the post vacated by Despard. He and Bridges soon paid a visit to Wulaia, where the locals were startled—and delighted—to hear Bridges hail them in their own language.

Later on, Bridges was sent back to England to take holy orders, and a wife. If nothing else, his proposal to Mary Ann Varder was an original. He offered her a life in an unkind climate, long dreary winter nights, solitude, no doctors, no police, no government, no contact with the outside world. She accepted.

On September 27th, 1871, Thomas and Mary Ann Bridges, with their nine-month old daughter Mary, arrived in Tierra del Fuego. Mary Ann would never see England again—or so she thought.

Dearest, you have brought me to this country, and here I must remain, for I can never, never face that ocean voyage again.

She did however face that ocean voyage again within the decade; Thomas was thought to have stomach cancer and it would be best for him to meet his maker in God's own England. But the meeting was postponed when Thomas disobeyed doctor's orders, fully recovered and returned with his family to Tierra del Fuego. They arrived just in time to watch HMS *Doterel* blow herself out of the water in the harbor at Punta Arenas on April 26th, 1881. Anchored nearby, the *Allen Gardiner* found itself under a shower of debris, but damage was minor and it remained in good enough shape to bring the Bridges family—now including sons Will and Stephen Lucas—back to their Ushuaia home.

Here, the elder Bridges continued work on his masterpiece; a Yahgan-English dictionary that deserves—and gets—a chapter of its own.



Left: Darwin caricature, done at about the time he began exchanging letters with Admiral Sullivan regarding the Fuegian missionary work

Some forty years after the voyage of the *Beagle*, two former shipmates began a lengthy correspondence about the Fuegian mission.

One, a former lieutenant, was now Admiral Sir Bartholmew James Sullivan. The other was now an author of some note, Charles Darwin. In June of 1870, Sullivan wrote to Darwin that the missionaries were at last enjoying success in Tierra del Fuego. The admiral, active in missionary affairs, had apparently brought Darwin's name to the attention of his organization—now known as the South American Missionary Society. Within days Darwin wrote back to his friend, delighted to hear the news, closing with,

I shall feel proud if your Committee think fit to elect me an honorary member of your society.

Over the years Darwin was kept informed of the Fuegians, and without fail he would reply with enthusiasm about Sullivan's "wonderful" news:

January 6th, 1874: "I am very glad to hear so good an account of the Fuegians, and it is wonderful."

June 10th, 1879: "The progress of the Fuegians is wonderful, and had it not occurred would have been to me quite incredible."

January 3rd, 1880: "I have often said that the progress of Japan was the greatest wonder in the world, but I declare that the progress of Fuegia is almost equally wonderful."

March 20th, 1881: "It is truly wonderful what you have heard from Mr. Bridges about their honesty and their language. I certainly should have predicted that not all the Missionaries in the world could have done what has been done."

December 1st, 1881: "Judging from the *Missionary Journal*, the Mission in Tierra del Fuego seems going on quite wonderfully well."

Years later, in editing Darwin's *Life and Letters*, his son Francis added a footnote to the letters to clarify his father's connection to the mission, beginning with a remark heard at an 1885 meeting of the South American Missionary Society.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said that the Society "drew the attention of Charles Darwin, and made him, in his pursuit of the wonders of the kingdom of nature, realise that there was another kingdom just as wonderful and more lasting."

After some continuing coverage in the *Daily News* of that era, Francis noted that Sullivan wrote to the paper, citing his quotation at the beginning of this chapter, and recalling what Charles Darwin had actually said years earlier:

He wrote to me that the recent accounts of the Mission proved to him that he had been wrong and I right in our estimates of the native character, and the possibility of doing them good through Missionaries; and he requested me to forward to the Society an enclosed cheque for £5, as a testimony of the interest he took in their good work.

In short, and despite an archbishop's gift of overstatement, Charles Darwin had said nothing about a wonderful kingdom other than the one that he had been studying in recent years. He was simply applauding the society's efforts to improve the lot of those who, as he recalled, were in "a more miserable state of barbarism than I had expected ever to have seen a human being."

It's not clear if Darwin knew of an earlier letter to Captain Sullivan. In 1851, Captain Gardiner's wife wrote to him at the Falkland Islands, seeking his help in sending provisions to her husband and the others. She was not aware that Sullivan was no longer there, and Sullivan later realized that if the letter had in fact reached him, he would surely have come to the rescue of her husband's group, and the mission would therefore have ended. But the letter was delayed by almost fifteen *years*, which Sullivan took as nothing more than part of a divine plan that the missionaries' lives should not be spared.

Is it not another proof that their deaths were the appointed means for carrying on the Mission?

As part of the Society's efforts on behalf of the Fuegians, Thomas Bridges would from time to time write of the work that needed to be done, concluding one letter with his plan.

To do these people all the good I could wish, the following seems to me to be the best way. ... First, insure a very large and constant residence here by a general employment (as lucrative as possible), and to supply them in return with needful shelter, food, and clothing. All so employed should daily receive religious instruction and evening lectures, and other means of developing and influencing aright the minds and hearts of the natives should be steadily pursued. The young should be *fully* supported, and lodged in *suitable buildings* entirely away from their parents, till those parents could, through the grace of God, be a blessing to their children. The young persons should be *well* watched, guarded, warned, exhorted, instructed, and also suitably employed, to prepare them for life's duties, guard them from its snares, and lead them in all things so to live as to glorify God. As one and another became fitted, they should be assisted to follow various occupations according to their own leadings; some should be teachers, others tailors, cobblers, sawyers, fishers, bakers, gardeners, farmers, carpenters, smiths, vendors, &c., &c. To accomplish this, and make the people capable of living a happy Christian life, would require a great number of agents, extensive erections of buildings, and, in fact, would be a complicated and extensive business, but I believe one that would permanently prove the salvation of these poor remnants of America's aboriginal races.

When Charles Darwin sailed on HMS *Beagle*, a lad named Mellersh was listed in the ship's company as midshipman. By 1872, he was Captain Arthur Mellersh, retired, and Rear Admiral Mellersh before the year was out. In a January 25th letter to Darwin, he expressed hope that "... the mission at Tierra del Fuego will not 'improve' the people to extinction." As Reverend Bridges' letter shows, Mellersh had good reason to worry, although chances are that neither he nor Darwin knew the extinction was already well under way.

The missionaries had taken some Fuegians over to Keppel for "improvement" and the group included the young son of Jemmy Button, called Threeboys because of a mistake. Jemmy had been asked his name, but thought the question was about the number of his children. "Three boys," Jemmy replied, and the name stuck. By early 1864 it was time for Threeboys and the others to be returned to their home. The Reverend Mr. Stirling reported what awaited them.

On arriving at Packsaddle Bay, a gloom was cast over the minds of the natives on board by rumour of a fatal malady which, in the past summer, had carried off large numbers of the people. Every one of our party was said to have lost relations. The saddest of all, perhaps, was Threeboys, whose father, James Button, was now reported to be dead.

A year later, Mr. Stirling returned to England, bringing with him four youths, one of whom was Threeboys. After sixteen months of further improvement, Stirling and the lads set out on the return voyage. But one, Uroopa, had a delicate constitution and did not survive the weeks at sea. There was however a happy ending, at least according to the Reverend Mr. Stirling: "To be with Jesus in the better land was his simple desire."

Next was the son of Jemmy Button, “struck with a mortal disease.” But even here there was good news:

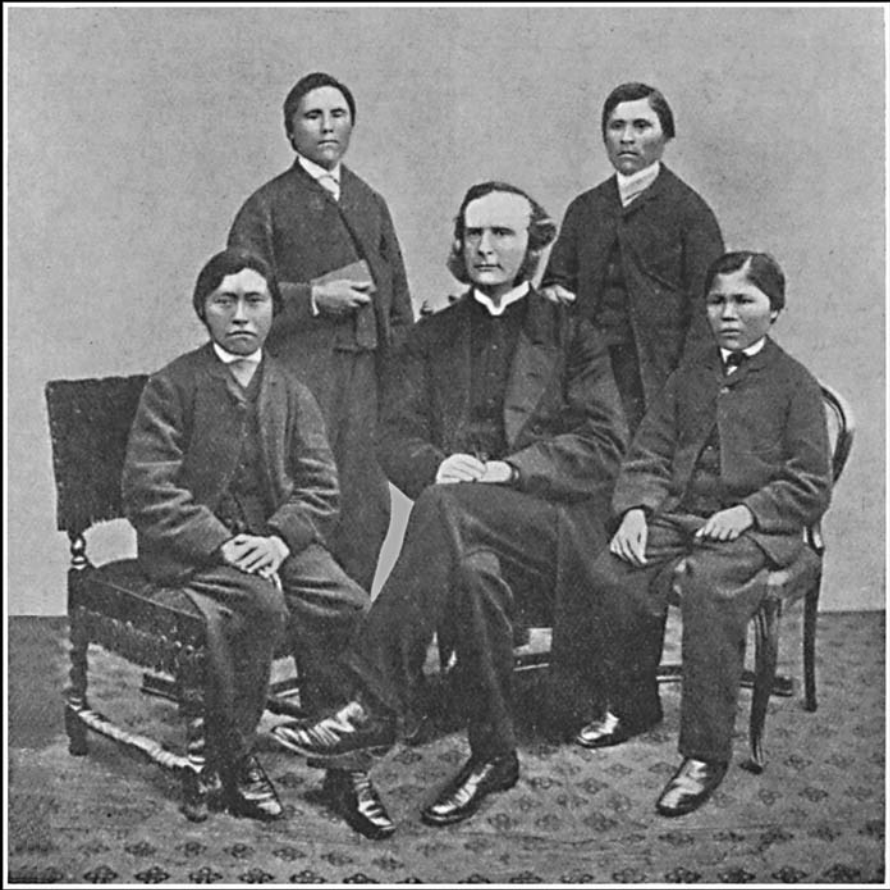
Death put an end to his great sufferings, and he was buried within three months after the funeral of his friend Uroopa. Mr. Stirling had no doubt that the Lord had drawn him to Himself with the cords of love.

Later on, Mr. Stirling became concerned with the effects of settlers from Argentina and Chile.

An attack of measles took place after a distribution of clothes by the Argentines. This disease spread like wildfire among the Yahgans, burning up the very best material of the Missions. The settled natives within a radius of thirty miles of Ushuaia nearly all died. The Indians, given to hunting and fishing in independent parties, more or less escaped. The civilized all perished.

Perhaps it never occurred to the Reverend Stirling that he and his missionaries were the first to bring “civilization” to Tierra del Fuego. Perhaps he had forgotten the fate of Uroopa, of Threeboys, of Jemmy Button. Perhaps he remembered, but said nothing.

Of course the Anglican communion was not the only church that sought to “improve” the natives, even if it meant destroying them. In the closing decade of the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Salesian fathers established a mission on Dawson Island, just across the water from Punta Arenas. By now, white settlers in the area were getting a bad reputation from their habit of killing off whatever Indians resisted efforts to be driven off their ancestral land. And so another tactic was put in place: the Indians would be rounded up and driven into the hands of the Salesians where, at their island mission, they might enjoy all the benefits of dying in a state of grace.



The Reverend Waite Stirling in England, with Threeboys and Uroopa (standing), Jack and Sesoienges (sitting)

The naked savages were intimidated into clothes harboring disease-bearing germs, fed an unwholesome diet, and pushed out of fresh air into enclosures—all of course that they might partake of the blessings of civilization. When the Belgian Antarctic Expedition ship *Belgica* stopped at Punta Arenas on the way to its destination, ship's doctor Frederick Cook visited the mission at Dawson Island and later wrote about the housing and conditions under which the Indians lived, however briefly:

The so-called houses were mere boxes, ... so placed as to effectively keep out light and air. Tuberculosis was sufficiently prevalent to thoroughly impregnate

the mud floor, and the average life of the Indian here in mission confines was less than three years. ... If he was encouraged to return to shelter tents instead of death boxes, many thousands of worthy lives might have been spared.

Epidemics followed, and at another mission the Mother General noted that "... by the end of the year we'll end up with no girls." But this was perfectly understandable: "They are physically unsuited to cope with civilization." To which the mission prefect added his own word of cheer:

These Indians die even in the woods, but among us they pass away like little saints.



Late nineteenth-century postcard photos of the mission structures



The Dawson Island mission closed its doors in 1912, its holy work done. The savages were dead.