

**MEMORIES OF THE LIFE OF
J.F.H. WOHLERS, MISSIONARY
AT RUAPUKE, NEW ZEALAND:
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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Memories of the life of J.F.H. Wohlers, missionary at Ruapuke, New Zealand: an autobiography
by J. F. H. Wohlers

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MEMORIES OF THE LIFE
OF J. F. H. WOHLERS,

MISSIONARY AT RUAPUKE, NEW ZEALAND.

An Autobiography.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

JOHN HOUGHTON.

*"Such men are the strong nails that keep the
world together."*

THE LITTLE MINISTER.

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INTRODUCTION.

J. F. H. WOHLERS was born a peasant in the village of Hoyerhagen, near Bremen, but a desire for the life of a missionary being developed in him, he went to New Zealand in 1843, under the auspices of the North German Missionary Society.

He settled in the first instance at Nelson, but finding no sphere there for missionary operations removed to the island of Ruapuke, in Foveaux Straits, then the residence of the principal native chiefs of the South Island, coming down the coast with Mr. Tuckett, the agent of the New Zealand Company, on his journey to select the site for the present settlement of Otago.

He converted communities, to use his own words, of loathsome savages sunk in degradation and poverty, both at Ruapuke and on the adjacent coasts of Stewart Island and the mainland, into prosperous communities of civilized human beings, receiving for many years no remuneration, but producing his own food out of the soil, and teaching the Maoris to do the same after a civilized manner. He preserved and fully records the old Maori mythology (a sublime one) which, even in his day, was only known to a few, as it was the religion of previous generations, the custodians of which all died before his own demise. He published the book of which this is a translation in Bremen, in 1883, and died at Stewart Island on the 7th of May, 1885, at the age of seventy-three.

Says Mr. James Anthony Froude in his *Essay on Representative Men*: "*The age of the saints has passed; they are no longer of any service to us: we must work*

in their spirit, *but not along their road*. And in this sense we say that we have *no pattern great men, no biographies, no history*, which are of any service to us. It is the remarkable characteristic of the present time—as far as we can know, a new phenomenon since history began to be written—one more proof, if we wanted proof, that we are entering upon *another era*."

The translator of THE MEMORIES OF THE LIFE OF J. F. H. WOHLERS submits that the present era is only a continuation of the old one—the Christian era—and that the rule still is, that when we have a pattern great man amongst us that we do not know it until he is dead, and "that he was in the world and the world knew him not" is as true to-day as it was eighteen centuries ago.

The author of this book lived and died amongst us, and as a great man we certainly did not know him. He wrote the "Memories of My Life" in his old age in his native tongue, and it has lain amongst us twelve years untranslated. His work was this: To make savages into Christian men and women, not in name only, but in very deed and truth, and to show in practice that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." He saved people's souls, and their bodies too. He put into practice the maxim of the old monks, *Laborare est orare*, and did manual labour as well as his spiritual task as under the Great Taskmaster's eye.

In his somewhat narrow sphere he solved the social problem—that problem that is the despair of modern statesmen, that labour unions, extensions of franchise, labour bills, and other Acts of Parliament are so vainly trying to solve. His materials were—and poorer ones could hardly be conceived—*First*, Men and women, loathsome savages, sunk in degradation and poverty, but still, like himself,

made in the image of God ; *Second*, God Almighty's earth, a small, sterile, rocky island in the midst of a stormy strait, but still that earth that is the Lord's, and full of riches ; *Third*, a little axe, a fowling piece, a bag of flour, a little salt, and no money at all ; but the Christian religion—that faith that moves mountains. His method was this : He combined religion and industry, and served God for no money at all, as much with the spade and plough as before the altar. He has gone to his longed-for home, but his work still goes on. His memory is still an active force in the field of his late labours.

The translator's acquaintance with the old world is but small. In the new continents he has passed a lifetime, and has seen such work as this man did in but one other place. On the coast of California are many adobe cathedrals, centuries old, some in ruins, some still in use and in good repair. They were founded by an order of Franciscan friars some three hundred years ago. The wild tribes of Indians which then inhabited California could not be reduced to order by the Spanish military authorities, and the coast of California for a length of five hundred miles was abandoned to a few of these friars, amongst whom were men of great learning and profound piety. With nothing but a rosary, a little holy water, and the Christian religion, they converted these wild men whom the soldiery could not tame. They taught them the arts of peace, that of irrigation, of the cultivation of wheat, of barley, of the vine, the olive and the fig, and they formed them into communities—not one, but twenty communities—of thousands of civilised men and women. They built these beautiful cathedrals of adobe, with cool transept and nave, with buttressed walls many feet in thickness, with shady corridors, and fountains gurgling in the plaza. They taught the Indians to breed sheep and cattle, horses and

mules; and, exporting wool and hides to the parent country, received back goods in exchange, and amassed such wealth that they could afford to have their heavy altar services of solid gold. The missions Dolores, of Monterey, of Santa Barbara, San Luis Rey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, Santa Inez, San Diego, San Buenaventura, and many others still tell of the work of these saints. With them, too, the practice was, *Laborare est orare*. And the translator submits that Mr. Froude's new era will dawn when all the saints learn that they are not here merely to pray, but to work as well—for to work is to pray; and that the solution of the social problem lies (as Mr. Carlyle suggests in his tale of Abbot Samson) in the combination of religion and agriculture first, and all other industry afterwards; for work is as holy as prayer, and "Six days shalt thou work" as much a divine command as "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Acts of Parliament cannot effect this. It must necessarily be a matter of slow growth, for the "Kingdom of Heaven," which is Peace on earth and good will towards men, "cometh not with observation."

The story told is that of a faithful husbandman—a true worker in the vineyard, and after a lifetime of toil, when earth had no more in store for him and his sole desire but for eternal rest, he calls himself an unprofitable servant! "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"

As Mr. J. M. Barrie says of one of the clergymen in the "Little Minister"—"Such men are the strong nails that keep the world together." They are the cement that joins the new era to the old one.

J. H.

INVERCARGILL, 1st July, 1895.

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