





Extract from "History of the Parish and Town of Bampton, with the District and Hamlets belonging to it" by the Rev. J. A. Gides, DCL.

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NOTE. The manor of Shifford has, of late years, fallen into a sort of abeyance, no doubt because the population has become so small, and from the fact that almost the whole of it is divided between the two large farms, called Old and New Shifford. The tenants of both these farms have for a large number of years been members of the family of Williams. The late Mr. John Williams (formerly of Coats) who died in 1821, with his sons Mr. Michael and Mr. Peter Williams (the present tenant) have successively held the farm of Old Shifford of the earls of Harcourt.

John Williams, missionary, martyred at Erromanga, and Sir James Williams, Knight, ex-sheriff, were branches of this family. The following account of the former may be of interest to my readers:

"The Revd. John Williams was the great grandson of Mr. James Williams of Southleigh, Devon, who was for 40 years a Deacon of the Baptist Church at Coats. He left England in 1816 as a missionary to the island of Raiatea, the largest of the Society Islands, under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. For twenty years he prosecuted his self-denying labours in the Isles of the Pacific, with an amount of success not often realized. In addition to his stated labours in preaching and teaching the truths of the gospel, in establishing schools, in translating and printing the scriptures and elementary publications, his inventive mind enabled him to instruct the natives in improved methods of constructing their houses, in burning lime from their coral reefs, in erecting simple sugar mills, and even in the construction of a sloop of some 60 or 80 tons, in all which labours



like another Oberlin, Williams was the pioneer, working laboriously with his own hands. — The perseverance which he displayed in overcoming the obstacles which arose from his want of tools, and the destruction of his only pair of bellows by the rats, are graphically described in his *Missionary Enterprises*, some 9 or 10 editions of which have been published — His self-dedication and disinterestedness at length had its due effect upon the minds of the natives; animated with the zeal of the first Christians they abolished the superstitions of ages and brought the idols of their ancestors to be committed to the flames. The honorable Captain Waldgrave, H.M.S. *Singapatam*, and Lord Byron, captain of the *Blonde*, have borne honorable testimony to the proficiency of these poor islanders in Scriptural knowledge, and declared that they had received answers to questions on religious subjects put by them, which most assuredly they never would have received at any provincial school in England.

The ardour of Williams's mind led him to confer the blessings of evangelisation on the flavory group of islands, and especially the island of Rarotonga. At these islands the gospel was received with rapture. — From one island, where it had been proclaimed, but where it was not possible to have a missionary, a native visited Rarotonga in an open canoe (a voyage of 80 miles) to fetch, as he expressed it, a little religion, which he took home to his countrymen, and then returned for further instruction. In the year 1838 Williams visited his native country, principally with the view of interesting the British public in his favourite scheme of evangelising the different groups of the Pacific. His intelligent, simple, and manly appeals found a ready response in the heart of thousands. Men of science and of commerce saw, in the progress of Missions, the true basis

of civilization and the advancement of knowledge. Many men of rank and affluence (and notably the Duke of Devonshire) cheerfully aided the undertaking.

Mr Williams returned to Polynesia in a ship which had been presented to him, the "Camden" followed by the prayers and the sympathies of thousands. But shortly after his return, in endeavouring to gain access to the island of Erromanga, one of the group of the New Hebrides, he was massacred by those whom he came to save; in revenge no doubt for some long remembered cruelties inflicted on them by Europeans who had formerly touched at their shores. He died Nov. 20, 1833 "

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Copied T.E.C.

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