

MY KINSMAN THE SAVAGE

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INTRODUCTION

When they first heard that savage Indians known as "Aucas" had killed five American missionaries in the jungles of South America in 1956, many people asked, "Are there still such savages living today?" The obvious yes to that question gave rise to further questions. Why did they do it? Who are they? How do they live? What makes them savage?

Then when three of us went to live in the tribe with these people, we were asked, How do they respond toward you? How do you feel toward them? What are you trying to do?

I am not sure I can fully answer these questions. I have lived with the Aucas less than a year, and must limit myself mostly to description rather than explanation of the Auca people. I know far too little of their language even to understand much of what they say, let alone what they think. I can barely hold up my end of a conversation dealing with the simplest everyday matters. I know next to nothing of tribal lore, superstitions, religion, thought patterns and beliefs.

My Speculations concerning the Aucas' attitudes toward outsiders, the reasons for their former behavior, their nature and character proved to be quite wrong. Ideas I had had about how to approach them were turned upside down, and my perspective on my own society was changed. I felt in many ways that I knew less, after living with the Aucas, than I had known when I went in. My hammock by the fire became an ivory tower. I was isolated from my own people by distance, from the Aucas by being a foreigner. Unable to communicate, I was forced to reflect.

And I did take some pictures. I made notes on what I saw.

It is my hope that these will convey some idea of who the Aucas are, how they live, how we lived with them, and some of the problems we faced. Perhaps the contemplation of this society may give a new perspective on our own, and help us to know what it is that really matters.

The word "missionary" may call to mind preaching, teaching, church-building (and even this often means merely a physical plant, rather than a spiritual building), medical work, baptizing, catechising, social improvement--almost any form of philanthropy. I found myself quite unable to undertake any one of these activities. A strange position for one who was called a missionary. I began to search my Guidebook to learn whether my definition had been an accurate one. The word "missionary" does not occur in the Bible. But the word "witness" does. I found many passages indicating that I was supposed to be a witness. One in particular arrested me. It stated that to be a witness to God is, above all, to know, believe, and understand Him. All that He asks us to do is but means to this end. He will go to any lengths to teach us, and His manipulation of the movements of men--Aucas, missionaries, whom-ever--is never accidental. Those movements may be incidental to the one thing toward which He goads us: the recognition of Christ.

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¹ Isaiah:43:10

Chapter I "I Must Tread Alone"

When on January 12, 1956, the party of missionary volunteers, Quichua Indians, Ecuadorian soldiers and American airmen who had gone to search for the five missing men returned to tell us that they were all dead, there was little sense of drama for me. The history of missions had repeated itself. I could see that, for I had read stories of missionaries, from the Benedictine monks who crossed the Alps into Germany and were murdered by savage tribesmen, to nineteenth century Englishmen who went to the South Sea islands and were clubbed to death. The crusading spirit, the thrill of reaching an unreached tribe, the passion for souls which is supposed to motivate some--all these faded out completely. I knew that if life was to go on, it must go on meaningfully. I was forced back to the real reasons for missionary work, indeed the real reasons for living at all. My husband Jim and the four men who had gone into Auca territory had one reason: they believed it was what God wanted them to do. They took quite literally the words, "The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." It is only in obeying God that we may know Him. Obedience, if it is a good reason for dying, is just as good a reason for living. I knew that there was no other answer for me. The "whys" that screamed themselves at me day and night could not be silenced, but I could live with them if I simply went on and did the next thing.

Jim and I had been working among the Quichua Indians in a place called Shandia. I returned to Shandia. I did the things that presented themselves to me as duties each day, and in the doing of these I learned to know God a little better. To obey is to know. To know is to be at peace. I had no idea what the future might hold. It seemed impossible that I could continue the entire management

of the Quichua station alone, but there was no use concerning myself with the next day. I was confident that, as in the case of the waterfowl,

"There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along the pathless coast--
The desert and illimitable air--
Lone wandering, but not lost . . .
He, who from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone
Will lead my steps aright."

There was much maintenance work to oversee on the station: the clearing of weeds on the airstrip, the planting of pineapples and bananas, the constant work to keep the jungle back from the trails and clearings, the mending of fences and ^{thatched} roofs, the finishing of a school building which Jim had started, besides the ordinary work of living without many conveniences. I had a baby to care for, medical work to do among the Indians, a girl's school to teach, the translation of Quichua Scriptures to do, a Bible class in the boys' school to prepare for, and the shepherding of a group of young Quichua Christians.

While I was at Shandia, the men of the Missionary Aviation Fellowship continued the flights over the Auca settlement, begun ^{Nate Sainr} by ~~one of the men~~ ^{with my husband & the others.} who had been killed. Gifts were dropped to the Aucas regularly, and the signs of friendship which they had given before the killing seemed unchanged. Many people, in all parts of the world, prayed for the Aucas, that the Light of the knowledge of God ~~at~~ would somehow be taken to them. The odds against this seemed even greater now than they had before an attempt was made.

But to know God is to trust Him, and we expected Him to do whatever might be necessary to open the Auca tribe. There were speculations as to how it might be done. Many people professed to know what mistakes the five men had made which led to their death. Psychologists and anthropologists wrote to explain what rules ought to be observed on the next attempt. Someone sent me sixty dollars with the request that it be ~~xxxxx~~ used to buy Bibles for the Aucas. One lady asked that the Ten Commandments be written down on a slip of paper and dropped from the airplane to the Indians. Some said that if women were to go into the tribe, they would be accepted. Others said this would be more dangerous than the five men's going in, as women would be taken as common wives. Suggestions gleaned from encyclopedias, seances, Greek mythology, and Freudian ^{psychology} ~~dreams~~ poured in.

It was clear to me that the central issue was not one of methods. Something could go wrong with the very best plan. Some unexpected factor could throw off the wisest calculations. I simply asked the Lord to do what He wanted to do about it. For once in my life I had no suggestions to make to Him about how He was to do it. I placed myself in His hands once more, ~~askingxxxxxx~~ telling Him that if He wanted to give me a part in reaching the Aucas, I was ready. I had noticed throughout the Bible that when God asked a man to do something, methods, means, materials and specific directions were always provided. The man had one thing to do: obey. This would have to be the only thing that mattered with regard to the Aucas. The words of Balaam in the Old Testament story seemed particularly appropriate: "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God, to do less or more."

But clearly the command for me to go had not been given, and unless I stuck to the job which had been given, I could not expect to recognize new guidance if it should come.

The Indians whom Jim had taught were learning to take more and more of the responsibilities in the Shandia church. One of the signs of health was an increasing interest on their part in Indians who had had no opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ. The death of the missionaries had awakened some of them to the seriousness of life, and they were praying more earnestly that God would send His Word to others. They began to make short trips to nearby points where missionaries had never been. They took over all of the preaching and most of the teaching in Shandia, and there was renewed interest in the translations of Scripture which were being printed for them.

Another missionary couple came to Shandia, and after a few months of ^{language} study they decided that they would stay there in the Quichua work. All these developments contributed to my conviction that I was ~~not to move on~~ to move on, perhaps out of the Quichua work and, although it seemed an absurd ~~dream~~, into the Auca work. I was certain that if this was the case, it would be unmistakably clear when the time came.

One day in May, 1957, Johnny Keenan, the missionary pilot, asked me if I would like to accompany him on the flight to drop gifts to the Aucas. I had flown over the Auca village only once, and we had seen no people that time. This time we flew over three different locations where there were houses and manioc patches. At one of these I felt sure I saw "George," the young man who had befriended

Jim and the others just before they were killed. "George" grabbed the package we dropped to him, and immediately started to eat the hamburger and bun, waving the streamers from the package so that we would be sure to see that he had gotten it. He ran from one side of the river to the other so as to be closer to us each time we buzzed the clearing. He raised his arms in what appeared to me to be a pleading gesture, and smiled and shouted. I could not help hoping that we might have to make a forced landing in that valley, so strong was the desire to meet them face to face. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ I understood then the eagerness of the five men to get down where the Aucas were. ~~Yet I knew that I never could go, indeed, never would even if the opportunity were given, unless the Lord unequivocally indicated that it was the thing to do. The Aucas were to me the personification of Death. They were the dealers of death to all that life had held for me, and I was perfectly aware of the possibilities now. Quite apart from my desire to meet them,~~ ^{Yet at the same time} there was ~~also~~ a shrinking from the darkness and doom which they seemed to represent. I thought of the story of Ananias in Damascus, who, when the Lord spoke his name, said, "Here I am." The Lord gave the orders--to go and speak to a man named Saul--and Ananias reminded Him of Saul's reputation: a killer. But the Lord said "Go." Ananias got up and went right into the house where he was. The dangers, public opinion, prudence were quite irrelevant when the command was explicit. I was sure God could be trusted to make it as explicit to me, too, if

*picture
-airview
of Aucas
houses?*

In October, 1957, a little house which had been built on the Curaray River by an English missionary, Dr. Wilfred Tidmarsh, was sacked by the Aucas. The door was ripped off, his belongings were

torn and scattered about, two lances were placed crosswise outside the door, machetes and pots were stolen. Any hopes that the Aucas might be ready for another friendly approach were destroyed. It was clearer than ever than if anything was to be successful, it would have to be of God.

"Who will bring me to the fortified city? . . . Wilt not Thou, O God? O grant us help against the foe, for vain is the help of man! With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes." (Psalm 60)

It was only a month after the attack on Dr. Tidmarsh's hut that the "miracle" we had expected occurred. I had been invited to the Tidmarsh's home in Arajuno. The decision to accept or not--ordinarily one I would have made quickly and without much difficulty--struck me this time as being a rather ^{an} important one. I prayed about it and asked especially that I should not make a mistake. The answer was a strong affirmative--I should go. I had not been there a week when we received word that three Auca women had appeared at a Quichua settlement within walking distance of Arajuno.