

ACTIVE RETIREMENT

A different assignment was a request from the headmaster of Suva Boys' Grammar School for DWH to stand in for him so that he might be able to take long overdue overseas leave. Hilda was visiting New Zealand when he started teaching again. DWH wrote to her:

"I find teaching to be just as interesting as it was 50 years ago when I first started. Now with the long experience I can take extra liberties and try out various psychological ploys with the different types of pupils. I have just finished the first full week in control at the BGS. Apart from a few minor points the duties are not too strenuous and I can get on with it all right."

A few years later I was to meet a young man who had been a senior pupil at the Suva B.G.S. during 1952. He had been due to sit New Zealand University Scholarship examinations but was very aware of his mathematics deficiencies. He assured me that he would never forget the trouble Dr Hoodless had gone to to persuade him mathematics was interesting, — even fun, — and to help him attain a scholarship.

In 1953 DWH was appointed Correspondent for *The Times* of London. The position in itself hardly repaid a correspondent for the trouble he might have to go to financially so only a person with an adequate income could contemplate accepting it. The terms were £5 sterling for each published column with a minimum of £1.1.0 for each published contribution. 'Reasonable incidental expenses' were refundable quarterly and cable fees were paid in London. Obviously *The Times* considered it a privilege to be one of their correspondents.

The South Pacific Commission was another concern in whose affairs DWH was invited to participate. The Commission was created by an Agreement signed at Canberra on February 1947, between the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America for the purpose of encouraging and strengthening international co-operation in promoting the economic and social welfare and advancement of the peoples of the non-self-governing territories in the South Pacific region.

A Fiji Information Committee for the South Pacific Commission was established in May 1954 because of rumblings that the £1½ million spent by the Commission had not benefitted the ordinary people with their day to day problems. The work of the Commission was covered by annual reports, some 60 technical papers, as well as a quarterly review from 1951. An enormous amount of paper had emanated from the Commission and a large amount of

scientific and technical information had been accumulated, nearly all of which was concerned with long term improvements for the islanders. Until May 1954 no one had gone to any great trouble to inform them through their daily press or the radio of those benefits. DWH along with the Fiji Public Relations Officer undertook to do this work for their particular area. Initially DWH prepared a resume of the work of the Commission:

“Now is the appropriate time while the price of copra is very high to show the native islander how to build a more satisfactory house, to obtain a good fresh water supply to each village, and to lessen the labour in the taro and yam gardens by the discovery and use of more nutritious and more quickly maturing varieties of foodstuffs. These are practical and everyday improvements in his daily life that the native islander can readily appreciate and he is quite willing to leave the scientific and technical investigations in the hands of a few experts hoping that sooner or later one or more of his race may be trained to assist them.”

At that stage in his late 60's DWH was as busily active as he could have wished. Hilda too, was a member of Lady Garvey's Gift Parcel Scheme Committee. The First Battalion of the Fiji Infantry Regiment was operating as jungle fighters in the steaming heat of Malaya's jungles in a relentless campaign pursuing terrorists. To assuage their thirsts the Fijian soldiers craved regular supplies of their traditional *yaqona* or *kava*. The Governor's wife Lady Garvey launched her scheme in March 1953 and by 1 July there was £2,335 in hand so that gifts of *yaqona* could be sent regularly and individual Christmas parcels be made available for each member of the Battalion. A Queen Carnival was organised in June 1954 with the aim that the section of the Fiji community which raised the most money would have their entrant chosen as Carnival Queen. This effort entailed the Committee in many hours of work but it was wholeheartedly supported by the population who were solid supporters of their Battalion.

They had been planning a trip for 1955, but on one of the mornings when DWH had gone down to see Mr Farquhar at the copra weighing shed on the wharf, he had seen a beautiful new cargo ship “Windsor” of the Watts, Watts and Company's line and had asked, “Does she take passengers?” since she was loading 9000 tons of bulk sugar at Lautoka and Labasa, then clearing Suva direct for London. The Captain said he could not take passengers without permission from the London office but he would be happy to take a doctor if the agents received cable permission from London. The reply came; “Pleased to take Dr and Mrs Hoodless as guests of the Company”. The ship was beautifully appointed and the food was excellent.

The frankly nostalgic nature of their London stay caught them up in a round of events that they allowed themselves to savour. DWH as a Yeoman of the City Livery Company known as the Society of Apothecaries, had never done what had been his right from the time he registered his LMSSA, which was to take up the Freedom of the City of London. So his application having been accepted DWH duly made his declaration of loyalty to the Sovereign and to the Lord Mayor, promising neither to take part in nor to countenance any rebellion and signed it. Then on being presented with his certificate of freedom and his copy of Rules for the Conduct of Life he had joined the company of Freemen of the City of London.

There were several visits to the offices of *The Times*. DWH found himself writing an article on Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna's new appointment as Speaker of the Legislative Council and being asked to prepare the previously quoted article on the Gilbert and Ellice Islands as well as an article "Life in Fiji" for *The Times'* own House Journal.

DWH also took Hilda to visit Kings College in the Strand where he found old acquaintances and was invited to lunch with the Dean and members of the Senior Common Room, of which from 1918 to 1920 he had been an honorary member. He also attended Chere Reine Masonic Lodge. His first visit there for nearly 20 years was saddened by the fact that Charles Jennings Marshall who had originally invited him to join the Lodge had died the day they were travelling from Liverpool to London. The years were passing and old friends with them. Their return passages had been booked on the "Orsova" due to leave Tilbury on 27 April via Suez and sailing right through to Suva by 9 June. They took a trip to France and Italy in March. France was to be the Indian Summer of their life together. Hilda herself wrote three articles which illuminate the happiness shared over that time. *Snow on Montmartre*, *The Language of a Laugh*, and *Flowery Nice*.

Pisa, Rome and Florence began well but DWH became increasingly unwell. At one stage it seemed that he might be unable to return to England but fortunately they reached Nancy's home in Cambridge and that evening he was admitted to the Addenbrooke Hospital. Mr Gray, the surgeon told Hilda that her husband's position was very serious. His duodenal ulcer had perforated, the duodenum was obstructed by old scarring but no surgery was possible because he was also in renal failure, a complication of the many years of a high milk diet. For a week everything was done that could be done but DWH died on 15 April. Hilda was nevertheless glad they had made the trip "for it has given him a great deal of overdue pleasure and we have enjoyed so much together."

In her grief Hilda was not looking forward to that journey back alone but in the end it passed reasonably well. Hilda's return to Suva more or less coincided with the return of the 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment after their four years in the Malayan jungles. Patricia, Lady Garvey insisted that Hilda be present at a party the Battalion gave for their well wishers who had helped with her Gift Parcels Scheme. It was the first function that Hilda had attended since her arrival. A tall figure bore down upon her, Ratu Lt. Colonel Edward Cakobau, the man who had years ago gone off as a schoolboy to Wanganui with the future Dr Tom Dovi. Ratu Edward gripped both Hilda's hands firmly in his and with emotion said:

"Oh Mrs Hoodless how sad I was to hear of your husband's death. We, in Fiji, have not really had the opportunity to let you know how we felt about him. Dovi and I owe a great deal to him. Words cannot really convey my feelings for him."

The settlement of her affairs dragged on for months. First there was the question of domicile. From the time of his retirement DWH considered himself as officially domiciled in Fiji, but by dying in England his estate had to be proven to the United Kingdom authorities to be that of a citizen of Fiji, not Great Britain. Hilda also became aware that the mortally ill Sir Henry was not hurrying her business along because, in his weary ill state, he did not

wish to lose the companionship of her visits. Hilda had not the heart to tell him that she felt tired and none too well herself. She did visit a doctor. She was poked and prodded, had some tests and was told to go away and forget about herself. She was deeply upset. She had always brushed aside minor ills as things not to be mentioned, certainly not referred to in her letters. She knew this time she had a tedious ache and felt unnaturally weary, but she carried on with no mention of the matter in her letters until one day she dropped her guard and wrote: "Sometimes I feel deathly weary", a statement that was striking in that it was so unlike her to mention how she herself was feeling.

Within a few weeks Sir Henry Scott was dead and she was able to arrange her departure. Then, on her arrival in New Zealand, it was obvious that she had meant what she had written. She arrived in August 1956 a patently ill woman and died on New Year's Eve. Until the day she died there was one task Hilda wished to fulfil. She felt she must return to England once more in a more peaceful frame of mind to see the Stearns and visit the grave they had arranged for her husband. It was not to be. She kept her tryst with DWH in another manner.