

LYDIA BROWN, SPINSTER

NOTES ON THE INTRODUCTION OF SPINNING AND WEAVING IN THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS 1830-37

MISS BROWN was one of the two or three pioneer social service workers in the Sandwich Islands, for most of her companions came to convert, rather than to supervise industry. But they all shared hardships that only consecration to a cause could induce one to continue facing.

Mrs. Thurston, one of the first missionaries, records that on "Monday morning, April 3rd, (1819) the first sewing circle was formed that the sun ever looked down upon in this Hawaiian realm. Kalakua, queen dowager, was directress. She requested all the seven white ladies to take seats with them on mats, on the deck of the *Thaddeus*. Mrs. Holman and Mrs. Ruggles were executive officers, to ply the scissors and prepare the work. The four native women of distinction were furnished with calico patch-work to sew—a new employment to them.

"The dress was made in the fashion of 1819. The length of skirt accorded with Brigham Young's rule to his Mormon damsels—dresses 'have to come down to the tops of the shoes.' But in the queen's case, where the shoes were wanting, the bare feet cropped out very prominently."

Lydia Brown, born at Wilton, N. H., 1780, crossed with the seventh company on the ship *Hellespont*, one hundred and eighty-three days out from Boston. She writes soon after reaching her station:—

Sept. 21, 1836.

"I arrived at Wailuku July 13. In eleven days from that time, I began with the natives. Have succeeded as yet quite as well as I expected. I commenced with six females. In two weeks I took the seventh. In four weeks they spun enough for forty yards of cloth, thirty-seven of which I have wove, and shall send a piece of it to you. You will not expect it to be fine,

like cloth made with machinery, but will consider that the gown was made by Sandwich Islands females, and is their first effort of the kind. We hope for improvement. They have as yet manifested more interest in the business than I expected, considering their natural inclination to indolence. I have from the first dreaded the decline of the interest awakened by the novelty of the experiment, but I have not yet discovered any disposition to withdraw. They seem to consider it a privilege rather than a task. The business seems to meet the approbation of rulers and people. I have had a visit from the governor of Hawaii. He appeared much pleased, and wishes much to have the work commenced on that island. I do not discover any deficiency in intellect to discourage the hope that they may become an industrious people. They certainly take ideas about the work remarkably well, considering I have little knowledge of the language. When I was about to commence weaving, expecting the novelty of that would attract their attention so much that they would not card and spin to profit, I proposed to them to prepare some yarn nice as they could, I would assist about it, and would teach them to knit. They seemed pleased, and went about it with much patience. I began each of them a stocking. They soon took the stitch: and although it required considerable of my time for a few days, I had much pleasure in seeing them off from their mats, and on seats, busily employed, which was my main object in proposing it. That they might have some variety, I sat each of them to quill their own yarn, that they might become acquainted with handling yarn; and seeing the defects in it, might improve in spinning. I have spent eight or nine hours a day with them, for several weeks in succession. I have exercised two of the females a little in the loom. I think I can teach them to weave, which is by far the most difficult part of the business."

LYDIA BROWN.

In 1836 Miss Brown was at Wailuku. This location was agreeable to the wishes of the king, and of the subordinate chief who had the care of this district. The following extract is from a contemporary letter: "On the 30th of July Miss Brown commenced operations, took under her instruction six young women, the best that could be selected out of the multitude who were anxious to learn the art of making cloth. Two weeks after, the seventh was admitted, and since that the eighth has been partially connected with the business. These young women have been uniformly in-

dustrious, docile, and interested in their work. Miss Brown thinks their ability to learn the art is not at all inferior to that of young women in general in America, and the skill they have already acquired in carding, spinning, and knitting, is quite equal to her highest expectations. She considers them now good spinners, and one of them has commenced weaving a little. Two webs of cloth have been spun entirely by the natives, and woven chiefly by Miss Brown herself; and the third piece is now nearly completed, which will make in all ninety yards. There has been no difficulty as yet in obtaining cotton, and we anticipate none, as it grows spontaneously, and has been planted this year to a considerable extent. It is also of an excellent quality.

“It will be remembered that Miss Brown was sent to the islands with a view expressly to instruct the natives in the art of manufacturing cloth, and in other similar arts, which might contribute to their comfort and well-being, by introducing industry and some of the habits of civilized life.

“Some attention has also been given to knitting stockings. With this the young women are well pleased, and it will no doubt suit their habits and be a means of promoting industry among them.

“The present class having acquired the art of spinning, will soon be dismissed and another taken in, while perhaps one will be retained to learn to weave.

“The chief and people, as well as we ourselves, feel a deep interest in this experiment. Much depends upon it, in regard to the temporal and moral interests of the people. But we are not without our fears that the king and some of the higher chiefs will seize upon this, as they are apt to do upon everything valuable among the people, and turn it to their own private advantage. When Miss Brown’s first web was woven, the king immediately sent for it and has not returned it. Now this individual act may perhaps be regarded as an evidence of his interest in the work, rather than an act of oppression, but still it shows how exceedingly blind he is to all the principles of wise policy. When he should have stood ready to reward or encourage in some way those who had just commenced a new and useful undertaking, he snatched away the very first fruit of their labor. But this is a specimen of the way everything is managed in this country. Therefore the Christian public must not be too sanguine in their expectations.”

Another Missionary, J. S. Green writes:—

Wailuku, on Maui,

Nov. 21, 1836.

“You will hear from Miss Brown from her own pen, I presume. She lived with us about a year and a half, and is now with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong [missionaries]. I shall do all I can to assist her, and I think she is doing well. My hopes are a good deal raised, and though our young chief lacks enterprise, yet there is another man Raauwai, the treasurer of the government. I think he will do a good deal in the line of cloth making. We need several wheel heads, also cards for cotton.”

In 1837 we read that “the quantity of clothing worn by the natives is, we think, annually increasing: and the frail native tapa is giving place more and more to the English fabrics and the English mode of dress. (The missionaries found the native women too enormous for the usual styles and patterns of the day, so the first successful pattern came to be cut from a nightgown, producing the Mother Hubbard *holoku* that has become standard.) Especially is this true at and near the mission stations. Perhaps no article of foreign manufacture is so much called for among the natives as our domestic cottons, and none is probably more useful to them.”

Volume I, of the Minutes of General Meetings of Sandwich Islands Missions, 1830–7, tells us that, “Two of the second class requested permission to remain in school, and they assist in instructing others.—One of them is about to set up cloth making at home.—On the whole, this branch of our missionary labor is prosperous.”

Then the Committee on the manufacture of cloth, begs leave to recommend:

“1. That the establishment be continued at Wailuku for the present as heretofore; and that a sum not exceeding thirty dollars be appropriated the present year from our treasury for the purpose of improving and enlarging the concern, as Miss Brown and the brethren of the station may deem expedient.

2. That any one of the brethren who may desire the removal of this establishment to his station, with a view to extend through the islands a knowledge of the art of cloth making, keep the subject in view during the present year, lay it before his people, correspond with Miss Brown on the subject, and present his wishes to the next general meeting.

3. That, whereas the pupils of the contemplated Female Boarding School at Wailuku are expected to be too young to learn the art of manufacturing cloth, for several years to come, therefore, that the vote of our last general meeting appointing Miss Brown as an assistant in that seminary, be rescinded."

In 1839 the committee "having made such examination of the subject as was in their power, report that, since the commencement of the business, between 500 and 600 yards of cloth have been made at Wailuku (on Maui) under the care of Miss Brown. Had her health enabled her to prosecute the work, the amount of cloth manufactured would doubtless have been much increased.

"At Kailua, Governor Adams has made an effort to introduce the manufacture of cotton, and with some success. A considerable number of females have made good proficiency in the art of spinning; four young men have learned to weave; twelve pieces, four hundred yards of plain and twilled cotton have been manufactured, some of the latter were plaid. Most of the cloth was woven under the superintendence of a foreigner; one piece however was prepared and woven by the natives unaided.

"In view of these facts your committee are of opinion that it is desirable to encourage the manufacture. It is not clear to us that it will be a source of permanent profit, yet it may be introduced with advantage in the Seminary, and in families, in the present destitution of employment."*

In 1839 we find Miss Brown was allowed one hundred and fifty dollars in advance. In 1840 this was raised to one hundred and seventy-five dollars and fifty dollars was allowed to build a workhouse. 1841, '42, '43 show the same amount appropriated: but 1844 gives one hundred and thirty-one dollars and twenty-five cents for nine months. Imports prospered and seem to have discouraged hand-weaving. From 1840-57 Miss Brown, so Mrs. Andrews at the Children's Cousins' Society says, was at Kaluaaha. In '57 Miss Brown lived at Lahaina, Hawaii; but she died in Honolulu, 1865.

The cotton Miss Brown used seemed of native growth, for shrub cotton is natural to Hawaii and the tropics—unless perhaps the kidney seeds or

*From Revised Minutes of the Delegate Meeting of the Sandwich Islands Mission. Honolulu Mission Press.

Brazilian cotton were introduced by Don Francisco de Paulo Marin, great grandfather of Mrs. Webb, Docent at the Pauahi Bishop Museum. There was from 1835-40 a cotton mill at Kailua on the Island of Hawaii. The tree cotton of Egypt and the Equator is poor in fibre. Cotton which is annual in our temperate zone, lives from two to forty years in the tropics. It is herbaceous cotton that is used in our South and in commerce: but its boll-weevil has not been introduced into the Territory of Hawaii, for the islands imported the long staple South Sea cotton. Moreover, the island ant attacks the weevil. Cut worms, however, are numerous in new fields. Its fibre is fine, but strong, and much used by yarn, lace, and silk manufacturers.

To H. M. Whitney belongs the initial credit for the encouragement of systematic cotton growing in the Sandwich Islands. He was a publisher and wrote up the subject in two languages, offering prizes, introducing machines and bringing seed from Boston, Massachusetts (1863). In 1866, 22,289 pounds were grown. Naturally the temporary cessation of southern industry during the Civil War revived and encouraged this fresh planting. But by 1874 the infant industry had ceased. It had been carried on entirely by uninitiated individual cultivators, and was overshadowed by the introduction of sugar.

In 1896 L. T. Timmons of Honolulu raised one hundred bolls or pods to a stalk—five times our southern output. Moreover, in half the time required on the mainland, he had a second harvest! In Louisiana cotton and cane grow side by side: why not on the eight large islands of Hawaii? One man it is claimed (Hawaiian Annual 1893-8, pp. 57-61: 1909-12, pp. 59-67) can tend ten acres in this moist, sunny section. Twenty pounds of seed sow an acre (pp. 149-152). Dr. E. V. Wilcox of the U. S. Experiment Station, claims that Guatemalan cotton could also be introduced. In 1905 W. M. Langdon brought over Queensland *Carabonica* from its originator, and in 1907 E. W. Jordan also tried it. The Timmons' boom was swamped by the interest in annexation (1898) and the increased investment and output of sugar caused thereby. Mr. Falkenberg has recently, I believe, tried some cotton planting.

Reverting to the early days, we find that in the girls' boarding school in 1839, were taught washing, ironing, sewing, braiding (of *Laubala* mats?) and silkworm feeding.