

# Beyond Civilization



by S. MULLER



# BEYOND CIVILIZATION

*by* S. MULLER

A collection of letters written to describe jungle journeys while pioneering among a hitherto unreached Indian tribe in the jungles of South America

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## FOREWORD

**Beyond Civilization** is a fascinating book written by a lady missionary serving under our Mission almost from its beginning. Sophie Muller pioneered the field of Colombia for us as a Mission, going right into the lowland unreached areas, taking the blessed Gospel story to several Indian tribes for the first time. She reduced their languages to writing and translated from a few books to the whole New Testament into their own languages. She has been an inveterate worker, working most of the time by herself far beyond civilization.

**Beyond Civilization** vividly expresses her lonelinesses, heartaches, fears and physical difficulties. It also expresses the joys and marvellous workings of the Spirit of God among the tribespeople to whom she ministered.

The book of Psalms seems to express to us the many and varied experiences of one of God's children. This book, in its own unique way, does this of Sophie's experiences among the Indians in the jungles of Colombia.

**Beyond Civilization** does not try to picture the writer or her accomplishments to impress the reader of the role of a great heroine with an outstanding personality. It brings out the human side very honestly. When she stated, "I'm scared," she wasn't trying to build up a scene, but just simply stated how she felt. She actually isn't too strong physically, but does have a real love for the Lord and the tribespeople to whom the Lord has sent her. That has been very evident, indeed.

The Holy Spirit is again illustrating the fact that He uses people of like passions as we are. Paul the Apostle gloried in his weakness because it thrust him, as only this could, on the inexhaustible strength of the Lord. So weakness becomes strength. God is still looking for yielded lives. He chooses the weak things of this world to confound the mighty. Many times it seems God has to choose a weak vessel, or make the vessel weak after He gets it, so that He can receive the glory that alone belongs to Him. This has been true in the case of the author.

Often strong men and women have gone to such places with much equipment, materially and otherwise, only to drop by the wayside because of spiritual or physical difficulties, or else they have moved to easier locations because of enemy opposition but not so with Sophie Muller. Over the ensuing years she has continued to push the spiritual battle with a strong offensive, even though in the past several years visas for new missionaries have been almost impossible to get for Colombia. She has, for the most part, had to work by herself — one little lady doing a man-sized job. Where are the men? Figures indicate seven women to one man on mission fields of the world today.

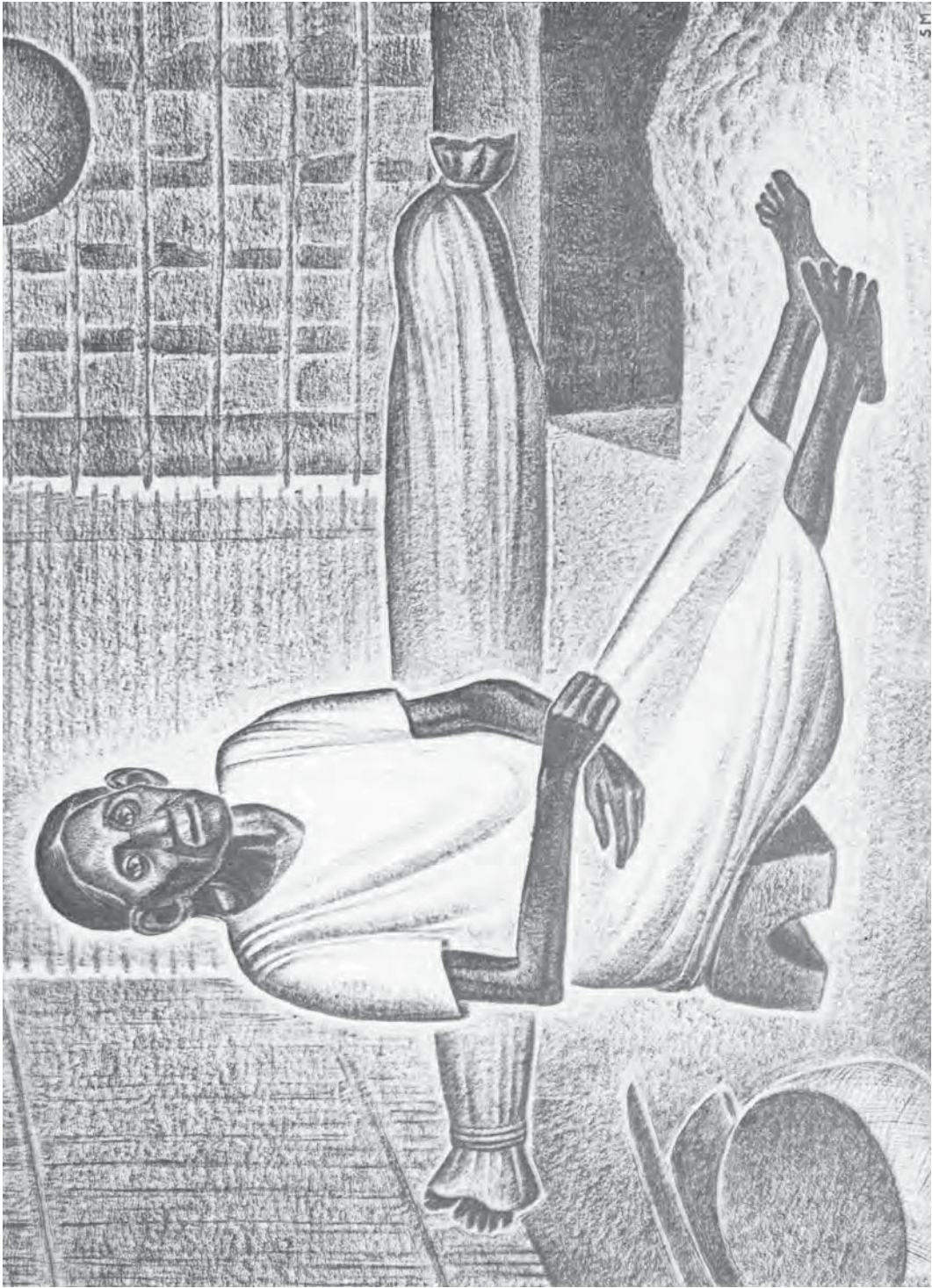
It is obvious from God's Word that His desire is that **“all should come to repentance.” “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” “God so loved the world.”** In heaven we find a great company made up from among every kindred, tribe, nation, tongue and people. There are approximately 1800 tongues with none of God's Word available to them yet. Surely, what God has enabled Sophie to see accomplished among the Curipaco Indian tribe, and nine other tribes, He wants to use many more to do — to reach other tribes with this greatest of all stories, that of God's great love in providing so great salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Kenneth J. Johnston, Chairman  
NEW TRIBES MISSION

*I DEDICATE THE MESSAGE of this book to those who will take up the challenge of the unreached tribes. The drawings in this book are dedicated to my first art teacher and best earthly friend-my father. These art efforts are the last that I have taken to him or ever can take to him for his approval; for the Lord has since lifted him away to view with rapture and delight the works of the Master Artist.*

—S. MULLER





## CHAPTER I

**A**FTER LEAVING the United States shores for Colombia, the first restless six months were spent, more or less, in trying the patience of a hard-working medical missionary in the city of Pasto, who had welcomed me into her home. Knowing that God had sent me to South America to reach a tribe whose language was unknown and unwritten, I set off by myself-for want of better “visible” company — to find such a tribe.

After months of travel through Colombia by truck, horse, riverboat and canoe, seeking tribal information from various missionaries, and studying the Spanish language en route, I found myself at the World Evangelization Crusade jungle station among the Cubeo Indians on the Rio Cudiari. There I learned much about unreached tribes, including the Kuripakos, who were located on the rivers northeast of the Cubeo territory.

At the end of three weeks of travel, terrible for a tenderfoot, in dug-out canoes and on jungle trails, I arrived at one of the larger Kuripako settlements known as Sejal, on the Rio Guainia. I was received with great interest by the tribespeople and began to work immediately on their language. The experiences that followed this first contact led, through much trial and error, to a workable plan for reaching these people.

May the following experiences not only be profitable to those going out into similar work, but also give a vision, via the Kuripakos, of the complete spiritual darkness of jungle tribes scattered over the face of the earth. There are many joys and sorrows in pioneer work with primitive people in bringing them Christ, the true Light. However, the pleasure overbalances the pain as you watch HIS splendor fall on a dark heart

**ONE OF THE MANY CHRISTLESS GRAVES** hidden away in a dark cabin on the Rio Guainia, a soul who lived and died without a chance to hear and be saved from eternal Hell.

here and there, creating a like flame — ever so feeble — where there was none before.

Then, too, He shines in your own heart as He never did at home. The still, small Voice goes well with the nightly symphony of the jungle and the din of waters swirling over rocks in a nearby river. In the misty radiance of the tropical moon it is not difficult to be conscious of the heavenly host round about, and the Lord walking in the shadows of the palms even as He walked in the garden in the cool of a day long ago. Often I would sit in my hammock at night and watch the heavenly scene, and it was beautiful! Sometimes I think the Lord was almost a stranger to me until I got alone with Him down there.

After three years among the Kuripakos on the Rio Guainia, the following account began to be written of an evangelistic and teaching trip to the Rio Isána of northern Brazil. The language of this section is called “Karom” by the Kuripakos, but is known as “Maniba” by the Brazilian Government. It is entirely different from the Maniba of Venezuela. These Indians are of the Kuripako tribe, but, because of the vast, uninhabited stretches of flooded jungle land and mountains between them, traffic is scant; so the two dialects have grown much apart.

\* \* \*

We’re off for the Rios Cuyarí and Isána! I’m scared to breathe. This little canoe is about an inch above the water, and we are in regular flood waters. All the palms along the banks of the Guainia are up to their necks in water, shaking their green hair in the current. The Indians say the trail across to the Cuyarí is waist deep in water, but I’m trusting the Lord to dry it up in the next three days while we’re paddling up the *canyo* leading to it. [A *canyo* is a small tributary running into a larger stream.]

We’ve just entered the *canyo*, and it is swift and deep. Two Kuripako fellows from the Rio Guainia are taking me up. They keep changing from one side of the stream to the other to avoid the main flow of current. The one in front keeps knocking himself on the head with his paddle every little while. I can’t make out whether it is some kind of superstitious ritual, or



whether he's trying to locate what's bothering him! ... We're dipping water on both sides with almost every stroke of the paddle; so the Indian in back swings up on an overhanging limb every now and then so the water can come to the front and we can bail it out.

Now we're stopping for lunch. My Indian companions have cooked dried fish with *yuca* bread, and we are dipping the fish out with some more *yuca* bread .... There is a beautiful blue ridge of mountains ahead .... It's beginning to get dark, and we can't find a bank to sleep on. All the trees are standing in water, and there's a wall of green thicket and overgrowth on each side. The shelter the Indians expected to find has been swept away. Can't find a place, so they're cutting their way up the bank onto higher ground, and clearing places between the trees for the hammocks. Too late to make a shelter.... Broad moonbeams are slanting down through the boughs overhead .... Guess they'll make the campfire now.

We had quite a song service in our hammocks last night. Guess we drowned out the great "minor chorus" for a while. One bird sounds like a tired old man. It goes down the minor scale four notes, like the sigh over approaching doom. "Oh, woe, woe, woe!" it cries. It reminds me of the Scripture verse "For the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain ... waiting for the redemption ..."

Well, after our Kuripako hymn-sing we each prayed. Since we were without a shelter, we prayed very enthusiastically that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't — which was nothing short of a miracle, since it had poured almost every night for weeks. We have just come in sight of the second range of blue mountain peaks. This is the divide between the tributaries of the Guainia and the Isána. The trail is over the lower part of it.

We're going off the main *canyo* now into still waters and quiet groves of palms unmolested by a current, their stately beauty reflecting in the still, black waters. Every now and then the arc of a huge old tree trunk spans the deep, narrow stream ... After the struggle against the current of the *canyo*, this is like a haven of rest. "He leadeth me beside the still waters; He restoreth my soul." ... Not a soul lives on this whole *canyo*.

We have just come in sight of a whole tribe of brown monkeys. It's thrilling to see them take a flying leap from tree to tree. The branches swing way down under their weight, and then up again as they leap for the next. The Indians are making sucking noises to call them closer. They would like to get one with the blowgun for supper. The jungle is all flooded in this monkey playground.

Only an Indian could find his way through this maze of submerged thicket and trails .... Beautiful, big, brilliant birds with long tails and hooked beaks just flew up.... The Indians keep slipping through short-cuts and have to cut their way through; and I keep ducking under vines and limbs, and ants and spiders keep falling down. Well, it's all right so long as they don't shake down a snake! These ants bite hard enough! And one of the fellows was bitten by a big, black scorpion.

Well, after hours and hours, we're still "doing it." We have come out on a clear stretch of stream for two minutes, and now it's dead-end, and they cut and push and pull through the thicket.... We've just come out on a nice, dry, sandy place. We're going to stay here for the night. The Indians are fixing up the shelter that the current dragged down.

Now my companions are sharpening up sticks for their blowgun (rather, the sticks are narrow strips from a reed-like plant). The Indians put a puff of cotton-like stuff at the thicker end, and poison the tip with sticky black stuff that they've just made by cooking a certain kind of bark (called *adapi* in Kuripako). One of these darts quickly kills a large-sized monkey like the ones we saw today, they say .... There they are off in the canoe to get a bird .... I'll go for a wash-up and swim now.

Well, it's getting dark, and my Indian friends are still gone, and I'm getting scared here all alone. Lots of noises all around. There's something big splashing in a pool back there. Hope those monkeys don't come swinging through here!

\* \* \*

Today is Sunday. We're paddling through a great Gothic cathedral, it seems — huge gray columns, branching out from either side, forming a pointed green arch above and reflect-

ing on the polished, ebony-like water of the nave. You can almost hear the organ prelude of "All hail the power of Jesus' name; let angels prostrate fall; bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all!" ... We're going round and round in circles now, it seems.

Just picked up some orange-colored fruit. They fall down with a loud splash from certain tall, thick palm trees and drift along on the water; taste something like olives. The Indians don't seem to care for them. They are all on edge to get a bird or a monkey. There's a big something coming through the jungle now. We can hear the splashing and breaking of branches. The Indians have slipped the canoe through to the land, and now they're taking the blowgun and stealing through thicket and mud .... They're coming back with nothing again — like last night. Well, they're not getting me excited over the prospects of monkey stew any more — one piece of fruit in the hand is better than two monkeys in the bush!

There, we got stuck on a submerged log again. Every few minutes, it seems, I'm out balancing myself on a slippery, mosscovered log, ankle-deep in water, while the Indians pull the canoe over it.... These waters have narrowed down to one little stream. The current is swift now. On each side it's just all big, high clumps of earth and fern and roots, with a tree or two sitting on each clump. Lots of fallen trees—it's a case of over the tree or under the tree, all the time.

Rain is coming, and my raincoat is over the duffle bags .... Oh, how it poured! The heavens were surely opened. The Indians kept on paddling. I just sat, with slacks and shirt soaked through, holding a few big leaves over my head, shivering and shaking in the cold. A little scorpion had the "crust" to add to the general misery of the scene and bite me in the arm.

Well, we came to the trail at last — it was somewhere in the bank above, they said ... . It was still pouring, so I just stood up there and shivered, while they went off. In a few minutes they dragged back lots of long palm branches and poles and vines, and in a short time they had my shelter finished and had started on their own .... It's still raining, and leaks down on my hammock. My head aches; I've a fever,

plus three big ulcers on my leg, all swollen up — otherwise, I'm feeling fine.

The Lord stopped the rain for the whole night, and now the sun is coming up through the trees, and I'm feeling so vigorous again that I told the Indians to make a little pack for me, too. They weave palm branches together to carry the things, which consist of paper, pencils, mimeographed syllable-charts and booklets, flannelgraph material, worm medicine, sulfa drugs, 14 pounds of powdered milk, a Bible, a few clothes, *yuca* bread, hammock and mosquito net.

Why, oh, why, did I ever tell them to make a pack for me? Little did I know that this is by far the worst trail I ever saw or hope to see ... mud, roots; roots, mud ... deep, too — up to the middle of my leg sometimes, while the water was knee-deep and thick. And you never know how deep it's going to be, and the pack throws you out of balance. My leg swelled up; my feet stuck in the mud; my sandals were torn off.

The Indians were a mile ahead of me. Still I tried to keep going, saying to myself, "Would you be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?" I thought of the 11th chapter of Second Corinthians and felt like a martyr. Then my poor, bruised bare foot came down hard several times on some sharp roots under the muddy water. I began to puff and pant and cry, and my pack got caught between two trees.

Then I had a consultation with myself. I said, "What are you trying to do — be a martyr?"

"Not yet," I answered. "I've got to finish translating the New Testament into Kuripako first."

So down went my pack on one of the rare dry spots of the trail — like my load of sin long ago at the foot of the Cross — and I limped blithely on through the jungle .... After a while I came out to a little clear spot where the Indians were waiting. They seemed to understand the situation when they didn't see the pack, and laughed. I showed them my running ulcers, and said my hiking was over for the day. So they made me another shelter and went back for the pack; and now I'm blissfully relaxing my taut, tired muscles in my

hammock, and there's a soothing song from a murmuring brook nearby.

\* \* \*

Well, the situation is quite nice today. We started off early. The two Indians are carrying everything except me and a handful of wet clothes .... They've just killed an *aapi*, a kind of snake that strikes to kill. Glad they were ahead of me. The old self-preservation instinct looms up big in places like this .... Was scared to death a while back, too. I thought sure I heard the cry of a tiger, and caught up with the fellows in an amazingly short time, considering the ulcers. It sure was disappointing to find out that it was only a bird! In places like this I like to sing, "He shall give His angels charge over thee in all thy ways," and then, with the eyes of faith, you can see them going on in the trail ahead.

We're coming down into muddy places again. This trail's terrific. One minute you walk on a long pole over a stream; then you crawl on your hands and knees to get through tangles of vines and branches .... All the trees are draped in long, green moss and ferns. Very rare are the sunbeams that find their way into this moist and shadowy world. It reminds me of the dark domain of the god of the underworld of Greek mythology. It seems to deserve the name "Green Hell," too, as you struggle through.

A sharp stick just went straight into one of my ulcers. Ache, ache, ache — and you still stumble on .... And then the rain comes, and it pours, but you don't care any more; this, too, will pass, you say.... Then suddenly you come out into the light ... a palm shelter on a high, rocky bank above a dashing stream — truly a place for poets to idealize. It reminded me of the line "Where the wild cataract leaps in glory."

Suddenly I forgot my interest in scenery. This was *Canyo Iyana* — this was the *canyo* we were going to go down! I said to myself, "How will we ever go down this without dashing our brains out?" There were several dugouts lying around on the bank, but the Indians chose the feeblest, most rickety little old canoe. I was sick at the thought of getting into that worm-eaten thing. I wouldn't even want it for a coffin! (That's





another Indian use for them.) I was mad at those Indians. I didn't have any faith, either, at the time; but I prayed vigorously, just the same, and got in.

Away we went like a toboggan slide. The fellows knew how to "put on the brakes" with the paddles when they wanted to—but usually they didn't want to. They just loved rushing through the inverted V of the rapids, then swerving aside out of the way of a fallen tree and then under the next one, bending low to avoid decapitation .... We passed one huge canoe, wrecked and left deserted against the rocky bank and tree trunks. This didn't add any to my peace of mind. Neither did the next wreck, a short ways below.

I was chewing furiously on a piece of *yuca* bread, and bailing out the water continually as it came rushing over the front and sides as we dashed through. Then the Lord said to me: "What's the matter with you? Didn't I bring you this far? Don't I want them to hear My Word on the Cuyarí and the Isána?"

Then everything changed. It was really a clear and beautiful stream ... bright amber in places where the sunlight hit the water and reflected against the white sand at the bottom. Here and there we passed huge rocks that towered above, and little beaches of white sand or smooth gray pebbles. Large glossy-leafed plants and ferns of all kinds grew out in bunches from the arch of fallen trees above, or hung from vines. Truly hanging gardens, these.

Through all this we dashed madly on for two hours or so. The hilarity of the Indians was contagious, I guess, because I began to enjoy it, too, and we arrived all too soon, it seemed, at the quiet flood waters that led into the Rio Cuyarí. At a large, deserted shelter we ate the last of our dried fish, and slept the sleep of the worn and weary. But I was grateful, and

**TYPICAL OVERNIGHT STOP IN THE JUNGLES** — The hammock was enclosed in a long, white-cloth mosquito net, which not only served as a dressing room but as a protection against animals as well. It appears that tigers will not attack what they cannot see. They prefer to carry off a dog anyhow — so perhaps one of those ought also to be included in one's equipment.

I praised God: "What is man, O God, that Thou art mindful of him?"

\* \* \*

Morning, and off down the Rio Cuyarí. We saw people at last, the first in six days. They stared across from their canoe at us. We stared back. "What's the matter with that woman's face?" I asked. (It looked like graphite was smeared over it.)

"Many bad people along here," they said; "they're born like that."

Then we saw a village called Matijáipan ahead. It looked inhabited. As we came near, Indians ran into their houses. "Help me now, Lord, to find an open door," I prayed.

We climbed up the bank and looked into the first house. The men were all congregated there. I told them that I had come to teach them about God and to read. It was a rather tense five minutes. They looked at me and laughed. I guess the dirty slacks and muddy bare feet were no recommendation. They hesitated long. I was afraid they wouldn't let me stay, and I sat in the doorway and prayed and prayed; because if they wouldn't want me, no other village would either, as it's "follow the leader" with the Indians.

The fellows from the Guainia were a big help. They said that I taught people to read in a short time, in all the villages on the Guainia river.

I don't know all they said, but finally the idea seemed to please the natives, and they said they did want to learn to read. So we started with the syllable chart right away, as soon as I got my hammock put up in an empty hut they showed me, and after a swim.

These Karoms seem like an entirely different tribe than the Kuripakos, as they are all spotted with light and dark purplish blotches. It gives the face a pushed-in look. Their dialect is low and guttural. I can hardly understand anything.

Well, they were so dazed about it all that I had to take some of them by the hand, lead them in and sit them down on a bench. They kept looking at me instead of at the chart. We practiced: "a, e, i, o, u; da, de, di, do, du," etc. A picture representing most of the syllables gave them confidence. Then





**MANY OF THESE KAROMS have a scaly skin disease characterized by light and dark purple blotches. Some have eyes that turn outward. (The blowgun pictured extends upward about twice the length shown.)**

I gave them each a piece of paper and pencil and told them to write the syllables we had studied. What clumsy fingers! I had to guide all their hands at first. But very quickly all the men and boys could copy the letters by themselves. The girls were slower.

Tonight these people heard the Gospel for the first time! They had known nothing. They couldn't even say the name "JesuCristo."

There's a lady here who is dying. I thought I heard groaning. Then her husband came and asked me to look at her. They wanted me to give her "water from heaven" — the kind that the *maliiri* (witch doctor) gives in exchange for anything he might ask. But I told her of the One who alone can give the "living water." "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink," Jesus said.

I have seen many Indians fade away and die, but never anyone so close to a skeleton as she. She lay in her hammock. A strange, horrible stench came from that corner. I felt nauseated. I wanted to run away. They lifted back the filthy rag covering and showed me her leg swollen to abnormal size above the knee, and hard as rock. Her whole body was covered with black scabs. She was in terrific pain most of the time, her face yellow and wasted, and her filed teeth set in pain.

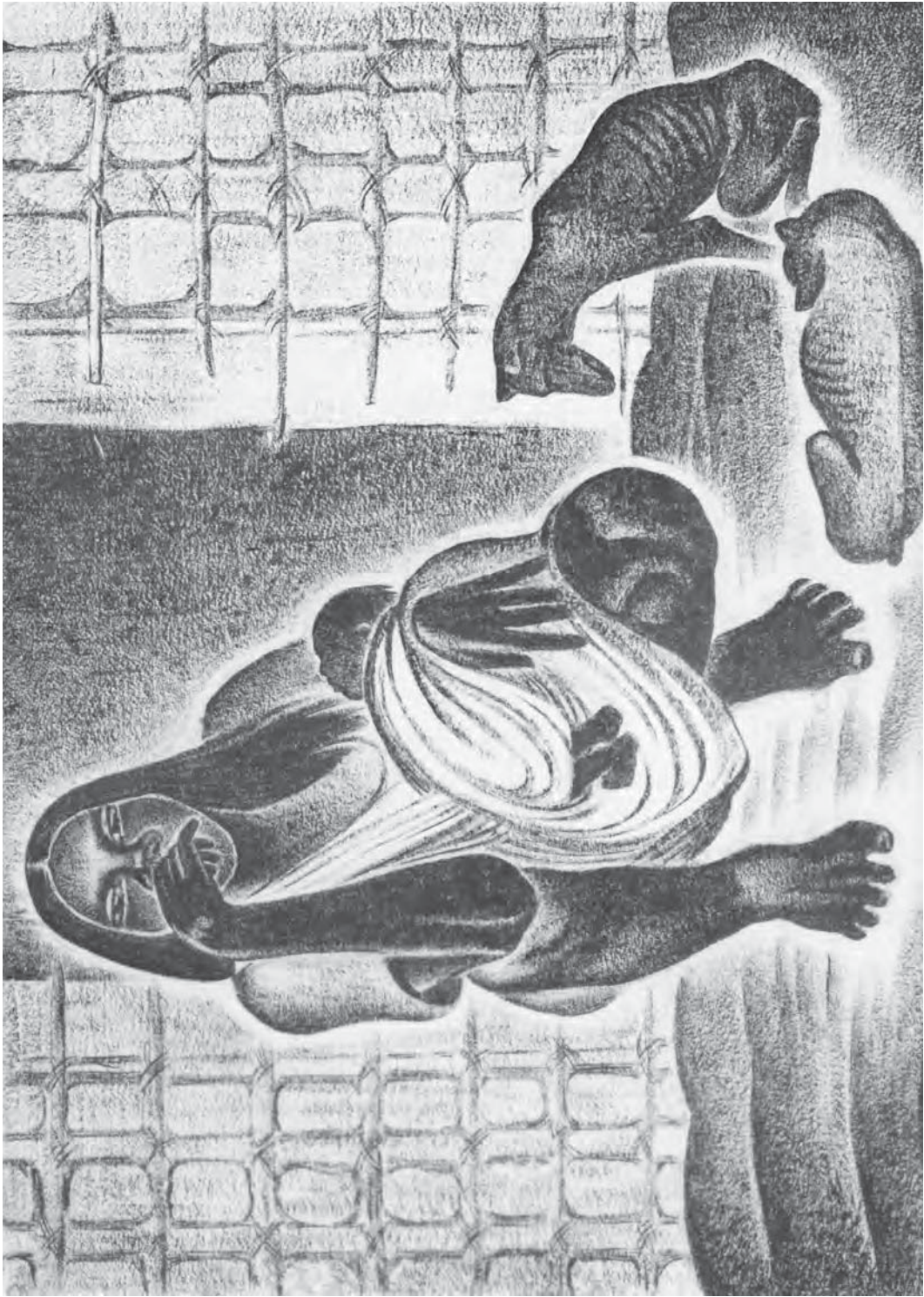
Her eyes roved about, almost wildly, for some hope of relief, some hope of cure; I gave her none. Why lie to one who is dying? Eternity is too close at hand. I sat down on the low stool by her hammock, held the long, claw-like fingers and told her about Jesus. She couldn't follow me. The pain was too great.

She kept saying: "What's His name? What's His name?"

I answered, "Jesu-Cristo, Jesu-Cristo."

**EVEN THE DOGS SEEM DISGUSTED AT TIMES** with the outrageous sounds that emerge from the song service. It's often discouraging trying to teach the girls to read. They start, and then drop off because of too much baby trouble. No sooner does the first baby get a little independent than they are lugging around the second — with the first one trying to climb on, too, half the time.





She called upon Him in desperation. I prayed the Lord to spare her until tomorrow.

After class I went to see her. I'd heard her moaning in the night, sometimes hysterically, but not since. She seemed calmer as I held her hand. She was alone and not in pain. I showed her pictures on "The Life of Christ" by Hoffman. She followed page by page. When I showed her how Jesus died on the Cross for us to cast away our sins, and how He arose from the grave and is with us continually, she looked very eager and said, "*Noajinii, noajinii*" (I understand, I understand).

When we prayed, this time she broke away from following my prayer in Kuripako, and spoke to the Lord directly in her own Karom dialect. She said that she wants Him; that she wants to go to be with Him. I know I'll see her in Heaven, because Jesus said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." I guess it will be hard to recognize her in her glorified body up there: but I'll recognize the look of hope and understanding and faith that played upon her face for a while, transforming it into the kind of beauty that the Lord loves to look upon and which all the angels in Heaven rejoice over.

\* \* \*

I hope to write more about these Karoms, so you can picture more keenly the spiritual hunger of the hundreds of Indian tribes of South America and their bewildered gropings for light. Who will go and tell them of the love of Jesus, and bring them out of spiritual night?