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PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL
'E' SERIES
1901–1950

Introduction by
Clare Taylor

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PROVENANCE

The Archives of the USPG have existed virtually since the foundation of the Society in 1701 and were housed for many years in the offices of the Society at 15 Tufton Street, London SW1 but have recently been deposited in the Rhodes House Library, Oxford. The twentieth-century Reports continue the traditions of the Society and are the records of the work of the missionaries and school teachers sent by the Society to all parts of the world, including the West Indies. Unlike the earlier collections, these later archives have received far less attention though they reveal the spiritual progress which the work of the USPG has maintained since its beginnings – progress which has always meant work for racial integration and harmony.
The SPG was founded in 1701 to act as the spearhead of the Anglican church overseas. Initially the SPG worked in North America and the Caribbean but later extended its activities to many other parts of the world, preaching and teaching, with the support of the established Church and of the British Government. The West Indies always received careful attention from the Society but, unlike the earlier 'C' and 'D' Series, the present 'E' Series is a more regular collection, containing a fairly complete set of quarterly Reports from 1901 to 1950. Not all missionaries filled out a Report, much less a quarterly one, or even the A, B and Z forms sent out by the Society; but many Reports give a moving and very accurate account of life in the West Indies in the first half of the twentieth century. All speak of dire poverty, of insularity and the shortage of well-trained staff. The records for the Diocese of Antigua, which concern the Leeward Islands, are particularly full and speak of missionary work in churches whose congregations were almost entirely black. The work of the USPG to end racial discrimination in the West Indies is very important indeed.

The work of the SPG in the West Indies was in the form of grants to the dioceses to subsidise existing parochial work of preaching and teaching. All agreed that the work was hard and consisted of missionary work as well as ordinary parochial duties. Not all clerics received a grant from the Society and the Reports from the diocese of Antigua reveal that as many as 22 missionaries filled in a Report in one year and as few as two in another. The churches in the Leewards were mainly long-established, and now mainly for blacks, who might also have special ones built for their own use. Everywhere there was felt a need for schools to help all the ills that beset the parish, mainly great poverty, migration, ignorance and declining church membership. The island governments were not sympathetic to church schools and competition from other denominations was often acute. Though the work in British Guiana and British Honduras was essentially missionary and clerics had to travel long distances into the interior to reach native Indians and many other races, especially East Indians, there was also an established church life very like that of the island sees. Trinidad remained a missionary outpost, too, though the Anglican establishment had clearly made headway since the last century in an island which remained mainly Roman Catholic; only in Tobago did the rural peace of an established Church order prevail. The Reports from the Windward Islands begin in bulk after 1918, as do those for Codrington College, Barbados, but no records as such exist for Barbados and Jamaica; whilst the records for Nassau are curiously disparate, revealing disturbing racial tensions.

From these records we gain a remarkable insight into the clergy of the Church, few of whom were incompetent or even illiterate, as once they had been; but rather a very long-serving band: over 40 years for men like Canon Joseph Emery in Nevis; and nearly as long for Archdeacon Herward R Davies in Tobago. The latter is of real interest for his Reports are unique in their length and importance, cleverly and amusingly illustrating everyday incidents and building up an amazing picture of life in a small tropical island in the first 40 years of the present century. He reveals, too, how far the Society encouraged its workers
to report fully and how far they discouraged gossip going behind the Bishop's back. His Reports also demonstrate the continuing importance of white clergy, though some were West Indian born or, like himself, married into West Indian families; but all seem to have been 'Creolised' and show a special sympathy for their work, loving their parish and the children in particular. The career of Archbishop Edward Hutson is a special glory for the Church in these years; born in the islands in 1873, he served with his father in the Virgin Islands before being elevated to the See of Antigua in 1911, one of the youngest Bishops in the field. The love and respect he won gained for him the Archbishopric of the West Indies in 1922 and when he died in 1936 he had brought special powers to his flock: the example of a West Indian born and educated in the islands and showing special gifts of leadership which illumine the content of these records. He avoided the Creole and European white exclusiveness and on his death was to hand on a Church which was increasingly able to turn to 'native' clergy to minister. Above all, Archbishop Hutson and his clergy show a special sympathy for the poor and a desire to minister to the heathen: the Church in the West Indies had come of age.
The records of the Diocese of Antigua (for the islands of Nevis, Montserrat and Antigua in the main) are very regular and full; less so are those from the Bahamas. Virtually all speak of the dire poverty; of the desire to have babies baptised but of the scarcity of communicants, few being confirmed or legally married. Superstition flourished but cheerfulness in the face of hurricanes and volcanic eruptions (in 1901) was wonderfully apparent. Joseph Emery, missionary at St George’s, Antigua, mentions an old lady of 95 who had been 60 years a teacher - and a teacher before slavery was abolished, too; whilst Francis Harding from Guiana mentions in 1902 the continuing missions to the Amerindians. There is a note that work in Honduras was still receiving help from Jamaica and from the Panama Rail Road and American Corporation in Colon. Nassau Reports speak of heat - the result of the volcanic eruptions in the Lesser Antilles; and of church buildings in the smaller islands - though there was backsliding and among the girls too (December 1902).

The Reports from the diocese of Antigua continue to speak of grim poverty. In St Mary’s, Antigua, they had been able to repair buildings but the Rev Mackenzie Gillie pointed out (September 1904) that his daughter could now play the new American organ for services. In Nevis, Rev Lawrence Thomas noted that the Fig Tree Church, where Lord Nelson has married Mrs Nesbit, contained a marble slab on the walls to commemorate this event; and a monument to the Stapleton family, an eighteenth-century planter family, but that there were not at the present time 100 whites left all told. More interesting is his tale of superstition, that although no voodoo or devil worship flourished, obeah doctors were still influential in St Lucia especially, where a boy had been murdered and his heart cut out and used for obeah charms (December 1904). The Report from the Guiana mission mentions that the Chinese were still working there, though only a third of the 600 who had settled in 1865 remained (Rev P A Stevenson, 1904).

From Honduras the Rev E C Robinson speaks of travelling thousands of miles up the mahogany banks to take services, especially of working amongst the children. There were still few communicants among the mahogany cutters but the work was hard and engrossing (December 1904). Nassau also received scant help from the SPG and the missionary there, stationed on one of the out-islands, had been ill.

The Reports for 1905 contain more statistics than previously, especially for the diocese of Antigua where there was a full complement of SPG missionaries - 14 in 1905 and 20 in 1906. Most reports mention the emigration of the young men to work in the cane fields of San Domingo seasonally; all were delighted to welcome their new Bishop, Walter Farrar, ordained in Antigua in 1905. A few brief Reports from F J Briggs, the new catechist on the Codrington estates in Barbados, and from R D’Y Brace on Long Cay, Bahamas speak of continuing hard work, as do the Reports from Guiana.
The Reports for 1906 are full and all speak of the good work of the new Bishop and of the continuing problem of segregation in the Antigua diocese. Rev Joseph Emery of St Kitts mentions an old man, born a slave and still living in dire poverty (June 1906). Canon F W Haines mentioned a chapel built about 1838 as a thank-offering for emancipation and still used as a special school and chapel for blacks in the heart of Montserrat (September 1906). A Humphreys said that deer were raised as game in Barbuda (September 1906); but Archdeacon Hutson from St Thomas in the Danish West Indies noted that black men were being trained as missionaries so little money for white curates existed (June 1906). Missionaries on St Kitts spoke of insularity and the drift to Protestant groups like the Methodists. In Antigua, however, a new ladies group had been created, the Daughters of the King, a complement to the Sons of St Andrew. The Reports from Barbados of the new catechist, F J Briggs, speak of the all-black congregations and of a falling-off in religion; only the school master and the clergy belonged to the upper status. Illegitimacy was rampant among the negroes and he knew of a group of native Baptists who baptised children in the name of the Holy Trinity (September 1906). The Bishop was active, however, both in visiting Honduras and in holding a Synod.

The Reports in 1907 have little to say: Bishop Farrar had been ill so one congregation in St Kitts had had to put aside their confirmation clothes (Joseph Emery, September 1907). Even so, the missionaries had a keen eye for events and places: Emery gave an interesting description of St Eustatius, an eighteenth-century free port and now a sleepy humdrum place, as were all the islands where migration to San Domingo alone brought seasonal work to the young men. W A Edwards of Anguilla had arranged to cyclostyle letters to them every month to help (November 1907). The real news came from a brief Report from Jamaica of the powerful earthquake there which had wrecked Kingston and left a huge task of restoration. 97370/3 : 1908-1910

The 1908 Reports for Antigua speak of a peaceful year, though one of great poverty. A new Bishop was to come, a help for much-needed restoration projects ranging from the old, loved piano at St Anthony's, Montserrat, to the fortifications on Brimstone Hill, St Kitts, an excellent place for a picnic. Brief Reports from Barbados speak of the hardship of getting the children to come to school as they were needed early in the morning in the fields (F J Briggs, March 1908). In Guiana the East Indian population had increased and the second generations were more sympathetic to Christianity. Honduras, Nassau and Trinidad sent in forms indicating the slow progress of work. By 1909, however, the Antigua missionaries spoke universally of the continuing drain of young men to San Domingo; Bishop Mather had come out of retirement to cheer them, a comfort in these days of poverty and depopulation. Reports from the catechist of Barbados dwelt on the small sins around him (F J Briggs, March 1909) but the accounts from Guiana, Honduras and Trinidad speak of missionary work among the Amerindians and East Indians, a hard pioneering exercise. Herwald F Davies in Tobago began the first of his lengthy 'logs', a daily report of life on the island filled with small matters,
often of real and continuing interest. A Bishop had still not been elected in 1910 and the matter referred to Canterbury but the Antigua diocese was plagued by obeah, though this was strictly forbidden (Canon Haines, Montserrat, March and June 1910).

97370/4: 1911-1912

The Reports for both these years from the diocese of Antigua speak of the quiet round and even of an increase of work, though the new Bishop had apparently sought the retirement of some members of the clergy because of advancing years or an unbalanced mind. Herwald Davies of Trinidad wrote lengthily; and from Honduras came news of work in Central America, though Guiana confined itself to the missions to the Amerindians and East Indians.

97370/5: 1913-1915

The Reports of these years stress the special difficulties found everywhere in the Lesser Antilles. Migration continued, there was no money but church work and teaching continued and in the north in the Bahamas it was noted that white pupils were coming to the black schools which were also using more women teachers. The outbreak of war in 1914 came as a great blow. The Antigua Reports stress the threat of the great, unrighteous and terrible war and in Honduras, where there were especially bad conditions among the racially mixed groups, the effect of the war was held to be a great problem. Herwald Davies in Trinidad gave a vivid account of the times but in Nassau the demand for more funds from the SPG for church building was made nonetheless. The rise of prices and the need for controls noted in 1914 continued in 1915, with news, too, of recruiting among the blacks who now were going as a contingent to war and not as seasonal labour. Collections for the war effort were taken in many churches but there was great poverty and little cotton was being grown. The situation in Central America was dangerous and difficult and the end of trade with Germany had hit the Bahamas hard; but women had been recruited to teach in the schools there and were doing well.

97370/6: 1916-1917

By 1916 the diocese of Antigua had adjusted to the war but Rev John Vanier of St Thomas, Nevis stressed that trouble among the labouring classes was coming to a head with the formation of a trade union (June 1917). An American fancy religion, the Christian Mission, was making gains (Joseph Emery, Nevis, June 1917) but in Honduras, Trinidad, Nassau and the Windward Islands the work continued.

97370/7: 1918-1920

In his Report for 1916 the Bishop of Antigua had attacked 'Kikuyu tendencies' in the Church and the tendency to take Holy Communion outside the parish. He knew well the deep poverty facing West Indian labourers but he prayed that all classes would think deeply and be aware of the crisis facing them and the poor in particular. It was timely advice. On 9 March 1918 there was a riot in St John's, Antigua; cocoa fields were set on fire, planters mobbed and two of the rioters were then shot dead. It was a foretaste of two decades of stormy race relations to
come and an indication of changing times in the West Indies. And yet the missionary Reports for that year speak only of the sons of clergy serving overseas and of the universal joy in the news of Armistice in November. The 1919 Reports spoke of the hardships facing returning servicemen and labourers were counselled to see the folly of striking, though their need for higher wages was recognised. The missionaries, too, bemoaned the blindness of the governments in the islands who felt that the negro should not be educated and had little understanding of the 'natives' (Rev John Vanier, St Kitts, December 1919). 'We don't feel much like peace' in Trinidad and Tobago was the view of H R Davies (June 1919) who went on to report a growing lawlessness and demand for higher wages among people 'who had ceased to fear the church'. Church workers were clearly now not only social workers but arbitrators in labour disputes, even at a time when membership among the young especially was falling off.

Nor had the situation improved by 1920 when food shortages and the rising cost of living were noted by all. Codrington College in Barbados was becoming increasingly active and their Principal, A H Anstey, had been elevated to the see of Trinidad. The importance of this island was becoming plain as the new oil industry developed. H R Davies was sent briefly to nearby Venezuela, another oil-producing region, protesting especially about women trying to exercise power by 'keeping down certain people', that is, blacks (1920).

97370/8 : 1921-1922

The papers for these years run into each other, the most important event being the elevation of Bishop Edward Hutson of Antigua to be Archbishop of the West Indies in 1922. His Report of the XIXth Session of the Diocesan Synod dealt with the Lambeth Appeal which concerned the ministry of women and Church finances. The Archbishop felt that the Lambeth Appeal conformed to Roman Catholic views but the Synod would not accept it. By 1922 the SPG required the Bishops to complete annual reports showing how the Society's grants were used and the Reports which follow for the next decade reveal clearly the extent of the influence of the SPG in church building and in providing salaries for clergy and catechists.

97370/9 : 1923-1924

From this date onwards the Reports from the mission in Argentina are included in the West Indies papers of the SPG. The Archbishop's report for Antigua speaks of an outbreak in the island of alestrim, a disease similar to smallpox. Much was hoped of the new Girls High School in Georgetown, British Guiana, and converts among the East Indians were increasing. But poverty was everywhere apparent together with increasing cruelty to children in a country where peasant proprietors could no longer keep order (H R Davies, October 1923, Tobago).
The hurricane of 1924 which hit the Leewards, especially Montserrat, dominates the news in these years; but there were new influences at work in the islands, too. H R Davies in Tobago spoke jokingly about 'Boshie influences'; but this was no joke along the Mexican border with Honduras, as the mission in Nicaragua reported in 1926. In Guiana a century of Christianity was celebrated in the centenary of Holy Trinity, Georgetown, British Guiana, founded by Edward Piercy Austin; whilst the Cathedral Church of St John the Baptist in Belize, British Honduras celebrated its founding as well. In Tobago H R Davies spoke of the hardship of winning converts among the East Indians, highlighting the work of the two mainland churches (1927). All looked to the Provincial Synod of the West Indies for help in its task of redrafting its constitution taken up in 1926 - these diocesan and provincial synods being a very important part of Church government.

Reports for these years speak of a worsening financial depression and the destruction of Codrington College by fire in 1929 did not dispel the gloom; nor did growing racist tension in Nassau and hurricanes throughout the region. But there was a desire to look forward: to found a University of the West Indies in Jamaica, for example, affiliated to Codrington College and the Agricultural College in Trinidad (Bishop of Barbados, Report, 1929). The strain on the older missionaries was hard, however; old Canon Emery had had a bad fall and his wife died of one shortly after, too anxious to be up early on Easter Day. H R Davies spoke for them all: 'Our Empire is God's people set here in the world to bring all people to a knowledge of men' (1929). Davies' own position was becoming increasingly important for the Trinidad oilfields were producing growing wealth and some was coming to the Church; but Trinidad remained a missionary field for the Anglicans, though life in Tobago was probably quieter than in Trinidad where the majority were Roman Catholics. A new Bishop, John Daughlish, had been appointed for Nassau and it was hoped that with his work at sea, the new man would bring changes, not least in fostering a native ministry (Nassau, 1931); at the same time a Bishop of the Windward Islands had been appointed (1930) and this new See was created out of the old Bishopric of Barbados.

The Reports for these years show clearly the coming storms ahead. The annual Bishops' Reports had begun to fall off but new typewritten Reports and other printed matter bore out the disquieting news. Not even the meeting of the 23rd session of the synod of Antigua held in January 1933 and the devastating effects of the depression could conceal the race riots which spread throughout the Caribbean in 1935. Even more disquieting were the views of H S R Thornton of the Church of the Good Shepherd, San Jose, Costa Rica, part of the mission from British Honduras. In 1935 he wrote in strict confidence of dissension among the German residents, speaking of Nazi influence which was clearly anti-religious. 'Many dislike it but could not resist it least they be delated by local informers and find themselves debarrd from trading with Germany. There is a German school here supported by the Home Government which names the teacher in charge. In some cities it would be well worthwhile for our Government to have the sense to do the like.'
Racial violence and increasing segregation was recorded in Nassau and in the Windward Islands in 1935. The Report of G.T. Bartholomew in Port of Spain, Trinidad spoke for all (November 1935); there was change everywhere, Europeans were very secular and relations between the races were worsening. Though Trinidad was one of the wealthiest islands, few had any idea how to deal with problems, indigenous West Indian priests were few and outsiders had no understanding of the islanders.

97370/13 : 1936-1950

The death of Archbishop Hutson in 1936 marked the end of an era. Riots everywhere and a lack of support for the West Indian mission field filled reports: H.R. Davies in Tobago had the right word, as ever. As for the riots of 1937, 'Moscow knows all about us' was his view. The new Bishop of Nassau was even more disquieting in his views (1938). Writing with fine detachment but rather clinically, he noted that the problems of insularity were great: the coloureds were not clever and coloured priests gained credence only by being treated as equals with whites. In strict confidence, he noted the increasing racial violence. This was also reported from the Windward Islands where the appointment of a Royal Commission to deal with the seething unrest throughout the Caribbean was noted. There were a few Reports for 1939; thereafter the Reports as we know them cease to exist. There is a quantity of material covering the years 1939 to 1950 for Antigua, rather less for the other regions, giving some items of news (including the resignation of Archdeacon H.R. Davies in 1947); but the older island order had passed and a new day had dawned for the West Indies. Nevertheless the work of the SPG was to continue. Slowly the work of the Church was seen as playing a significant part in the coming of independence for the West Indies by keeping to the true spirit of Christopher Codrington and his will of 1710.
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