

NOTES FROM MY 1961 WEST AFRICAN DIARY

SIERRA LEONE

IT was my privilege to represent the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Baptist Missionary Society at the Independence Celebrations. As their representative I was received by the Governor, Sir Maurice Dorman, and granted a long interview. His Excellency was very interested to hear that the first Baptist Church on the African Continent was founded in Sierra Leone in 1792 and that one of his predecessors had expelled a Baptist missionary from the Colony. The Governor hoped that history would not repeat itself!

Of the many notable events of the Independence Celebrations three were of special significance to me:—

1. A few moments before midnight on the eve of Independence Day the President of the Muslim League, the President of the United Christian Council, the Archbishop of West Africa who was also Bishop of Sierra Leone, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Freetown and Bo, stood side by side in the Arena of the crowded Stadium. The first three offered a prayer and the Roman Catholic Archbishop gave a message from the Pope.

2. As Independence Day dawned the Church bells of Freetown (including our Baptist Creole and Bassa bells) pealed out reminding the Capital of the Christian witness in the new Nation. This was followed by prayer meetings in the churches.

3. On the first Sunday of Independence at a United Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication which marked the close of the week of Celebrations, the Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, and the Chief Justice, Mr. (now Sir) S. A. Benka-Coker, representing the Nation left the Royal Stand in the Stadium and presented a copy of the Instrument of Independence to the eight officiating ministers in the Arena saying "We here present this Instrument of our Independence praying that in the blessing of God we all may live by the Royal Law of Liberty". An appropriate prayer was offered. A few weeks later as I stood before the statue of Nkrumah opposite the House of Parliament in Accra, and read the words at its base: "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added to it," my thoughts went back to this historic service.

NIGERIA

It is an inspiring and encouraging experience to visit the Nigerian field of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention on which they spend £400,000 a year. The American Mission has operated chiefly in the Western Region and has established over 360 places of worship with a total Christian community of 50,000. There are primary and secondary schools, grammar schools, training colleges for teachers and pastors, language schools, hospitals and work among the lepers, and now a Baptist University is being planned.

In common with other societies the object of this Mission is entire indigenous control of the whole of the work by the Nigerian

Baptist Convention. For example, the Mission has passed to the Convention the official proprietorship of the Baptist Schools. American missionaries are a decided minority within the Convention and so authority is in African hands. The Convention is creating a missionary spirit among its people and, in spite of the deep need in their country, has already sent out their first foreign missionaries to Bumbuna in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. This was an area untouched by the Protestant Church and work began in February, 1961. Before leaving Sierra Leone I went up country and visited the Rev. F. P. Boyo and the Rev. I. O. Badejogbin at Bumbuna which is the centre of a Muslim community. Within nine months, after experiencing fierce opposition and undergoing privations which would have daunted less courageous men and women, these two African families have over a hundred people attending their services, of whom 50 have accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour, and the Paramount Chief has placed three sites at their disposal for the erection of a church building, Mission Headquarters, and a Primary School which will be opened next September.

I spent three days at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary at Ogbomosho about 80 miles north of Ibadan, the Headquarters of the Baptist Denomination. The Seminary has a high standard and is now affiliated with the Southern Baptist Seminary of Louisville, Kentucky, and offers students who successfully complete the prescribed course the Bachelor of Theology degree of the American Seminary. There is an enrolment of 171 of whom 119 are men representing 15 Nigerian tribes and some from Ghana, Camerouns and Kenya. Our two Sierra Leone assistant ministers have just completed a year at the Seminary as special students. There are married quarters and 44 wives of students (who also receive instruction) are in residence with their children for whom there is a nursery department. In 1961, 19 men took the Degree course, 73 the Certificate course, and 25 attended the Vernacular classes. There is a staff of 23—13 American missionaries and 10 Nigerians. The Principal of this flourishing seminary is Dr. J. C. Pool and he invited me to address the student body in the College Chapel. Dr. T. O. High, whose subjects are Baptist History and Comparative Religions, asked me to give a talk at one of his classes on our British Baptist set-up and welcomed my suggestion that I should include a reference to our Denominational affiliations, specially mentioning the World Council of Churches. I always found it an inspiration to speak to African audiences and congregations—they are so responsive and eager to hear what one has to say. In the Library of the Ogbomosho Seminary I found a copy of our Baptist Handbook and copies of *The Fraternal* which are read by the students with deep interest.

CAMEROONS

It was a thrilling experience to see the Spanish Island of Fernando Po from Victoria in the Southern Camerouns, the town founded by Alfred Saker when he and many of his people were obliged to leave

the island through R.C. persecution. The bitter experience through which they passed is reflected in the Regulations that were drawn up for the new Colony of Victoria in 1858. Here are two of them: "There shall be entire freedom in all that relates to the worship of the true God; and the word of God is hereby acknowledged to be the foundation of all our laws and claims the obedience of our lives." "That although we are now all of one mind in the essentials of Christian worship, yet should there come among us persons of differing opinions as to Christian worship or duty all shall equally share in our freedom of worship as well as in our protection."

There was one R.C. missionary, however, in those far-off days who, after leaving Fernando Po, published a book in Madrid in 1848 and recorded his tribute to the work of the B.M.S. Mission on the Island. He wrote: "Not less surprised than I was, would any of my readers be, were they to see the veneration and respect with which the converted negroes of Fernando Po look upon their missionaries. One of the severest punishments which they can inflict upon them is the expelling them from their religious worships. The festival days they employ in the continual reading and exposition of the Gospel, alternating these exercises with religious songs; and more than once in the middle of the night my sleep has been interrupted by these songs being sung by a whole family in a neighbouring house. Let us compare the customs with those which daily present themselves to our eyes (in Madrid) and with the horrible blasphemies which continually grate our ears, and let us say 'Which people—these negroes or ourselves—show the most signs of being savages?'"

In a prominent part of the town I saw the monument of Alfred Saker, erected at the time of the centenary in 1958. I preached at Ebenezer the church founded by Saker and, with Mr. E. K. Martin as my guide, saw places of Saker interest and visited the grand-children of Joseph Wilson and Horton Johnson, honoured names in the early Baptist history of the Cameroons.

At Mizpah Baptist Church, Victoria, built in the Centenary Year, I attended an Ordination Council which lasted for three hours and closed with a feast! The ordinand was S. N. Bwanje. All the churches in the area were represented on the Council and members of Mizpah Church were also present. The ordinand was subjected to a searching examination which lasted well over an hour and his wife was also examined, but not too closely! Mr. Bwanje, his wife and the members of the church then withdrew and the council considered its verdict. Voting was by ballot and the result was 20 in favour and one against. Mr. and Mrs. Bwanje and the church members then returned and the decision was announced.

A few days later I managed to get to Douala in the Cameroons Republic by the long route through Kumba, a distance of 120 miles. I stayed at the Protestant Evangelical Mission on the spot where Alfred Saker had his headquarters and translated the Bible

into Douala. The old church erected by Saker was demolished in 1945 and an imposing building was erected as a Centenary Church. Several old buildings erected by Saker still remain and the graves of Mrs. Underhill (1869) and Mrs. Grenfell (1877) near the old store are preserved and honoured. Recently Pastor Paul Helmlinger of the Protestant Mission with the assistance of African pastors translated the Bible into Douala. He tried to use the work of Saker for the Old Testament but the language and orthography had so changed that a new translation was necessary. However "Thanks to Saker", says the Pastor, "the Douala language became a literary language and also the written religious language for certain tribes in the Southern Cameroons." My guide in Douala was Pastor Paul Mbende of Bethel, the first native church founded by Saker. The Pastor is also President of the Union des Eglises Baptistes du Cameroun of which Konrad Kolte, who was also very helpful to me, is the General Secretary. Pastor Mbende was elected at New Delhi to the Central Committee of the W.C.C.

Since the B.M.S. handed over the Cameroons field to the Basel Mission in 1888 owing to difficulties created by the German Colonial policy and the challenge of the Congo, Baptist work has been considerably extended by other societies in spite of interruptions by the two World Wars. The North American Baptist Convention has worked in the Southern Cameroons since the First World War and the present Superintendent is Rev. Paul Gebauer. In the Cameroons Republic the Baptist Union has 200 churches and the European Baptist Missionary Society has 8 or more representatives in the field. There is also a native Baptist group which has no association with other Baptists. On receiving its independence the Southern Cameroons decided to join the Republic and not Nigeria. I had an interview with the British Commissioner, His Honour J. E. Field and the Prime Minister, the Hon. J. N. Foncha. There are many difficulties owing to differences in language, educational systems and coinage. Administratively and economically there are big problems to solve. I found that many people in Southern Cameroons were not very happy about the union of their country with the Republic; they had hoped to become part of Nigeria.

"In these quickly changing times it is always very interesting and inspiring", said Pastor Helmlinger, "to look back to the first times of the missionary work in this country." I certainly found it so, and while proud of the British pioneers who founded Baptist work in the Cameroons, I am moved from what I saw to pay my tribute to the men and women who followed them and have greatly extended the Christian witness in that part of Africa. It was an inspiration, too, to recall that it was while George Grenfell and Thomas Comber were serving in the Cameroons that they looked towards the Congo and were sent to establish the B.M.S. Congo Mission. The great work of the B.M.S. in the Congo has justified the decision of 1888 to hand over the Cameroons field to others.

B. M. S.

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1 Corinthians xvi, 19, 20

For further information, write to:—

The General Home Secretary
Baptist Missionary Society
93, Gloucester Place, London, W.1

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409 BARKING ROAD, PLAISTOW

LONDON, E.13

My dear Brother Minister,

One of the fascinating pieces of work we are privileged to do on behalf of the whole Denomination is the work amongst boys in need of care and protection at Orchard House, Stock, Essex.

Eight years ago the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust made us a wonderful present in the shape of the new building at Orchard House, and we have been carrying on the work there ever since.

Every boy who comes to us is sent by direction of a Juvenile Court, although it does not mean that the circumstances which make it necessary for him to be taken out of his home are his own fault.

Mr. and Mrs. Beagles are doing a wonderful job with these lads, and many of them respond gratifyingly to the atmosphere of Orchard House. It would be delightful to be able to say that they all respond, but this would be far from the truth. Nevertheless we believe that God is using the ministry of this place, and we invite your prayers, and the practical help of your church.

You may be able to use the following illustration. Some years back, two half-brothers came to us at Orchard House after getting themselves into serious trouble with the Police. We did what we could for them, but after they left we did not have much news of them until a few weeks ago. We find that one of them is now in a London prison, having gone from bad to worse; the other, with the full backing of his Minister and church, is now applying to a Bible College for training for full-time Christian service. Which is a parable, and it might serve as a summary of the results of our work at Orchard House.

Thank you for all your help in making our work known and encouraging your people to help us by their practical gifts.

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL,

Superintendent Minister.

SIERRA LEONE

Our two Baptist churches in Sierra Leone are now affiliated with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The Creole Church is weak and with its private day school continues to be a problem. On the other hand the Bassa Church is thriving, but the people have yet much to learn about the way the Gospel should be expressed in their daily life and associations. The next step forward in our oversight of the two churches is a happy one; the Baptist Missionary Society and the Baptist Commonwealth Society have combined with the Baptist Union to help them. The B.M.S. has seconded the Rev. Clifford Gill to the B.C.S. and is responsible for personal allowances, transport to and from the field, and furlough expenses. The Commonwealth Society is responsible for grants to the churches, accommodation, car and its maintenance, and other local expenses. Before I left Freetown I inducted Mr. Gill as minister of both churches. His ten years' experience in the Congo will prove invaluable to him. The Creole and Bassa assistant ministers have now returned from Nigeria and will resume their pastoral work under Mr. Gill's oversight and will follow a prescribed course of reading and study. The time of their ordination has yet to be decided. We look forward to the day when these two indigenous churches, founded by Africans themselves, will be able to do without our help and go forward under their own leaders. Both churches are affiliated with the United Christian Council of Sierra Leone.

F. C. MORTON.

Christian Deviations. By Horton Davies. S.C.M. 5s.

This is a valuable book. Dr. Davies deals seriously with the problems raised by the sects showing not only what in them is heretical and even fantastic but also what it is that gives them their hold on so many minds. Each chapter brings to the reader's notice some emphasis that has been neglected by the Church and so given occasion for the sect. The book is more than information, it is also a challenge to examine our own faith. I notice that on page 137 the Oxford Group is called the Oxford Movement. I doubt whether Pusey would be a good companion for Buchman!

The British Churches Today. By Kenneth Slack. S.C.M. 5s.

This also is an excellent book. Mr. Slack writes with a fine understanding of the various traditions of the Church. Before we can participate intelligently in any ecumenical movement we need to have understanding and not prejudices about traditions of the Church other than our own. This book is offered to those who are seriously concerned to understand. One may feel that the non-episcopal churches need to be considered in a world-wide context and that when so considered the outlook is brighter than Mr. Slack suggests.

A. B. JESTICE.