

**FIFTY YEARS IN WESTERN
AFRICA: BEING A RECORD OF THE
WORK OF THE WEST INDIAN
CHURCH ON THE BANKS OF THE
RIO PONGO**

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Fifty Years in Western Africa: Being a Record of the Work of the West Indian Church on the Banks of the Rio Pongo by A. H. Barrow

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PREFACE.

THE Mission of the West Indian Church to Western Africa was inaugurated in the year 1851, although its actual work was not commenced on the banks of the Rio Pongo before the summer of 1855. After less than a two years' residence in that country, its first missionary, the Rev. Hamble James Leacock, was cut off by death just as the arduous work he had undertaken was giving the promise of great success. Early in 1857 the first secretary to the English Committee, Dr. Henry Caswall, published the life of Leacock under the title of the "Martyr of the Pongas." This book was in no sense a history of the Mission, which was only then in its infancy and had but a year's history to record. Since then, nearly half a century has passed away, and no attempt has been made to give a consecutive story of the Mission which has continued its efforts to the present time. Amid untold difficulties and discouragements, a little band of missionaries, catechists, and schoolmasters have struggled on and persevered; and one by one, as they have rested from their labours, their places have been filled. Indeed, the combined records of the extension of Christianity could scarcely afford a nobler example of how the Gospel may, with the

Divine help, be effectually propagated. Of the courage, the self-devotion, and the zeal which have characterized the efforts of these few labourers, it is not the special object of these pages to speak; but they are sent forth to tell their own tale in the hope that the blessing of God may rest upon them, and that they may win the favourable consideration of Christian people.

The sources of information have been Dr. Caswall's "Martyr of the Pongas," and Bishop Parry's "History of the Early Days of the Mission," published many years ago in the *Mission Field*. In addition to these, the present author has made full use of the "Story of the Mission,"* continued the story to the present time, and given such other information as his office of Secretary for the last seventeen years has naturally brought him. The original intention to give a faithful record of all events has not, however, been carried out, as just half of the manuscript has had to be set aside in order to bring the book down to its present proportions. This will account for the omission of a large number of incidents and the somewhat journalistic form of the closing chapters. Many thanks are due to the Rev. Professor Caldecott and the Rev. Canon Bindley for their kind assistance and revision of the manuscript.

March, 1900.

* Compiled in "the eighties" by the Rev. J. R. Izat, Vicar of Streatley and Assistant-Secretary of the Mission.

COMMENDATORY NOTE

BY THE PRIMATE OF THE WEST INDIES.

THE readers of this book will find it to be an interesting story of the West Indian Mission to West Africa, often called the Rio Pongo Mission. The writer, as Secretary of the Committee in England, has given much time and labour to promoting this enterprise, and is well acquainted with the facts. A connected account of the beginnings and later progress of the Mission was much needed, and I hope the story herein told will encourage its old friends to continue their efforts, and will help to raise up new friends both in England and in the West Indies.

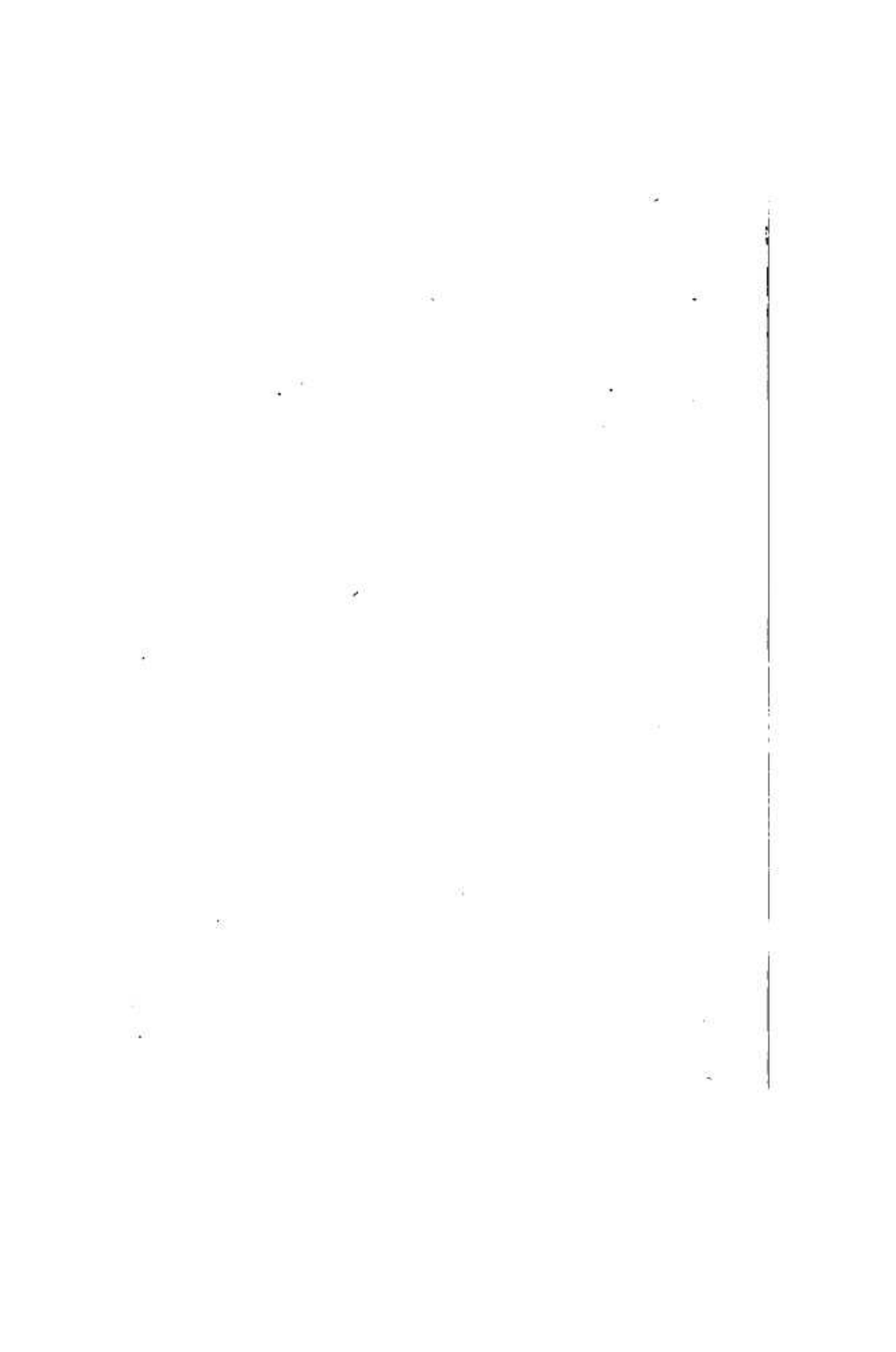
This Mission is only a small one, but it is the embodiment of a great and fruitful idea, and has already done much to quicken, among the people of the West Indies, a desire to make known the Gospel of Christ in that land from which the forefathers of many of them came.

I commend the book to the attention of those who desire to become acquainted with genuine efforts made for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ, and the Mission itself to their prayers and sympathetic help.

E. JAMAICA,

Primate of the West Indies.

LONDON, *July 20, 1899.*





FIFTY YEARS IN WESTERN AFRICA.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory—Idea and purpose of the mission—Reflections of Principal Rawle—Codrington College—Practical outcome—Pongas country—The Rio Pongo—Abortive effort by C.M.S.—Climate—Fever—Tornado—Scenery—The White Ant—The Susu tribes—Form of government—Customs—Art of healing—Religious ideas—Mohammadanism—Contrasted with Christianity, etc.

BEFORE beginning to relate the story of the Rio Pongo Mission, it will be necessary to sketch briefly the idea and purpose which its original promoters had in view, to offer some explanations of the main object to which its inception was due, and also to give a few particulars of the Pongas country and the Susu tribes amongst whom the missionaries labour. First of all, then, it must be clearly understood that this Mission was the outcome of a noble effort of missionary zeal on the part of the West Indian Church. To that Church it owes its birth, and from that Church it has ever derived its main support. There were many just and good reasons for this, as well as for the

choice of that particular part of Africa which was decided on as its field of work.

The West Indian Church has within her fold many whose ancestors were born, lived, and died on the Rio Pongo. These Christians could not forget their fatherland, and naturally the thought occurred to them, as well as to their teachers, the clergy who had brought them to Christ, "Can nothing be done by us to carry the message of the Gospel to those of our own flesh and blood in far-off Africa?" Africa's children felt they owed a debt to her, but there were others who were equally indebted, viz. the Christian Europeans in, and connected with the West Indies. It was a claim of justice as well as charity, that restitution be made to those who had been wronged in the past. To undo the past was impossible, but nevertheless it was possible to do something to root out the remains of that slavery which, even now, after so many years of Christian influence, continues a blot upon the progress of African civilization. And this claim of Africa was not confined to the West Indian colonies, but addressed itself to all British subjects; for the old slave-trade, which brought the negro of Western Africa to the West Indies, did not originate in the efforts or wishes of the colonists, but against their wishes and remonstrances—in the policy of the mother country. Thoughts like these led to the formation of an association in the West Indies for the furtherance of the Gospel in Western Africa.

The idea may have occurred to more than one West Indian Churchman: certainly Bishop Parry of Barbados had conceived it, when, in answer to an

invitation from the S.P.G. inviting co-operation in the celebration of the Society's third jubilee he wrote as follows, April 14, 1851 :—*

"The chief commemoration of the jubilee which I propose in my own diocese, and venture to suggest also to the other West Indian bishops, is to commence an African Mission, if only in answer to our prayers and efforts the great Lord of the Harvest be pleased to send forth the labourers, disposing also the members of the West Indian Church to unite in the work, and others in England to assist it. I am fully aware how far from attractive is the missionary field which the Western Coasts of Africa present; how trying the climate; how degraded the people; and how slow, probably, the progress will be in anything lovely and of good report. Still it is a work which ought to be done, which has, indeed, in more than one place been already commenced, and in which the West Indian Church should certainly take a part. If the Society's jubilee should find us at length engaged in it, surely it would be a suitable commemoration of the Society's benefits, to be thus, after a century and a half given to America and Asia, thinking also of Africa."†

* It is of interest to note that after the lapse of another fifty years, and whilst celebrating its Bicentenary, the Society is helping the Pongas Mission, in its first jubilee, to build churches in Western Africa (see note p. 61).

† "S.P.G. Digest," 1898. The succeeding paragraphs in the Digest (p. 264) fully explain the unbroken connection which has existed between the parent society and the Pongas Mission :—

"At the Barbados Church Society's meeting (S.P.G.), June 16, 1851—which also happened to be the jubilee day of the Society—it was determined to make the African Mission not a mere branch of the Church Society's operations, but the object of a distinct organization,