

**AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF
THE AFRICAN MISSION OF
THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL
CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.**

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An Historical Sketch of the African Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U. S. A.
by Foreign Committee

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Protestant Episcopal Church, U.S.

in the U. S. A.

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INTRODUCTION.

SURELY there can be no duty more imperatively binding upon Christians than that of striving to give to all the nations who sit in darkness the marvellous light of the Gospel. That the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States in her corporate capacity has faithfully endeavored to obey this parting behest of the Master, admits of no question; that her efforts may have been productive of less tangible results, in some instances, than were hoped and prayed for, in no wise detracts from the sincerity and devotion of those who have gone forth thoroughly imbued with the missionary spirit, and have done all in their power to disseminate the teachings of Him whose all-embracing love compassed the entire world.

In no direction, perhaps, has greater effort been made by this Church with less apparent success than in the attempt to illuminate with the light of Christianity the gloomy recesses of the "Dark Continent." The history of African Missions is one that, while it may sadden the hearts of believers and induce a temporary feeling of discouragement, should also serve as an incentive to renewed effort and an increased faith in the final triumph of those teachings upon which the salvation of the human race depends.

In presenting a *résumé* of the history of the Church's work in Africa, we are compelled to admit that it has not yet been crowned with that measure of success which is so earnestly desired; but we believe that a thorough comprehension of the hinderances that have impeded its progress will awaken a feeling of thankfulness

that even so much has been accomplished, and arouse a spirit of determination that the work so bravely inaugurated shall not falter nor fail for lack of hearty sympathy and co-operation on the part of those who, having professed themselves CHRIST'S faithful soldiers and servants, are bound to obey His parting injunction—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

The Mission work of this Church in Africa is confined to the Republic of Liberia which extends along the "Grain Coast" for a distance of six hundred miles and reaches inland about eighty miles, having an area of 9,700 square miles. Liberia was founded in 1820 by the American Colonization Society, which established there a colony of free colored people. In 1847 Liberia was declared an independent republic, and in the following year her national existence was recognized by Great Britain and France. The form of government is modelled upon that of the United States. Monrovia, the capital, is now a flourishing city of about 13,000 inhabitants. The native population of Liberia is 700,000; the colonists and their descendants number about 20,000. The Liberians have built many churches, established schools and printing-presses, and in general their progress has been highly commendable.

The country is traversed by several rivers of considerable size, the largest—the Cavalla—being navigable for boats or small steamers to the falls, eighty miles from the ocean. The soil is generally fertile, producing all tropical fruits in abundance. Cotton, coffee, rice and sugar-cane grow luxuriantly, and there are large forests of cam-wood, red-wood, bar-wood and other varieties, of great commercial value as dye-woods. The principal articles of export are palm-oil, coffee, cam-wood, sugar, arrow-root and ivory.

Much has been said regarding the unhealthfulness of the climate; but doubtless many of the statements have been somewhat exaggerated. As in all tropical regions, the seasons are divided between the wet and the dry, the average temperature during the former being about 76°, during the latter about 84°, the extremes being 65° and 90°. December and January are the warmest months, but the regular sea-breezes so far mitigate the heat that it is seldom oppressive, and some of our Missionaries, who have lived several years at Cape Palmas, say that the climate at that point is less trying than that of New York. It is true that

new comers cannot escape the acclimating fever, but this dreaded visitation is losing somewhat of its severity as the clearing of the country progresses, and proper sanitary precautions are introduced.

The principal native tribes with whom our Missionaries come in contact are the Greboes* in the southern, the Bassas in the central, and the Veys in the northern section of the country. The Kroos, or Kroomen, are scattered along the entire coast, and are among the most intelligent of the natives.

With this brief description of the locality, we pass on to trace the foundation, growth, and present condition of the Missionary operations of our Church in Western Africa.

* Also spelled Gedeboes.

CHAPTER I.

1821-1843.

At a meeting of the General Convention held in St. Peter's Church, Philadelphia, in October, 1821, there was organized The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and on the 23d of May, 1822, Mr. Ephraim Bacon and his wife were appointed as catechists and teachers, to work upon the western coast of Africa, that being the first foreign Mission designated by the Society.

The first sermon in behalf of the Mission was preached in June, 1822, in St. Thomas' Church, Philadelphia, by the Rev. G. T. Bedell, D.D. (father of the present Bishop of Ohio), and the first collection was there made. Five years elapsed, during which time no opportunity presented itself for Mr. Bacon to go to Africa (the Colonization Society, from some motive connected with the internal affairs of their colony at that period, having refused to allow Mr. Bacon's family and the goods procured for the Mission a passage in their vessels), and the opening of the Mission was temporarily abandoned. The money which had been contributed, about \$1,800, was invested and pledged to the future endowment of an African Mission.

In February, 1828, the Rev. Jacob Oson (colored), of Connecticut, was appointed a Missionary to Africa; but before the time of sailing arrived he was removed by death, and the work was again suspended. In 1830, three members of the African Mission School at Hartford, Conn. (Edward Jones, Augustus V. Cæsar, and William Johnson) made application to be sent as Missionaries to Africa. The first two were ordained by Bishop Brownell, in Christ Church, Hartford; the last named was appointed as catechist; but for some unexplained reason they did not proceed to their contemplated field of labor.

The record of the next four years presents only a succession of futile appeals for laborers in the African field. In 1835 Mr. James M. Thompson and wife (colored), then resident in Liberia, were appointed to the charge of a Mission school which was established at Mount Vaughan, near Cape Palmas, on a tract of ten acres of land

donated by the Colonization Society; and an appropriation of five hundred dollars was made for the erection of Mission buildings. In March, 1836, Mr. Thompson commenced the work of instruction with seven pupils, five boys and two girls. His connection with the Mission was terminated by his removal in 1837, and his death occurred in 1838. In March, 1836, the first contribution—two hundred dollars—was received from the New York Female Society for the Promotion of Schools in Africa, and applied toward the support of Mrs. Thompson, who remained as teacher in the Mission after her husband's death. In the following month the Young Men's Auxiliary Education and Missionary Society of New York contributed two hundred dollars toward the support of a Missionary in Africa, and pledged the annual sum of five hundred dollars for that object.

The month of August was made memorable by the appointment of the Rev. Launcelot B. Minor and the Rev. John Payne, of the Diocese of Virginia, and the Rev. Thomas S. Savage, M.D., of the Diocese of Connecticut, as Missionaries to Cape Palmas, where the latter arrived on the 25th of December following. He found the Mission buildings at Mount Vaughan partly erected, and the school progressing favorably under the zealous labors of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson. The Rev. Mr. Payne and wife and the Rev. Mr. Minor reached Cape Palmas July 4th, 1837.

Even at this early period in the Mission's history the Foreign Committee recognized the necessity of educating natives as teachers and Ministers, and therefore welcomed the propositions made to them for the future establishment of a High School in connection with the Mission. In their report to the Board at its annual meeting in June, 1837, it was announced that Bishop Meade, of Virginia, had appropriated to this object, when needed, one thousand dollars placed in his hands for the benefit of Africa, and that further aid was promised from other sources. The Foreign Committee's Report, August, 1838, states that the Bishop deposited \$1,300, and Edward Colston, Esqr., of Virginia, a bond for \$420.

The labors of the Missionaries were partially lightened, early in 1838, by the appointment of Mr. E. S. Byron, a colonist, as assistant teacher, and "business agent" for the Mission. The necessity for more help was, however, very evident, and frequently urged by those in the field. An extract from Dr. Savage's journal about this time says: "The West African Mission is now organized—a Board is formed for the transaction of all business involving