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The American Church in West Africa

BY BISHOP FERGUSON

THE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF THE
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SOME OF THE PEOPLE AMONG WHOM THE CHURCH IS WORKING AT BLUEBARRER, SINOE, WEST AFRICA

REV. MR. TURNER REV. MR. COOPER

"At the time of my visit the tribe was at war with another some distance off, and most of the men had gone for a battle."

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CHRISTIAN WORK IN AFRICA STILL MEANS CARRYING THE GOSPEL TO MANY PRIMITIVE HEATHEN

SEVENTY YEARS ON THE AFRICAN WEST COAST

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND SAMUEL D. FERGUSON, D.D., D.C.L.,
BISHOP OF CAPE PALMAS

SEVENTY years have passed since the Church began its work in Liberia. The efforts of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America to evangelize this part of Africa were begun about the time of the founding of the colony afterward known as the Republic of Liberia, by the American Colonization Society in 1821. It was in May, 1820, that the General Convention of the Church organized a missionary society, which immediately began to put forth efforts to establish a mission on the west coast of Africa. Among the agents of the Colonization Society who came out in 1821, were several clerical and lay members of the Episcopal Church, including the intrepid Jehudi Ashmun. They, however, bore no commission to start the work of the Church.

The first appointment of a missionary was made in 1822, when it was determined to send Mr. Ephraim Bacon and his wife, who had already been out for the Colonization Society and returned to their home. He was to serve as a catechist. Through an unfortunate circumstance, the arrangement fell through and they never came. The way then seemed closed to the managers of the Society until October, 1827, when Mr. Jacob Oson, colored, a candidate for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Connecticut, was appointed. He was ordained deacon on February 16th, 1828, and priest on the following day, by Bishop Brownell. The directors of the Col-

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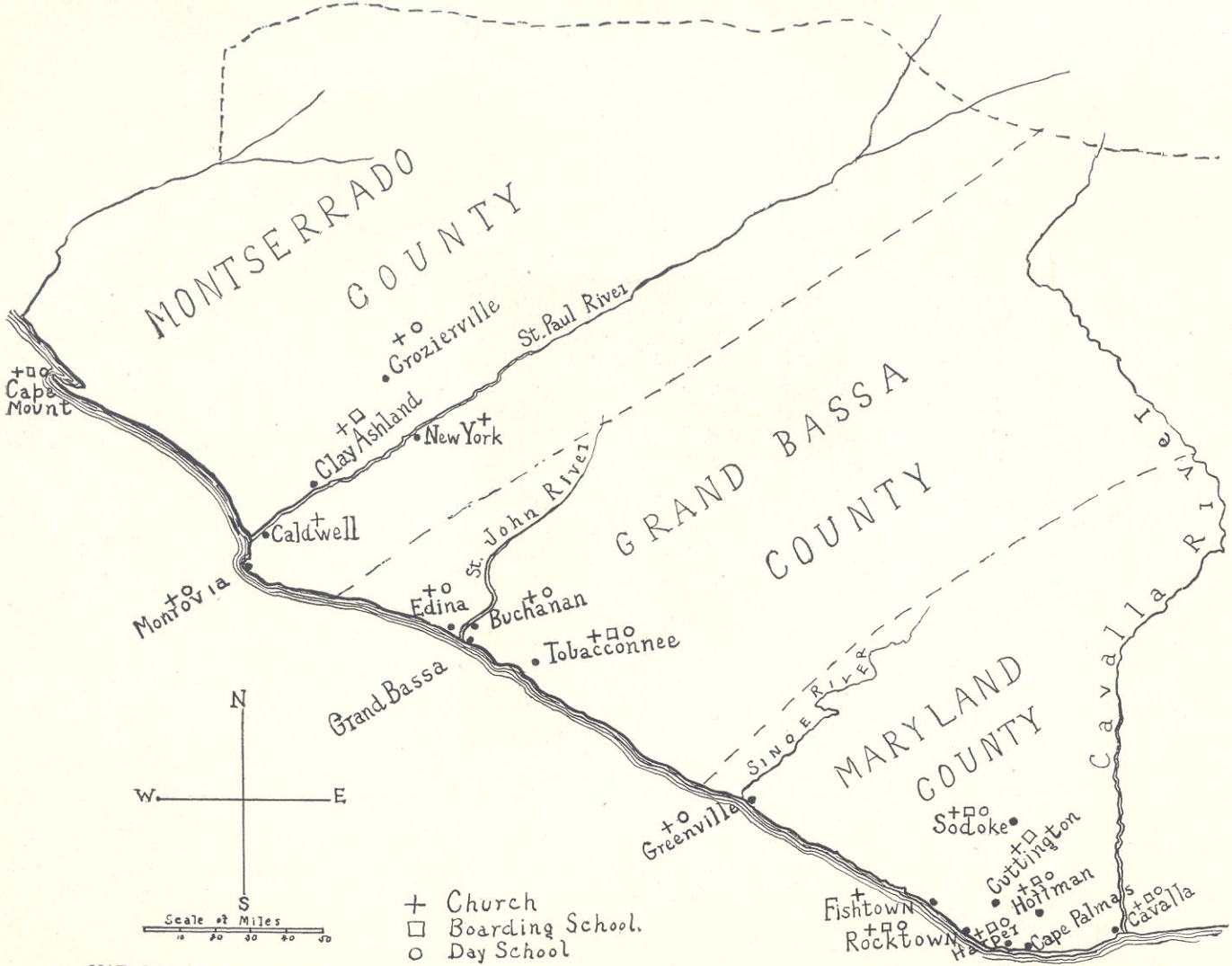

MAP OF THE MISSIONARY DISTRICT OF CAPE PALMAS, WHICH INCLUDES ALL OF THE LIBERIAN REPUBLIC.
AREA 43,000 SQUARE MILES. ABOUT EQUAL TO PENNSYLVANIA

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onization Society offered him a free passage in one of their ships and pledges were made for his support. The friends of Africa rejoiced in the hope that the way for the establishment of the mission was now opened, but they were again disappointed, as Mr. Oson died before the sailing of the ship which was to have carried him to Africa.

An attempt was made to establish a mission school in Hartford, Conn., for the purpose of training colored young men to act as missionaries in Africa; but that likewise was a failure. Thus for thirteen years the efforts to begin work in this land proved abortive.

In 1833, Dr. James Hall, writing to the society from Monrovia, gave information that some of the citizens there had formed themselves into a religious body under the title of St. James's Church, professing to be governed by the laws of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. He also forwarded an appeal that had been written by Mr. James M. Thomson, colored, and signed by the wardens and vestrymen, asking aid in the erection of a house of worship. Mr. Thomson is said to have been officiating for them as lay-reader. The appeal sent over was published and some money collected, but what became of that movement at Monrovia I have no means of ascertaining.

When, in 1834, Dr. Hall founded the colony of Maryland in Liberia, of which he was governor, Mr. James M. Thomson was his secretary. I find the following record concerning him: "He was a native of Demarara but educated in the United States, whence he came to Liberia, about twenty-seven years of age, intelligent, pious, well educated, ardently attached to the distinctive principles and features of the Episcopal Church, and, for a considerable period had been officiating among the colonists as lay-reader."

THE REV. NATHAN MATTHEWS AND SOME OF HIS CAPE MOUNT FRIENDS

In 1834 the secretary of the missionary society was directed to open a correspondence with Mr. Thomson and ascertain from him whether he would be willing to engage in the service of the society. To this he consented, and in June, 1835, he and his wife were appointed teachers. The Colonization Society offered to give the mission a piece of land on Factory Island, Grand Bassa, or else-

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where. Mr. Thomson was instructed to select such a spot as he might deem suitable. After consultation with the governor and others, he decided to locate on Nyepealu (the "Person Curing Hill" or mountain) as the natives called it, near Cape Palmas. The place was later called Mt. Vaughan in honor of the Rev. John A. Vaughan, under whose administration, as secretary of the missionary society, the enterprise had been commenced. Here, on March 1st, 1836, Mr. Thomson began school work with seven pupils—five boys and two girls.

Thus was the desire of Church people in America at last realized. A beginning of the work which they were anxious to do for the redemption of Africa was made. From this historic spot the work has spread through different parts of Liberia. From these two Negro pioneers, Mr. Thomson and his wife, the number of laborers has increased to sixty clerical and lay. Instead of the one little school at Mt. Vaughan we now have fifty-five boarding and day-schools. Beginning with the seven pupils here, we now count 1,711 boarding and day pupils.

The Pioneer White Man

Ten months after Mr. Thomson had started the work, the first white missionary arrived in the person of the Rev. Thomas S. Savage, M.D. Here is the testimony he bore to the faithfulness and effective service rendered by the colored pioneer in his first letter to the secretary of the society:

"I am much pleased with Mr. and Mrs. Thomson. They have a very interesting school of native boys and girls. Everything connected with the mission gives evidence of their faithfulness and capability to fill the important post with which they have been intrusted. God has signally blessed us in raising up such servants." In view of the fact that they were the first Negroes appointed to work in the mission and that they had the honor of being the pioneer missionaries, this is an important testimony to their competency to fill the position.

On March 4th, 1837, the Rev. Dr. Savage removed from the Cape to Mt. Vaughan. In the following month he and Mr. Thomson made their first visit to Graway, Half Cavalla, Grand Cavalla and Rockbookah. Dihne, on the Cavalla River, was next visited.

On July 4th, 1837, the Rev. John Payne and wife and the Rev. Lancelot B. Minor arrived in the field and set to work.

Mr. James M. Thomson died in December, 1838, and the Rev. Mr. Payne took charge of the work at Mt. Vaughan, and from here made occasional visits to Graway and Cavalla. On October 2d, 1839, over two years after his arrival in the country, he moved to the latter place, which, after his consecration to the bishopric, became the headquarters of the mission.

Time will not permit me to trace further the early history of the mission. Missionaries continued to arrive nearly every year. Among them, I may mention Mr. and Mrs. George A. Perkins, the Rev. John Smith, Miss Martha D. Coggleshall, the Rev. Samuel Hazlehurst, Mr. and Mrs. Appleby, the Rev. and Mrs. E. W. Hening, Mrs. Catherine L. Patch, the Rev. E. J. P. Messenger, the Rev. C. C. Hoffman, "our beloved Barnabas," as Bishop Payne called him, the Rev. E. W. Stokes, the Rev. T. A. Pinckney, the Rev. Alexander Crummell, the Rev. Hezekiah Greene (the last four being Negroes), the Rev. and Mrs. G. W. Horne, the Rev. and Mrs. H. R. Scott, and many others.

The First Bishop

Then, too, there are many who have been raised up in the field, both natives and Americo-Liberians, whose memories are sacred to us, but who are also too numerous to be named. For fifteen years the work went on without episcopal supervision, and not a single confirmation nor ordination took place. At last

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BISHOP FERGUSON AND A PART OF THE CONGREGATION AT ST. LUKE'S, EDINA

one of the pioneers, the Rev. John Payne, who had labored as a priest fourteen years, was called home to receive the office of bishop. The happy event took place in Alexandria, Va., on July 11th, 1851. At that time there were four mission stations—at Cape Palmas, Cavalla, Rockbookah and Taboo. St. Mark's Church was approaching completion and the corner-stone of the Church of the Epiphany had been laid and nine young men and women, educated in the mission schools, were employed as catechist, teachers and assistants.

On the arrival of Bishop Payne in July, 1852, new impetus was given to the work. The first confirmation service was held in St. Mark's Church, on Christmas Day, 1852, when twenty-five persons received the rite. The first ordination took place on January 15th, 1854, when Mr. Garretson W. Gibson (Americo-Liberian) was made a deacon. On Easter Day of the same year Messrs. C. F. Ku Sia Jones and John Musu Minor (natives) were also ordained deacons.

Bishop Payne immediately set about extending the work, not only in Maryland County, but to the other counties as well. In 1853, the Rev. Alexander Crummell, under his appointment, started the work in Trinity Church, Monrovia. In the same year, the Rev. A. F. Russell was commissioned to open services at Clay-Ashland. In 1854, the Rev. Mr. Pinckney was sent to Sinoe to begin. In the same year the bishop said, "The Bassa Cove station may now be regarded as fairly commenced." The late Rev. Jacob Rambo was stationed there. Four important centres were thus established, from which the work has since been spreading; the present number of stations—principal and minor ones—being sixty-four.

Bishop Payne retired from the field in 1869, after nearly thirty-two years of faithful service, including eighteen years in the episcopal office. He died at his home in Virginia, in 1874. The next bishop was the Right Rev. Dr. J. G. Auer, who had left the Basle Mission to join ours in 1862. He was consecrated bishop in April, 1873, arrived in the field in December of the same year and died two months afterward. The Right Rev. Dr. C. C. Penick became the third missionary bishop. He was consecrated in February, 1877, returned to his home in the United States October, 1882, after five years of service, and resigned the charge in October, 1883. He is still living and working for the Master. The present incumbent, as the

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fourth bishop, was elected by the House of Bishops, in 1884, and consecrated on June 24th, 1885. His connection with the mission as a worker dates from October, 1862.

This brief sketch of the beginning of the missionary work in this land presents mostly the bright side of the picture. As is to be expected with every enterprise of the kind, there were difficulties, sore trials and discouragements encountered by the pioneers that should be taken into account. But with a steadfast faith in God they bravely pressed forward, undaunted by the untoward circumstances.

The first death in the mission was that of the pioneer, Mr. James M. Thomson, as we have seen, two years and eight months after starting the work. He was only about thirty-one years of age. The second call from the Master of the vineyard came to the wife of the white pioneer—Mrs. Savage. She had been here only a few months. The next was Miss Martha D. Coggleshall, who, like Mrs. Savage, was summoned from her work almost before it was begun.

The first clerical missionary called away was the Rev. Lancelot B. Minor, who had worked six years. He died at Taboo and was interred in the Mission cemetery at Half Cavalla. Upon the stone which covers his mortal remains are inscribed his last memorable words: "Let the mission go forward; let it go forward more than ever."

Among others who followed were Mrs. Patch at Cavalla, Mr. E. J. P. Messenger, here at Mt. Vaughan, Miss Sophia M. Smith, six weeks after her arrival at Rocktown, Dr. T. R. Steel at Cavalla, the Rev. George W. Horne at Rocktown, the Rev. Robert Smith at Cavalla, Mrs. Virginia H. Hoffman and her little daughter, Kate, who died at the orphan asylum and were buried here at Mt. Vaughan, Miss Isabella T. Allay, who worked at the orphan asylum and died at Cavalla. The Rev. C. C. Colden Hoffman, one of the best men that ever came as a missionary to Africa, to whose memory we have a mural tablet in St. Mark's Church, of which he had been pastor, fell asleep at the orphan asylum, where he lived, on November 25th, 1865, and was interred in Mt. Vaughan Cemetery. Among his last utterances is a message to the Church: "Tell them, by the living crucified One, hold not back their hands." And then with his expiring breath he exclaimed, "Don't grow weary; remember who has promised, 'Lo, I am with you alway.' Let not the Church go back, but rather increase her efforts more."

The Church's staff in West Africa includes, in addition to the Bishop, 1 white clergyman, 2 white women teachers, 25 African clergymen and 107 lay helpers. There are 56 stations, 26 boarding-schools with 565 pupils, and 30 day-schools with 1,186 pupils.

¶ Copies of this Leaflet may be obtained from the CORRESPONDING SECRETARY, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York, by asking for Leaflet No. 103.

¶ All offerings for Missions in the District of Cape Palmas should be sent to GEORGE C. THOMAS, Treasurer, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York City.

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