

GRENADA : 1832-1932 *

ON the Feast of the Assumption in the year 1498 Columbus discovered this island and called it Conception Island. But it was not till two hundred years had passed that resident missionaries, French Dominicans, were established, as we learn from Père du Tertre and the famous Père Labat, in their accounts of those early days, 1651-1657. During two intervals they were replaced by Capuchins, 1657-1663 and 1763-1784, and by a series of secular priests, French, Irish and Spanish, till the English Dominicans formally took over the mission in 1901. So long as the French occupied the island its Catholic history was peaceful, but when the British seized it in 1762, and again, after an interval of French occupation, secured it finally in 1783, the Catholic Church in the island entered on a long period of storm and trouble. The whole forms a dramatic picture which is well set out by Fr. Devas, who has for years been occupied with the history of the island, and who has spared no pains in accumulating materials for its compilation.

Ecclesiastically the island was under the jurisdiction of the Vicars Apostolic, Challoner, Talbot, Douglass and Poynter, up to 1819, when the West Indian Diocese was erected and Dr. Buckley was appointed as first Vicar Apostolic with his residence in Trinidad. But long before that date troubles had arisen. The British regime started well—on paper : Catholics were to be Members of the Council, one was to be assistant Judge and one on the Commission of Peace in each

**Conception Island, or The Troubled Story of the Catholic Church in Grenada, B.W.I.* Compiled chiefly from original documents and unpublished records by Raymund Devas, O.P., M.C. (Sands & Co., 1932; pp. 426; 12/6.)

town or parish. But then began a series of petty and unworthy intrigues. First of all the Ministers of the Established Church demanded the cession of the Catholic churches throughout the island, or at least the free use of them for the Anglican service after the Mass was over on Sundays. As the Catholics could not in conscience cede this latter alternative, they had perforce to surrender their churches. Attention was then turned to the income of £371 14s. 10d. and to the glebe land ; the petitioners

' did not conceive themselves bound so far to sacrifice to the blind prejudices and indecent presumptions of the Roman Catholics as to the lands are settled for uses which must now be considered in law as superstitious and improper to be countenanced in a British Colony, least of all in an island where the number of Catholics, although not possessing one fifth of the property of the island, forms a large proportion of its inhabitants, and where consequently, there is every reason to apprehend a growth and increase of the Romish persuasion among the people the Roman Catholics are not entitled to expect more than a toleration of their worship when performed with that decency and privacy which our Statute Laws require. They (the clergy) should be maintained by the private contributions of the individuals of the same persuasion ' ;

this despite the fact that no less than £1,700 and finally £2,500 were devoted to the support of the Protestant ministers. The next unworthy act was to insist that all Baptisms and Marriages should be entered in the Registers of the Established Church within a month ; this was followed by a refusal to concede that the Catholics had a right to vote in elections. Fr. Devas was justified, then, in terming the period between 1784 and 1795 ' Pillage and Persecution.' The two following years were marked by the terrible Insurrection of the coloured peoples who succeeded in capturing the Governor of the island. The suppression of this revolution involved the Catholics in even greater hardships.

Blackfriars

In 1793 Father Felicien sent to Bishop Douglass a *Status animarum*, which shows that there were six priests at work in Grenada, though none of them was young. We know, too, that from 1791 a certain Father O'Loughlin had been there, and that his flock numbered some 25,000 souls. Naturally enough, he appealed to the Government for financial aid. But meanwhile, the Rev. Mr. Dent, who was at one time acting Governor, had demanded that all the Catholic churches should be vested in His Majesty's name 'as was done in the case of the dissolved monasteries and abbeys'; he was supported in this by the Attorney-General, who said that 'Acts of this nature were passed in the reign of King Henry VIII,' and the Governor added that 'so many of the principal Roman Catholics have been involved in the late rebellion (that) the might and influence of that class of subjects is in consequence considerably diminished.' The result of Mr. Dent's appeal was far-reaching, for on February 1st, 1801, George III signed a document whereby 'the lands and church were granted to trustees upon trust, to permit and suffer divine service to be performed in the chapel thereon according to the rites and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, by the minister or priest who shall be the officiating minister for the time being by licence from the Governor.' This meant that the Catholic Church and her ministers became a 'Royal Foundation' by a 'Royal Grant,' and that her ministers were 'licensed' by the Governor.

This was 'asking for trouble,' and it soon came. A revolution broke out in Venezuela in 1815, with the result that two Spanish priests came to Grenada and were 'duly' 'licensed' by the Governor, an act which brought down on them a 'suspension' from the Vicar General, the Abbé Planquais. For this he incurred the wrath of the Governor, who demanded an apology 'for the very great insult he had offered the Governor.'

The Abbé felt that he had not exceeded his rights, and urged that he was acting under the orders of Dr. Poynter. One can imagine the indignation of the Council when the Abbé 'produced a certain printed paper in the Latin language, on which was endorsed a writing in the same language signed and sealed by Wm. Poynter, apparently vesting in him an ecclesiastical authority extending over all the islands in the West Indies subject to his Britannic Majesty.' The Abbé was told to leave the island, but failed to do so. He appealed to Bishop Poynter, while the Governor, Sir Charles Shipley, appealed to the Secretary of State, Earl Bathurst, after throwing the recalcitrant priest into gaol. In a story told to Bishop Gibson by Dr. Poynter an interesting side-light is thrown on the religious attitude of the people who at that time were without most of the consolations of their religion :

' I will tell your Lordship a little anecdote which would deserve a place in the *Lettres édifiantes*. In one of our Colonies where there is no priest, some of the good people have engaged with a priest in one of our chapels in London, that he should say Mass for them at a certain hour. They calculating the difference of longitude, know the precise and absolute difference of time when the Mass is said, and at that time they join with the priest in the Mass. Thus they hear Mass very devoutly across the Atlantic! Who would not wish to serve such Christians as these? '

There came to the rescue of the people a devoted Capuchin, Father Hilarion, 1822-1827, and an urgent appeal was made to the authorities of the island for some financial help for him, but all in vain. In 1819 the West Indian Diocese had been erected, and the Bishop of Cork undertook to provide the first Vicar Apostolic with a priest. This was Father O'Callaghan, who, like so many others, became a storm-centre on the island; for his first act was to refuse to apply to the Governor for a licence. Not only was the whole principle of this 'licence' abhorrent to Catholic ideals,

Blackfriars

but its phrasing was, to say the least, irritating. For the priest had to pledge himself not to interfere 'with the exclusive use and enjoyment of the churches and the lands and tenements thereunto appertenant, allotted to the Rector and inhabitants of the said Island, exercising and professing the worship of the Church of England as by law established'; he had also to conform to the acts concerning marriages, baptisms and burials, and was required 'to swear to observe the contents of this licence,' which was, moreover, only to last during the pleasure of the Governor.

On Father O'Callaghan's refusal to 'take out' a licence, Sir James Campbell, the Governor, completely lost his head. He stigmatised the priest's action as 'a daring contempt of his authority,' and the letter written in his support by the Catholic Guardians as 'grossly insulting'; he proceeded to disband the Catholic Guardians, and even deprived two of them of their rank in the militia. The then Solicitor-General, Henry Otway, gave as his opinion when officially consulted that it was illegal for any priest to say Mass except by permission of the Governor, since Statute 25, Elizabeth, C. 1, runs: 'he who says or sings Mass shall forfeit 200 marks and suffer a year's imprisonment.' But the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. W. Huskisson, replied to the Memorial sent by Sir James Campbell in terms which show a real breadth of view:

'In the first place it is to be borne in mind that the Colony formerly belonged to a Roman Catholic State, and a considerable portion of its inhabitants have continued, I understand, to be of that persuasion. A community growing out of such circumstances should, less than any other, be subject to be treated as an intrusive establishment; and whatever sentiments may be entertained respecting the deprivation of civil rights which the Roman Catholics of Grenada have suffered (a question which the present case does not involve), there can be no doubt that in justice they

are entitled to toleration in its utmost extent, and if in law there be any unfortunate limitation of this, then there devolves upon the Government the strongest of obligations to administer the obnoxious law with every degree of gentleness and forbearance which shall be compatible with the obedience to all laws in force.

‘ If, therefore, the laws of Grenada absolutely require that a Roman Catholic priest should be licensed, no unnecessary obstructions to the obtaining such licence should be super-added by the Government, nor should the power to withhold it (if such power exist) be used as a means of supporting the authority of the Government . . . ’

Father O’Callaghan had, however, finished his mission, and now secured the services of another priest, who was, alas ! only to add to the sorrows of the Catholic body in Grenada. This was the notorious—no other qualification does him justice—Father O’Hannan, commonly spoken of as ‘ the Great O.’ He accepted a licence in a modified form, reopened the Church which had long been closed, and—most wonderful of all—succeeded in doing what everyone else had failed to do; namely, securing an endowment of no less than £500 per annum ! Things seemed promising, but, owing to some friction with another priest, ‘ the Great O ’ sent in his resignation to the Bishop. This was accepted, but ‘ the Great O ’ suddenly went back on his resignation and started a schism which lasted from 1829 to 1839. That this scandal should have endured so long was due of course primarily to the character of the priest who originated it, but it was also due to the change that had come over the British Government at home with regard to things Catholic. Whether it was the impending Emancipation that affected them adversely we cannot say, but it is noteworthy that whereas men like Lord Bathurst, Mr. Huskisson, and Mr. Stephen had shown remarkable fair-mindedness, we now find His Majesty’s ministers indulging in petty recriminations which are hardly to their credit. Un-

Blackfriars

fortunately, Dr. McDonnell's titular See was 'Olympus,' and Ministers complained that the Governor of the island should address him as 'My Lord'; 'he,' the Governor, 'refers to the Bishop of Olympus and receives his orders with exactly the same publicity and deference as though he were corresponding with the Protestant Bishop of Barbados'! On a later occasion the Secretary of State urged that it was no part of his duty to enforce regulations made by an ecclesiastic who signed himself 'Bishop of Olympus'!

Into the miserable details of this schism we have neither space nor wish to enter. The only scene which it is pleasant to recall took place on February 10th, 1838, when in Rome 'the Great O' solemnly made his submission to authority. He died at the early age of forty-eight in 1840. Despite all his faults and his grave misconduct, he was a veritable apostle and accomplished an amazing amount of work in the island. With the passing of a Relief Act for the Catholics of the island on January 30th, 1832, a new period opened for Catholic life in Grenada, and for the next seventy years a series of hard-working secular priests kept the Faith alive in the island. Finally, in 1901, the English Dominican Province took over the mission, and twelve Fathers are now working there.

Fr. Raymund Devas in this truly notable piece of work has set an example to other missionaries. A tropical climate and the exhausting life of a missionary would seem to be unfavourable conditions for the compiling of historical records. Few will realize how much patient toil and courageous industry have gone to the making of this volume. Fr. Raymund is to be praised for having touched new ground, enriched our store of knowledge, and added a valuable and by no means uninteresting page to modern Church History.

No one can read this fascinating story without feeling that, like Simon's boat, the Church of God is

Grenada : 1832-1932

tossed by the storms, but at the voice of Him Who rules the winds and the waves there is peace. The volume is well got up. There is a most useful map, full indices, and several photographs. Those who have worked in Conception Island and those who will find their sphere of missionary labour there in years to come will find much to inspire them in these pages.

HUGH POPE, O.P.

ROSA PATIENTIAE

THE rose's hue and scent
Are meant,
By Him who made the rose, to adorn
A thorn.

And thus, when sorrow irks,
Who shirks
Forgets to count the gain
Of pain—
Nor, joy-benighted, knows
The rose.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.