

THE BLACK WORK

THE BLACK WORK OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AS IT RELATED THE THE WEST INDIAN WORKER FROM THE CARRIBEAN

When the 'Advent Movement' came into being in 1844 there were millions of Blacks who were still suffering under the burden of enslavement. Freedom had come to the Blacks in the West under Pierre-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture in 1791 under the Haitian revolution and Simon Bolivar throughout the West Indies and the Carribean. L'Ouverture was a mulattoe, Bolivar an aristocrat Creole. Their struggles and burdens were to free their People from the shackles of slavery under which they had lived for hundreds of years. When the new governments were set up under these new leaders throughout the West Indies they were not recognized by the United States until 1862 under Abe Lincoln however they continued to function and to function well.

At the close of the Civil War in the United States during which the Blacks who had been enslaved here were given an emancipation proclamation under President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. The concept of former slaves being accepted on par with former slaver owners was very difficult for many of the white People to accept and even unto this day, at times, one can still sense strained attitudes in the relationship.

Although the SDA denomination had been called into being by God to give a special message to the world and to help make ready a people to meet Him when He returns for His church (Eph. 5:27) many were not too sure that this included those who had been held captives of slavery for four hundred years. Ellen G. White stated in volume one of the *Testimony for the Church*:

"There are few in the ranks of Sabbath keepers who sympathize with the slaveholder. When they embraced the truth, they did not leave behind them all the errors they should have left. They need a more thorough draft from the cleansing fountain of truth. Some have brought along with them their old political prejudices, which are not in harmony with the principles of truth. They maintain that the slave is the property of the master, and should not be taken from him. They

rank these slaves as cattle and say that it is wronging the owner just as much to deprive him of his slaves as to take away his cattle.



Elder J. F. Crichlow.

"I was shown that it mattered not how much a master had Paid for human flesh and the souls of men; God gives him no title to human souls, and he has no right to hold them as his property. Christ died for the whole human family, whether white or black. The institution of slavery does away with this and Permits man to exercise over his fellow man a Power which God has never granted him, and which belongs alone to God. The slave master has dared assume the responsibility of God over his slave, and accordingly he will be accountable for the sins, ignorance, and vice of the slave. He will be called to an account for the power which he exercises over the slave. The colored race are God's Property.

...Some have been so indiscreet as to talk out their pro-slavery principles which are not heaven-born, but proceed from the dominion of Satan. These restless spirits talk and act in a manner to bring a reproach upon the cause of God."

—Vol. 1, p. 358, 259

In spite of these attitudes, the commission that was given to this people was to teach the message of God's love to all of mankind on planet earth. This, they had not been able to do for those who had been former slaves whom the looked upon as being three-fifths human or as

the cattle of the field. The advent message had been withheld from the Blacks in America especially in the Southland. Missionaries were being sent to the peoples around the world, but none were being assigned to the down-trodden people of the South

Ellen White further stated in volume eight:

"The salvation of the heathen has long been deemed a matter that should engage the interest of Christians, and it is not more than justice to bring light to their dark borders. But home missionary work is just as much needed. The heathen are brought to our very doors. Idolatrous ignorance is within the very shadow of our homes. Something is being done for colored people, but next to nothing compared with others receive who already have a knowledge of the truth, who have had opportunities Innumerable, but who have not appreciated their advantages. . .

"What are we doing for the Southern field? I have looked most anxiously to see if some Plan would not be set in operation or a resolution to do anything. . . .But though for years our duty has been laid out in a most decided manner, yet the Southern field has been touched only with the tips of our fingers. I now feel deeply in earnest in again bringing before you this neglected portion of the Lord's vineyard. This matter is brought before me again and again. I have been awakened in the night season, and the command has come. Write the things that I have opened before you, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear."

Volume 8:60

"The Lord expects far more of us than we have given Him in unselfish service for people of all classes in the Southern States of America. This field lies at our very doors, and in it there is a great work to be done for the Master. . .

"The Lord has long been waiting for human instrumentalities through whom to work. How much longer will He be obliged to wait for men and women to respond to the call: "Go work today in My vineyard"? Messengers of mercy are needed, not merely in a few places in the South, but throughout the whole field. Rich and poor are calling for the light.

"The proclamation that freed the slaves in the Southern States opened doors through which Christian workers should have entered to tell the story of the love of God. In this field there were precious

jewels that the Lord's workers should have searched for as for hidden treasurer.

"Some time ago I seemed to be, during the night session, in a meeting in which the work in the Southern field was being discussed. The questions were asked by a company of intelligent colored people: 'Has God no message for the colored People of the South? Have they no souls to save? Does not the new covenant include them? If the Lord is soon to come, is it not time that something was done for the Southern field?'

" 'We do not,' it was said, 'question the need of missions in foreign lands. But we do question the right of those who claim to have present truth to pass by millions . . . of human beings in their own country, many of whom are as ignorant as the heathen. Why is it that so little is done for the colored People of the South, many of whom are ignorant and destitute, and need to be taught that Christ is their Creator and Redeemer? How can they believe in Him whom they have not heard? How can they hear without a preacher? And how can one preach except he be sent?'



Elder J. G. Dasent, first president of Lake Region.

"We lay this matter before those who Profess to believe the truth for this time. What are you doing for the unenlightened colored race? Why have you not a deeper sense of the necessities of the Southern field? Does there not rest upon ministers of the gospel the responsibility of setting in operation plans whereby this people can be educated? Does not the commis-



Elder C. M. Kinney, first Black Seventh-day Adventist minister sits front and center.

sion of the Saviour teach this? Is it right for Professing Christians to hold themselves aloof from this work, allowing a few to carry the burden? In all your plans for medical missionary work and foreign missionary work, has God given you no message for us?

"Then He who has authority arose, and called upon all to give heed to the instruction that the Lord has given in regard to the work in the South. He said: "Much more evangelistic work should be done in the South. There should be a hundred workers where now there is but one."

Volume 7:220, 222, 223, 224.

But the leadership of the church still could not bring itself to go into the Southland to give the message of hope as they had been instructed to do, and even in the North, there were SDA churches where Blacks were forbidden to attend. Ellen White told the brethren that they had no right to exclude these from their Places of worship. C.M. Kinney, the first Black to be ordained to the Adventist ministry had met with problems with the church in St. Louis, Mo. His was one of the issues that was Presented to the General Conference in 1888 only to be passed by by the brethren with comments such as 'we do not need to stir up the race question'.

At the turn of the century the church established the American Medical College in connection with the Battle Creek

Sanitarium which had become world renown. People from around the world came to this place for training. Many of the Negroes who applied were SDA. Some 67 colored doctors and nurses attended the school to receive training with which they could return to their countries to help their people. J. Harvey Kellogg had called for Negro men and women to train as doctors and nurses here. E.A. Sutherland in 1945, said Kellogg's different views on the color question was one of the reasons for his break with the church. These Blacks who received the training had a choice of remaining in America to labor in the South after graduation or to return to a mission field in Inter-America or to India. Many returned home and carried the advent message with them.

Entering work in foreign fields, so states Jacob Justiss in his book "Angels in Ebony" were Prince Mark Njoji of the Congo and Dr. Simie from French Guinea. Phillip Giddings, a physician, married Louise Peters, a nurse, and went to Haiti. Dr. and Mrs. Morrell were last hear of in Africa. Anna Knight of Soso, Ms., went to India under the General Conference auspices and Dr. D. E. Blake and wife Dr. Lottie Isbel Blake did self-supporting work in Panama. Barbados was the choice of nurse Doris Skerrett and her husband C.H. Cave. Her sister Mabel Skerrett also a Battle Creek nurse, went to the Barbadoes and eventually after the



Ministers assemble in front of Henderson Hall at Oakwood College.

death of her sister became Dr. Cave's wife. These carried with them God's message of love for all mankind. Another person who returned home from Battle Creek was the "Missing Mr. Reid" of Bermuda who is spoken of by Mrs. Nellie Musson in her book by the same title. Mr. Read started the church in Bermuda by working as a literature evangelists and spreading the message like the leaves of autumn.

Battle Creek had been a training school for peoples around the world. Adventism from this mecca had spread far and wide. When the church sought to construct a house of worship in Battle Creek that would seat over three thousand people, many families from around the world contributed a dime a month to help with this building. It became known as the Dime Tabernacle. The posture that was taken by the church in South Africa was of a different nature. Some who felt disposed to help with the project were encouraged by Ellen White to use their funds to help in their own homeland rather than send them to America. However, in a letter that is published in a book that was released in 1976 entitled "Testimonies To South Africa" Ellen White is quoted as having written in Letter 188, 1899; 'It is safer to educate students at home than to send them to America to receive an education; for in America they see and hear much that does them no good, which they would not see and hear

were they to remain in their own country. Too many of the methods and habits and fashions have been transported from America to Africa, and the result is not favorable. The very best teachers should be sent from America to foreign countries to educate the young.' And until this day, some of the brethren state that the African student should not attend the schools in America. Some have especially spoken in a derogatory manner about the school in Hunstville, Al.—Oakwood College.

But back to the West Indian Worker. When we speak of the West Indies many only think of the island of Jamaica which is the largest in the group, however, there are many islands that help to make up the entire group and Black people from the African continent had been scattered among these islands during the height of the slave trade industry. Interestingly enough, the SDA faith appears to have been introduced into the Caribbean on the island of Jamaica about 1880 or 1890 by William Arnold. We are told some of these publication fell into the hands of Mrs. Margaret Harrison who became interested in the Sabbath truths. Mrs. Harrison later went to Battle Creek for treatment and while there made a request that someone be sent to Jamaica as a missionary because of the interest that was being seen among the people there. In response to her plea, A.J. Haysmer and his family were sent to establish a mission in 1892. After conducting public meeting

on the island, Haysmer was finally able to organize the first SDA church on the island with 37 members.

As a result of this aggressive promotion of the SDA teaching the membership increased to 300 by 1896. Among the converts were ministers of other denominations who in many instances led some of their congregations with them. J.K. Humphrey was a minister of the Baptist faith who accepted the message. The work continued to grow and by 1897 the first general meeting of West Indian workers was held on Kingston with its headquarters in Jamaica. In 1903 when W.A. Spicer, the secretary of the Foreign Mission Board for the General Conference visited this field there were some 1,200 Jamaican adherents who were organized into the Jamaica Conference, the first such to be organized in the West Indies.



J. K. Humphrey.

The next year, 1904 Jamaican churches sent out their first missionary, a young man named Nathan Moulton who directed the work in Puerto Rico. Later others were sent out.

While the work in the West Indies was moving along, work among the Blacks of America was just beginning. Edson White had gone into Mississippi in 1895. The Huntsville school had been established in 1896 to train Black youth to work for their people.

When Ellen White visited the Huntsville school in 1904 she stated that 'this was the very spot that the Lord showed to me in vision. Not one acre of this land should be sold'. Some of the brethren felt that the work among the people of the Southland was bringing a financial drain on the church and the project at Huntsville should be sold. Later on when she met with the student body at the school, she challenged them to 'go to work for your own People.' Elder J.H. Laurence who had been sponsored by two white ladies from Iowa to attend this school, had come from the Island of St. Kitts.



G. E. Peters.

After Ellen White's visit the students accepted the challenge and began going in all directions across the country to give these messages of hope to their down-trodden brothers and sisters. The Lord greatly blessed their labors. By 1909 the members of the Black people in America numbered 900. The General Conference, observing the tremendous growth, felt that an office should be established whereby this thriving work could receive special attention. Interestingly enough the year 1909 was also the time when progressive Black leaders of the land met at Niagara Falls, Ny., and organized the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Although there were many Negro preachers who had demonstrated ability



to carry heavy leadership responsibilities a white man, J.W. Christian, was elected to serve as the first Secretary of the Negro Department. He served from 1909-10 and resigned because of ill health. He was followed by A.J. Haysmer a former missionary to the West Indies, who served three years and was succeeded by C.B. Stephenson, the President of the South-eastern Union Conference until 1918.

In 1906 the West Indies Training School was established to train workers for the West Indies and tropical Africa, but by 1913 the school was closed and all but 13 acres of the 507 acre tract of land was sold. Twelve of the students went the Huntsville Training School in Huntsville, Al. These students were not treated too kindly by the leaders of the Huntsville school. Their ability to articulate, their assertiveness, their looks of arrogance and pride did not set too well with the school officials and teachers. Some were made to sleep in the barns at the school.

As the director for the Negro work in America, A.J. Haysmer, no doubt, sought to get Black leaders with whom he could 'feel comfortable with', as the brethren sometimes remark. Having served as the director of the work for Blacks in the West Indies some of these brethren were invited to come to work. The Whites were beginning to leave the Southland because of the extremely hot climates and their inability to endure the conditions under which they were called upon to work. For the West Indian worker, it was an

opportunity to get to America with its many challenges comforts that were not found in their homeland. Many came and were soulwinners, some ministers and others laymen.

When these West Indian workers arrived in America, they were immaculately dressed like British statesmen—the hickory striped trousers, the cut-away coats, the wing-tipped collars, the Pride blossom tie, the patent leather shoes with the spats buckled down; they even wore a homburg hat and used capes after they delivered their sermon on Sabbath.

They were very articulate they spoke the king's english. They were assertive with holy boldness and usually got what they wanted. They were a proud group whose roots were traced back to the revolutionary days of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Simon Bolivar when their own governments were taken over by their own country men. They had been free for from 75 to 100 years. They were Black, they were free, they were proud. Before long they were in positions of leadership and authority.

Many were accepted by the Blacks in America because of their demeanor and their abilities to articulate. Hundreds of Blacks joined the church under their leaderships across the land. These were tremendous preachers and soul-winners. Some few, 12 in number—jokingly called themselves the "terrible twelve" so stated M.G. Nunes. The names of these were: A.N. Durrant who was among the first

national SDA ministers to be Placed into the work in Jamaica along with Herbert Fletcher, M. Jones, W.H. Randle and Linton Rashford (father of A. Samuel Rashford who later attended Oakwood Jr. College in 1931); G.J. Dasent the first Black Regional conference president, the Lake Region Conference; J. Hermanus Laurence, now 103 years of age baptized thousands of people all across the country and organized numerous churches; A. Wellington Clarke, one of the greatest scholars that this church has ever produced, the father of Wellington Clarke, Jr.; J. Malcolm Phipps who helped



J. H. Lawrence.

open the work in Ohio, had two sons, J. Malcolm and Sinclair, Charles and John Mann who pioneered the work in Georgia but later became disillusioned and left the church; M.G. Nunes, who became a great health lecturer and preacher who worked through the southwest; W.D. Forde worked in Michigan and Indiana and New York; E.A. Jarreau; Louis Sheafe, the pastor of the first SDA church in Washington, D. C. left the organized work when the whites moved out to their own segregated church; J.K. Humphrey who the brethren dropped from the ministry (and later his entire church, Harlem Number One) because of his refusal to present his plans for Utopia Park to the conference committee. He felt they would not approve of them. He sought to build for

Black people a similar facility as the one in Battle Creek with schools, hospitals, churches, senior citizens homes, orphan homes to meet the needs of Black people. They were not accepted nor allowed in those operated by the church.

So these called themselves 'the terrible twelve' no doubt because they took pride in the successes in the work of the church that the Lord had brought to them. Elder J. Gershom Dasent was sometimes heard to say after being told that he had delivered a moving sermon on Sabbath (he became known as the silver tongued orator), "You do not have to tell J. Gershom Dasent that he has preached a good sermon, J. Gershom Dasent knows that he has Preached a good sermon!"

Others of the West Indian leaders of prominence were G. E. Peters who became the second Black to serve as the secretary of the Negro Department in the General Conference. He too was a man who took care of business. He changed the name of the department from Negro Department to the Colored Department; He also became the first Black to actually have an office in the General Conference building, although he could not eat in the Review and Herald dining room which was adjacent to the G.C. building. He was the one who lead in the struggle for total equality for Blacks in the SDA denomination which finally lead to the brethren's decision to organize separate Black Conferences for the believers in the United States. Whenever and wherever a Black worker in the work, whether West Indian or American, found himself in problems with the White brethren, Peters was always there to defend and encourage.

Other leaders who came from the islands were: U. Osternan, F.S. Keits, I.O. Irons, Jaffeth Williams, A. Jefferies, D.B. Reid, R. Hope Robertson, C. Crichlow, A.T. Maycock (a layman who became a member of the church after coming to America) and James Bennett, just to name a few.

DISAPPOINTMENTS AND FRUSTRATIONS CAME to these leaders after arriving in America and discovering that they were not totally accepted by the White people as they had been back in their islands. They were not without opposition from the Black leaders in America. The White leaders had lead them to feel they were just a little better cut than Black Americans and who had not fought for their freedom as they had.

This was not totally true. It was the continuous revolts of the slaves in America that finally lead to the outbreak of the Civil War.

Secondly, there were attitudes they developed among themselves coming from different islands and countries in the Carribean, a carry-over from tribal conflicts that existed in Africa.

at one point when Whites separated themselves from the Black churches in some areas or refused to accept the Black preacher into their pulpits, Ellen White admonished:

"Instead of wondering whether they are not fitted to labor for white people, let our colored brethern and sisters devote themselves to missionary work among the colored people. There is an abundance of room for intelligent colored men and women to labor for their own people." 9T; p. 199

Frustrations came in 1929 when these brethren pushed for post in the conference offices. They later requested that Black Conferences, because it was not acceptable to have Blacks work for their offices. These were started in no uncertain terms; "Be quiet on this matter and never mention it again until Jesus comes!" Under the "Back to Africa movement of Marcus Garvey, another West Indian, Black pride came to forefront. Humphrey began laying his plans for the construction of the Utopia Park facility. L.K. Dickson, who was the president of the Greater New York Conference, succeeded in getting his conference committee to cancel Humphrey's ministerial license. The brethren later spread the word throughout America and the West Indies that he was a revolutionist. He was looked upon with disdain by many Blacks and even a number of his own kinsmen back in the islands.

A little later when Dickson spoke at Elder Humphrey's congregation, Harlem number one in New York City, to explain his reason for the action that was taken against Humphrey, the whole church arose in holy terror against Dickson and sought to mob him and his delegation right in church. He returned to his conference committee and disfellowed the entire congregation. These people had not given up on the teachings of the SDA Movement. Theirs was a struggle for total acceptance into the brotherhood such as that which they had enjoyed back home.



But now that he was a preacher with a congregation that had been severed from the general body, but who still held to the beliefs of the general body, Humphrey and these believers (most of whom were from the island) organized themselves into what history reveals as the Free SDA Movement. Their own General Conference was organized with churches in New York, St. Louis, Denver and Kingston Jamaica.

Because they were told or were treated differently from the American Black whose parents had been former slaves attitudes arose among these two groups of Blacks in some instances. At one point, when American Black SDA leader lay dying, three of his Black brethren came to visit and to pray with him, one a West Indian, the other two Americans, his words are reported to have been: 'Let the two brethren come in, but do not bring that West Indian in here!'

G.E. Peters is one who was blessed of God to settle many of these differences of race pride and national origin among the brethren; although some church leaders tend to keep the division going at times.

When a student of West Indian background entered the seminary, after studying at Oakwood College, the only Black school established to train Blacks to help finish the work, he was slighted, belittled and talked down to by some of the White professors. In relating to his experience to a fellow islander, he was admonished to let them know that he was a West Indian. The treatment changed when this was revealed.

Most Blacks whether from America, or the West Indies or the homeland in Africa have come to realize that we are all in the struggle together. There must be no national, social or ethnic differences among us. There is a work to be done for God in getting the souls of all mankind to be ready for His return. A few years ago when segregation was at a peak, the male chorus from Oakwood College was traveling through the state of Texas and stopped at a service station to get gasoline and to refresh themselves. When asked where the restroom was, the attendant responded that 'Niggers cannot use the rest rooms here.' A member of the group whose roots were in the West Indies came to the fore and announced: 'I am a Canadian.' to which the response came: 'I do not care what kind of Nigger you are, you cannot use that rest room!' Let us walk together, children but don't get weary. Jesus soon will come.

A distinct work is assigned to every Christian.—Southern Watchman, Aug. 2, 1904.

In some West Indian circles, the brethren do not think too kindly of themselves. There is a polarization among themselves in relationship to the countries from where they have come. When Elder Tim Walters, one of the greatest West Indian leaders that this church has ever produced, was voted out of office in the west Indies Union Conference Kingston, Jamaica, one of the reasons was said to have been: "he is not a Jamaican, he is a Panamanian." The work among West Indians suffered a loss when he left.

Whether we be Afro-Americans, West Indians, Latin descendants or islanders or from the mainland of Africa, there must be an acknowledgement that with Christ there is no East or West, in Him no North or South, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth. There is a job to be done! There is a race to be run! There is the Eternal God who we must all meet in the end. . May the devil nor this world push us into its mold. We are the world, we are the children!

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that WHOSOEVER believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

—Dr. C.E. Dudley

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