

William Knibb to Charles Stovel.

A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTER.

KETTERING, TRELAWNEY,
JAMAICA.
May 31st, 1843.

MY dear Brother,

Your sympathetic letter was truly welcome though it opened afresh the yet bleeding wounds inflicted in the sudden removal of my fourth and only son. He was a lovely child, and bade fair to be a useful man, but he is gone, and I dare not repine. His sweet tones when he sang the praises of God still are music in my ears, while his manly enquiries I still think on with fond affection. Though not six years of age, in all that concerned liberty or the Mission or the family he took the deepest interest, while his little heart bounded with joy whenever he could alleviate woe. But he is gone and for the present deeply do we feel his loss. But while I thus feel, I know it is right, nor would I have it otherwise, contrary to the will of God, for 10,000 worlds. My dear wife, with an impaired constitution and my youngest child suffering from the effects of scarlet fever, have left for England, so that I am quite alone as far as my domestic arrangements are concerned. For nineteen years has she lived on behalf of the down-trodden slave, and I hope that amidst the sympathies of Christian friends she will by the blessing of God receive that renovation of strength which will enable her to return and again with me pursue the labour of love in which we are engaged. I scarcely know how to account for the feeling, but in the last 6 months or more I have had an impression that my heavenly father is inviting me to some other sphere of labour at least for a season; and that he has taken my children to himself that I might follow where he leads. Should the call of providence be plain I shall follow it, though it will be the heaviest trial I have ever borne as a Missionary, as I shall have to sever from a Church entwined around my heart and disposed to impart every comfort they can give. I think I owe to my God any sacrifice I can make, and I pray for grace cheerfully to make it. The following are my ideas. I think that it is almost essential to the wellbeing and extension of our Mission in the neighbouring Islands, on the Spanish Main, and in Africa for someone to spend his time in visiting them, going for instance to the islands, and to Africa and if necessary now and then to England

so that the most efficient plans and co-operation may be carried on, and I have never wished for the means of doing good by hav^g money at my disposal, until this scheme suggested itself to my mind. I shall wait the dispensations of providence, and if the Cloud arises I shall follow it; if not, cheerfully I remain here. Each journey round to the stations including Africa would occupy about 3 years, it would be a self-denying dangerous enterprise, but with these matters we have nothing to do but to obey. Thus saith the Lord is quite enough or ought to be for every Christian.

We are at peace here among ourselves though at war with all besides, and now that our Churches are multiplied, so that the numbers are better proportioned, while more errors are detected, more good is effected. Our Schools too are beginning to yield fruit unto God. The Church at Falmouth has recently dismissed 300 of her members to form a new church and I expect to dismiss about 200 others to form or assist another church. This will make the 8th draft in 9 years, a very fair proof of the falsity of the charge that we grasp after the multitude to obtain their money. When I came to this station I was the only miss^y in it of our denomination, there was no chapel, no school, no Bibles. In 10 years there have been erected 8 Chapels with nearly as many schoolrooms, there are 8 churches, 9 day and Sabbath schools, 5 Missionaries and 2 who regularly preach the word of life. I have now 5 day schools and 4 Sabbath schools and at the Sabbath school at Refuge we have seldom less than 500 children present. The salaries of all fall upon me and amount to full 900 sterling per annum besides all the other expenses connected with the carrying on of the work. Hitherto the Lord has helped us, and I hope will yet evince his amazing condescension in employing us in his service. I am now erecting the rooms for the students at the Theological Institution, and tomorrow the first applicants will be examined for entrance. We have some interesting young men, and my heart yearns over them with the fondness of a parent's heart. If I do but live to see them able ministers of Christ my heart shall rejoice, even mine. One of the native Baptists a Mr. Duggan has left to be present at the Anti Slavery Convention. He is I believe a good man, and I hope will not be either slighted or made too much of in England. Some of us are desirous in uniting with the best of the native Baptists, feeling assured that they are good men and I hope we shall be able to accomplish it.

That the God of all grace may abundantly bless you is the earnest desire of

Your affectionate Brother,
WILLIAM KNIBB.

The original of this letter, now in my possession, is in an excellent state of preservation. Charles Stovel, to whom it was written, became minister of the famous Baptist church meeting in Little Prescott Street, London, in 1832. Under his leadership new premises were erected in Commercial Street in 1854-55 and there Stovel continued to minister until his death in 1883. He was twice President of the Baptist Union and a notable protagonist of Nonconformity. He took a prominent part in the agitation for slave emancipation and was one of William Knibb's closest associates in this country. Some details of their first contact in 1832 are given in the writer's *Freedom in Jamaica*, 1946 edition, pp. 376.

Knibb was in England in the spring of 1842. He shared in the celebration of the jubilee of the Baptist Missionary Society and gave evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Commons on conditions in the West Indies. On his return to Jamaica, he found his wife in a serious state of health and in March, 1843 his little boy, Coultart, died. The child had been named after one of his colleagues. Knibb had already lost three boys. His daughters, Catherine and Ann, he had left in England. The opening part of the letter printed above is similar to one which Knibb wrote a little earlier to another English friend, Dr. James Hoby, part of which is printed in J. H. Hinton's *Memoir of William Knibb*, 1847, p. 455. Mrs. Knibb had left for England with her youngest child a few days before Knibb's letter to Stovel.

The letter is of special interest for the indications it gives of the sense of an impending change that had come over Knibb, his hints at a wider itinerating ministry which might include the projected mission to Africa, and the references to the establishment of Calabar College. A letter he wrote in July 1843 to Joseph Angus, then B.M.S. Secretary, speaks of a possible visit to America (see Hinton, *op. cit.*, p. 460). But Knibb became himself seriously ill in August. At the end of the year there was the excitement of the arrival of the *Chilmark* from England and her setting out again with the party of Jamaicans destined for Fernando Po. In 1844 conditions in Jamaica were very difficult and Knibb was heavily engaged in responsibilities of various kinds in the island. Early the next year he paid his fourth visit to England. It lasted from April to July. Within four months of his return to Jamaica with his wife he was stricken down with yellow fever and on November 15th passed away, at the early age of forty-two.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.