

The Union Church at Launceston, Cornwall.

III. JACOB GRIGG.

JACOB GRIGG was born in the parish of St. Stephen's by Launceston, Cornwall, on 19th June, 1769, where in the baptismal register is recorded: "Jacob, son of John and Mary Grigg, was baptised July 9th, 1769." The family had long been established, and there are records of it as far back as 1582, then spelt "Grigge". Other branches of the family lived not far away in the parishes of Warbstowe and Dunloe. A memorial tablet in St. Stephen's church records the generosity and worth of John Grigg—probably a cousin of Jacob—who was born in 1792, and died in Philadelphia, America, in 1864, having been shepherd, sailor, wool merchant, draper, shop-keeper and book-seller successively.

We do not know what led Jacob to turn from the parish church and become a Dissenter. But there was a new movement in the religious life of the land. Despite the exceptionally bad roads of Cornwall, George Whitfield had visited Launceston in 1750, and John Wesley was making frequent visits to the district. It was on St. Stephen's down that he had first preached in 1747, and the effect of his work was becoming evident when Jacob was a boy. As Jacob grew he would also know of the group of people who met for "religious exercises" in the parish of St. Thomas, at the foot of the hill on which St. Stephen's stands, looking across the valley to Launceston, then the county town, and he seems soon to have joined with them. In 1791, when he was twenty-two, he was one of the foundation members of the little Baptist Church which had separated from this group.

This church, with its membership of three women and eight men—two of whom were not long after to be removed from membership—began as a lively body. Thomas Eyre, brother to Rev. John Eyre (associated with the *Evangelical Magazine* and the London Missionary Society) was the leading figure of the church, and eminent in the life of the town. A month after the church had been constituted they "called our brother Jacob Grigg

in public work of the ministry of the Word of the Lord. . . . We believe that he is possessed of spiritual and natural gifts, as we have frequently heard him with pleasure and profit dispense the word of God among us. . . ." One of his natural gifts was musical ability. Keen's tune-book for Rippon's collection of hymns contains three of Grigg's tunes, and one of these, "Tiverton" (named after Rippon's birthplace), is still in use. This was in April, 1791. In August allegations were made against Grigg and Sarah Bounsall by Richard Dymond, who the following month "was excluded for speaking things to the Hurt and prejudice of our brother Jacob Grigg and Sister Sarah Bounsall." In January 1793, Grigg was registered (at the Quarter Sessions?) as the teacher of the Church, although no record of his ordination has been traced. The following May—in 1793, Grigg made a request "to go to the Academy at Bristol for a Term of one year for instruction, and then to return for to reside among us in preaching the Word as usual." This request they warmly commended to Isiah Birt, of Plymouth, who was frequently in contact with the Church, and in response Grigg wrote to them:—

"My Dear Bretheren,

"Sensible of my own weakness and Inability for such an important work, I desire to depend entirely on the Lord for Instruction and Strength, not doubting His aid and assistance to carry me through that Arduous Employ. I submit to your Desire and Request, and at the same time desire your prayers on my Behalf both as to my Conduct and in the Church and in the World, and on my Labours in the Lord amongst you—That this is my real desire, before God, Angels, and you my Bretheren, for your satisfaction I hereunto set my name this 26th day of May 1793."

There can be no doubt that at this time Grigg did in fact intend to return to Launceston and continue his ministry. If that had happened the future of the Baptist church there might have been altogether different. As it was, the church was to suffer the deep disappointment of losing his services, and finally to languish through the lack of adequate oversight. Although he never permanently returned to his home, he seems to have influenced his family with his own convictions, for in 1809 Joannah Grigg became a member of the Independent Church, while in 1810, John Grigg became a trustee for the new Wesleyan Chapel. Later, in 1888, Mr. James Grigg was actuary of the local savings bank, while A. H. Grigg, manager of another local bank, became through the marriage of his daughter, father-in-law to Dr. A. M. Chirgwin, who has rendered such valiant service for the London Missionary Society.

Jacob Grigg began his studies at Bristol in 1793, as the church minutes show. Once there, new influences would begin to affect

him. We cannot doubt the broadening of outlook that would come to this country lad, to whom Plymouth, twenty miles away, was probably the only town even infrequently visited. Added to this, the ferment of the new missionary spirit began to work in him; it might already have begun, for it was his older friend, Isaiah Birt of Plymouth, who had influenced Samuel Pearce. By the time Grigg reached the Academy, Robert Hall had left, but his influence lingered. The new head was Ryland, now about forty years old and one of the leaders of the recently-formed Baptist Missionary Society. Hall had taken a quite uncompromising position as to the duty of Christian men to participate in public questions and would have nothing to do with quietism. At Bristol, Grigg would also learn something of the slave trade, for the city took a prominent part in it, sending ships with cargoes of cloth and muskets which were traded favourably for slaves, who in turn were carried to the colonies and sold for profit, thus providing good cargoes of colonial products to bring back to Bristol. The trade was not popular with sailors, and in Bristol anyone with an enquiring mind would begin to learn the horror of it. The first movements against the trade were in fact begun in Bristol, where Thomas Clarkson and the group he led had been campaigning against it.

Just at this time, David Bogue, of Gosport, wrote a letter in the *Evangelical Magazine* wakening the missionary spirit; since Thomas Eyre, elder of the Church at Launceston, was brother to Robert Eyre, who had founded the magazine, it could hardly have escaped the notice of Jacob Grigg. In Pearce and Sutcliff, Bristol College had sons who were eager to support the Baptist Missionary Society. All this would play on the mind of the young man from the Duchy. He may, too, have heard of the missionary work being undertaken among Negro slaves in America, who had never heard the name of Jesus till they reached that land. Possibly he knew, too, about the new Sierra Leone company. He would know that the Western Baptist Association had passed a resolution against the slave trade, and was making an annual subscription to the society of Clarkson and Wilberforce.

While we can only speculate as to the factors which influenced him, Grigg made his decision not to return to Launceston, but instead to offer himself for service with the B.M.S. The Society was already contemplating the possibility of work in Africa, and in 1793 had considered a letter from a Negro minister, educated in England, but working in Sierra Leone—Mr. David George. At Sierra Leone, many years before, a group of escaped slaves had successfully defended themselves and built a settlement. In 1787 as a result of the pleading of Granville Sharpe, the idea of building a larger settlement there for ex-

slaves had been accepted, and despite difficulties the enterprise had been begun in 1792. Correspondence with the colony strengthened the mind of the B.M.S. to undertake their project. At this point, Grigg's offer of service came, and soon that of another young minister, James Rodway of Burton-on-Trent. The offers were accepted, and at the general meeting of the Society in Birmingham on September 16th, 1795, the two were solemnly dedicated to their task. The charge was given by Ryland, who bade them reclaim a savage people accustomed to the worship of idols and to enslave and sell one another to the more wicked and obdurate Europeans. They sailed for Sierra Leone on November 2nd in the same year, bearing with them a letter of introduction to the pastor there, David George. Search had also been made for a schoolmaster to accompany them, but in vain. How different the story of the B.M.S. might have been had Marshman volunteered at this stage.

The story of what happened at Sierra Leone makes sad reading; it can be reconstructed from letters reproduced in the *Periodical Accounts*. Three days after they landed the Governor called on them and "conversed very freely concerning the mission; assuring us that nothing should be wanting on his part to further the work." At his suggestion, and with the approval of Rodway, Grigg settled at Port Logo, a town about four miles up the river, while Rodway seems to have made his headquarters on the Isle of Bananas. Both these places were centres of the slave trade; this separation was contrary to the B.M.S. policy which was to send men in pairs. The Governor, Zechariah Macaulay, had had experience on a Jamaican plantation which had given him great sympathy with slaves. Unfortunately, just at this point his health gave way, and William Dawes, a former governor, had to take his place; the latter had come from the convict establishment at Botany Bay and was inhuman and inflexible.

Grigg soon met with strong opposition; through misrepresentation and malevolence the impression was fostered among the natives that he was there to take advantage of their ignorance. He was not the first to evangelise in this area; of 2,000 Christian slaves recruited by the British Forces in the American war, and subsequently liberated and settled in Freetown by Granville Sharp, half were members of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, and were vigorously preaching the Gospel. But the colony was predominantly Anglican, and Church of England chaplains were already at work. The solitary Baptists were despised. After a few weeks Grigg went back to Freetown for about six weeks, but found on his return that the natives continued to view him with distrust. Accordingly he returned again to

Freetown in despair, although "persuaded that nothing can frustrate the designs of God." He was able to take with him two children of the headman to give them some education, so he had at least some slight gain.

Grigg and Rodway were on good terms with the local Baptist church and its pastor, David George, preaching for him frequently and also preaching to the Methodists before their own chaplain came out to them. Grigg seems to have become quickly acclimatised, and after a few weeks wrote that he could "converse with the people of the Tammany country in their own language." He had good hopes of quickly being able to preach to the natives. Rodway on the other hand soon experienced ill-health and as a result of a series of fevers, was compelled to return to England. On reaching Bristol he was able to give a report of the work.

Left to himself, Grigg soon found himself in trouble. In December, 1796, after only eight months in the colony, he wrote of the sight on "Bance Island, on which there is an English slave factory, where hundreds of poor Africans are annually condemned to perpetual slavery, with all its attendant horrors." Another letter, written not long afterwards, tells of his good relations with the wife of the headman, and goes on to tell of her enlightened treatment of her slaves, who were chained and prepared for sale. "She always disowned that she had any part in the trade, and whenever one was brought chained to the house, she would come to me, and, knowing that I was an enemy to the trade say 'it is none of me, Mr. Grigg, it is none of me, it is Mr. T—'s Slave.'" Before long Grigg was embroiled in difficulties with the authorities of the colony. There is no reference to the root of the trouble—it is carefully avoided—but it seems clear that it lay in Grigg's opposition to the slave trade, which was the commercial foundation of the colony. Despite the ideas of the company, nearly everyone in the colony, Europeans and natives, themselves once slaves, possessed their own slaves. The climate undoubtedly contributed to this state of affairs, for no European could undertake any heavy work for long. Grigg was of a particularly sensitive nature, and would weep openly at the sight of the suffering. His house soon became full of native malcontents, and since he was already unpopular, the rumour spread that he was "going native."

The B.M.S. report on the affair is a lengthy one, and speaks of the disappointment which they felt about Mr. Rodway being small as compared

"with that which respects his colleague. It is with pain and grief that we inform the friends of the undertaking, that after all the encouraging appearances in Africa, a cloud has covered our affairs in that quarter, which threatens for the present a total suspension of

our labours. In the second letter that we received from Mr. Grigg we perceived that he had imbibed some prejudice against a principal person in the colony at Sierra Leone, who had treated him kindly while in England, and had shown much cordial respect to our society. We were at a loss to account for such a prejudice . . . we lost no time in writing to him . . . But it seems that, before our letters could arrive, he had acted with so much imprudence and embroiled himself in such unhappy disputes, that the Governor conceived it necessary to insist upon his leaving the colony . . . He may, ere this, have left Africa, and the mission in that quarter have, for the present, consequently terminated."

It seems that Grigg, under "house arrest," was given the choice of remaining at Port Logo, outside Sierra Leone, or of returning to England or going to America. The last course he chose, and left the colony with hardly a friend to bid him God-speed. He arrived at Norfolk, Virginia early in 1797. In England the B.M.S. reflected upon the strange providence whereby the apparently successful missionary was compelled by health to return home, but the man of good health "should incapacitate himself by the impropriety of his conduct. . . . While we utterly disapprove of Mr. Grigg's conduct, in interfering in concerns foreign to his mission, we cannot but entertain a hope that this painful event may be ultimately profitable to him." Since this event was based on his opposition to slavery, it did not prove profitable in the sense that the Society hoped, but was to be of great importance in determining his later conduct in America.

The subsequent story of Grigg's career in America can only be sketched, and often with serious gaps. But the minutes of Association Meetings help draw the main outlines. His first charge was at Court Street Baptist Church, at Portsmouth, Virginia, where he exercised a "public gift"—which may refer to his preaching ability, or be an allusion to the extreme powers of memory with which he has been credited. It is interesting to know that only a few years earlier this church had, in an emergency, called to be its pastor a former slave, Jacob Bishop, who had been able to buy his freedom. But his pastorate was not long, as one might expect with a coloured pastor at that time even though, as was customary, the church had a gallery for the Negroes. Grigg's arrival at a critical moment seemed providential. During his pastorate in Portsmouth, Grigg met and married a Miss Littlelike, who seems to have been a local citizen, and who outlived Grigg by a few years. Round about the end of 1798 he accepted a call to the church at Upper Bridge, in the south-eastern part of Norfolk County, but still in Virginia. Here he was breaking new ground, and like other evangelists would be travelling widely. As with Paul, he preached to bond and free, and not without success, for he secured the conversion of some 4,000 negroes in this district. Throughout this period he was

active in the Virginia Portsmouth Association, being one of their two representatives in 1798 at the meetings of the Kehukee Baptist Association. In 1803 he left Virginia to go to Kentucky, to the church at Mayslick, in Mason County. At this period there was a great movement of Baptists from Virginia over the mountains to Kentucky: life was rough; men and women alike dressed in leather or skins, living in the open-air, sleeping in log cabins with earth floors, and with rifles at hand in defence against animals and Indians. This was the period of the great Revival of 1800, which affected most of the states in the South and the West. It would be impossible for Grigg to remain aloof from the movement, although we do not know to what extent he was directly committed to it and to the extremes of religious excitement which accompanied it. Forty years later the church at May's Lick was the largest in the District.

Soon after this revival came the first distinct anti-slavery movement. No doubt the heightened religious consciousness of the Christian community and the new interest in foreign, as well as domestic, missionary work made many people acutely aware of the challenge of slavery. Already individuals had been agitating against it, such as Joshua Carman, who would not have any Christian fellowship with slave owners. In 1787 the Ketocken Association had declared that heredity slavery was a breach of the divine law and ten years later the Dover Association not only supported the Abolition Society's programme, but showed itself alive at least to the present evils. In 1804 a number of Baptist ministers started a crusade against slavery, and within a few years six Baptist Ministers in Kentucky had followed their example; one of these was Jacob Grigg. They came in for much attention, not all sympathetic, and their churches were opposed to them. In consequence they withdrew to a separate local association, curiously called "The Baptist Licking-Locust Association, Friends of Humanity"! The group was known for long as the "Emancipating Society" and held its first formal meeting in 1807.

There is no evidence to suggest that Grigg was at any other church than the one at May's Lick during his stay in Kentucky. The spirit of the day was unfavourable to the progress of the movement in which he took so prominent a part, and this probably accounts for his removal to Ohio in 1804. After he had left the May's Lick Church it returned to the Bracken Association. His stay in Ohio was brief. He lived in the town of Lebanon where one of his brothers had already settled. Here he opened a classical school, in which his unusual faculty for teaching must have served him well, for he obtained a high reputation as a scholar in all branches of English Literature, and from this

school came some who were afterwards to be distinguished citizens of the district. In addition he preached from time to time, though no evidence of a regular pastorate is forthcoming. Perhaps, too, Grigg was realising that as slavery was forbidden across the Ohio river, slaves could escape with aid! Such a movement in fact developed later, and was known as the "Underground Railroad."

In 1807 he paid a visit to his wife's widowed mother in Virginia, and was persuaded to remain there, moving to the city of Richmond, where he again opened a school and served the churches as a part-time preacher. His preaching was very acceptable, and a letter to him is preserved in which the writer declares roundly that a sermon Grigg preached at the previous association meeting "opened his eyes to seek and serve the living and true God." From 1809 until 1814, Grigg was active in the life of the Dover Association, as its minutes show, preaching for them in 1813. That year fell in the period of the war with England, and Grigg, with others, was charged with the responsibility for forwarding a resolution about National Prayer to the President. However embarrassing or painful it was to be an immigrant from England, he spent his time in most active evangelism. The following year he was again preaching to the Association, and such was the impression made that the sermon was ordered to be published. The records are lacking for the next year, so we do not know exactly how long before 1816 it was that Grigg moved to Philadelphia, a stronghold of Baptists, to become pastor of the Lower Dublin Church. We do know that he was one of the Virginian delegates to the Philadelphia meeting in May 1814 from which ultimately sprang the American Baptist Missionary Union, and that two months before this meeting Dr. Samuel Jones, pastor of the Church, had died. Some connection between the events seems probable.

After two or three years, in September 1817, he took charge of the newly-formed New Market Street Baptist Church, in Philadelphia. This church had been founded as a result of a division within the Second Baptist Church, arising from allegations made about its minister. Grigg took over the work as soon as he was called to it and supervised the erection of a church building, which was opened on the first Sunday of 1818. His ministry here was not a long one, and its end is obscure. The following year his name is not given on the Association Minutes, though there is no reference to his having been called elsewhere. Between 1816 and 1818 he seems to have taken a prominent place in the life of the Association, three times being the preacher at Recognition services. After that his movements are not known, although it is presumed that he returned to Virginia, preferring

its rougher life to that of placid Philadelphia. No trace of him can be found at all until 1834, sixteen years later when he is again at the General Association in Virginia.

A contributing factor may have been that for a period he fell under the influence of drink. It was not unusual for a minister to drink at that period and many church members drank spirits excessively. In his case he acquired the habit when a doctor prescribed spirits for a depressed condition. The habit gained control over him, so that at times he was discovered completely under its influence. Later in life he overcame it, and became a temperance advocate.

During this period he acted for a time as the agent for Columbia College, in Washington. Rev. William Staughton, who as a youth had been present at the meeting in Kettering when the B.M.S. was formed, was the first President of Columbia in 1819. He had been minister at Sansom Street, Philadelphia, while Grigg lived in that city, and in fact had preached when the New Market Street church was first opened and dedicated. This friendship probably secured the appointment for Grigg. Staughton died in 1829, and subsequently a Virginian college was founded on a farm (with farming as part of the curriculum!) near Richmond. It may well be that for much of this time Grigg had embarked upon an entirely itinerant ministry, somewhat like that of a man in the bush in Australia today.

Other movements had begun which must have given him a good deal of pleasure. The Free Baptists began their campaign against slavery, while the news from Sierra Leone was heartening; missionary work had been finally established there, principally by the Methodists.

In 1834 Grigg's name again appears in the minutes of the meeting of the General Association of Virginia as the representative of the Portsmouth Association (although he is not included in the appended list of ministers), but it is for the last time. The following year, on October 9th, 1835, he died in Sussex County, Virginia, being sixty-four years of age. He left the reputation of being an able preacher, but with little practical judgment; lacking social graces, he was yet a man most acceptable to his friends. In his first year as a missionary he proved as bold as Knibb. Without the glamour of a platform, he had proved equally tenacious and held on his course not for the twenty years in which Knibb laboured, but for twice that period; Grigg rejoiced at Knibb's success without living to see his own desires for the slaves' liberation realised.

Though few in this country know the story of the Cornish missionary, Jacob Grigg is still remembered in Negro circles in America. During the last war some coloured American soldiers

were for a time stationed in Launceston. While they were there, their chaplain, in conversation with Alderman Gregg and his wife, remarked: "I wonder if you are descended from a man called Jacob Grigg, who came from Cornwall to America many years ago, and is still remembered for all that he did for the slaves."²⁵

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²⁵ Material for the study of the life and work of Jacob Grigg will be found in: Minutes of the first Baptist Church at Launceston; *The Baptist Periodical Accounts*, Vol. I, No. II; "Jacob Grigg, Missionary," by Howard Grimshaw Hartzell in *The Chronicle* Vol. VI, 203 (The American Baptist Historical Society); Notes made by the late Dr. W. T. Whitley.

CORRECTION (see *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. xiv, pp. 152 and 157). Rev. K. E. Hyde writes: "I am grateful to Rev. C. E. Surman, of the Congregational Historical Society, for pointing out that according to the *Evangelical Magazine* (1834, 512) John Saltern, on leaving Launceston in 1872, entered Taunton Academy before settling at Bridport, Dorset, in 1786. He served this church until 1831 and died there in 1834. When he left Launceston, his brother accepted the oversight at once, although not ordained until 1790. (*Evangelical Magazine*, 1796, 45) Ronald Cope, minister of the Independent Church 1800-1820, should have been described as Richard Cope.

None Other Name, by A. S. Herbert. (Livingstone Press, 1s. 6d.)

This attractively produced little book of some fifty pages, in the "Broadway Books" series, consists of four lectures given at the London Missionary Society's annual conference at Swanwick, 1951. Professor Herbert's theme is that the missionary enterprise is an integral and inescapable part of the whole Christian revelation and that, therefore, total self-committal to God and His saving purpose is demanded from the redeemed community. The publishers have done well to make these interesting, enlightening and challenging lectures available to a wider public. Questions for discussion are included and, for church study groups this meaty little book—excellent value for the price—should prove admirably useful.