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THE REVEREND JAMES SEYMOUR, S. P. G.  
MISSIONARY IN FLORIDA

When the Floridas became English territory, in 1763, there was the characteristic effort to reproduce in the new province whatever the mother country deemed essential. In less than a year Anglican missionaries were on the ground ; and we find a record of nine clergymen "licensed to the plantations by the Bishops of London from the year 1745 inclusive".<sup>1</sup> Those missionaries of the Church of England, with the dates and assignments, were:-

EAST FLORIDA

John Forbes	May 5, 1764	St. Augustine
John Frazer	March 23, 1769	(not given)
John Leadbetter	Nov. 8, 1773	St. Augustine
John Kennedy	Dec. 24, 1776	St. Marks

WEST FLORIDA

Samuel Bart	May 5, 1764	Mobile
William Dawson	July 2, 1764	Pensacola
William Gordon	Aug. 8, 1767	(not given)
Nathaniel Cotton	March 2, 1768	(not given)
George Chapman	May 3, 1773	Pensacola

Just what was accomplished by these men has never been ascertained. The records of the Society for *the Propagation of the Gospel* have been searched in vain for their letters and reports.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps they were sent by the Bishop of London, independent of the Society. It may be noted that Mr. Forbes is mentioned as still residing in St. Augustine in 1771; and

<sup>1</sup> Fulham MMS., reprinted in Protestant Episcopal Collections, 1851, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. A. Macleod Murray of the Oversea Department of that organization is unable to vouch for the assumption that they were, S. P. G. missionaries.

the Rev. John Frazer is recorded as "Parson at Mosquito." There was a substantial church built at St. Augustine ; and "the first services - other than Roman Catholic-were held in the building which stood on the site of the Spanish bishop's palace. Later a church was built on George Street, of which Mr. Forbes was rector. Governor Grant presented the parish with a glebe extending from the gates of the city to the outer lines. A mission was established at Pensacola also."<sup>3</sup>

The *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*, that venerable organization which has carried the Gospel into distant lands for two centuries and a quarter, owes its inception to the desire to assist the



SEAL OF THE S. P. G.

A minister with an open Bible in his hand stands on the prow of a ship in full sail, making for a point of land on which there are people with arms outstretched. They are saying: *Transiens adjuva nos. (Come over and help us.)*

<sup>3</sup> E. Clowes Chorley, *How Our Church Came to Florida*. In *Spirit of Missions*, Feb. 1917, p. 123.

American colonists and make converts of the Indians. Its activities have broadened constantly. In the words of the late Bishop Doan of Albany, "S. P. G. is venerable and venerated the world over, because it has always listened for and heard the call, 'Come over and help us'; across seas, pathless until the mission-ship made a wake in them, glowing with other than the phosphorescent light of ordinary wakes, through wilderness, trackless until they were trodden by the feet of men shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace; and over continents whose primeval forests the missionary blazed with the Sign of the Cross."

It was in 1701 that King William III granted a charter to the Society ; it being represented,

That in many of our Plantations, Colonies and Factories beyond the Seas, the Provision for Ministers was very mean; and many others of our Plantations, Colonies and Factories were wholly destitute and unprovided of a Maintenance for Ministers and the Publick Worship of God; and that for lack of Support and Maintenance for such many wanted the administration of God's Word and Sacraments, and seemed to be abandon'd to Atheism and Infidelity.

From its beginning, the Society was most active in furnishing missionaries to the provinces. Nearly all the Church of England ministers in the Carolinas and Georgia, prior to the Revolutionary War, were supported or selected by the S. P. G. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and the New England colonies were liberally supplied by the Society.

Among the Society's missionaries in Georgia was the Rev. James Seymour, who was stationed at Augusta from 1772. He appears to have toiled diligently in his hard and exposed field ; but the beginning of the War brought personal trials, as his sympathies were with the British. He was imprisoned for a while ; then he went to Savannah (1780) as a refugee, without parish or stipend, and endeavored to support

himself and his dependent family by teaching school.<sup>4</sup> Eventually he made his escape to St. Augustine; and there officiated until the Spaniards took possession of Florida. Then he started for the Bahamas and died on his way, in 1784. Some references to his ministry in Florida have been discovered in the archives of the S. P. G.; and, as they throw light on contemporaneous history and give some insight into the struggles of a Tory missionary, they are now published:-

<sup>5</sup> A letter has reached the Society from the Rev. Mr. Seymour, who was the Missionary at Augusta in Georgia, from which place he was compelled to fly, after having sustained very grievous losses and sufferings, as hath been particularized in former Abstracts. He escaped to Augustine, from whence the letter is dated, and where he was the officiating Minister, and was to remain till the Spaniards should take possession of that place. He is entirely at a loss how to dispose of himself and his distressed family, but proposed to go to Providence, in the Bahamas, where he requests the Society to settle him, if there should be no other Clergyman there. But it is more than probable that St. John's is filled again by Mr. Barker's return; but the Mission at Harbor Island and Eluethera is open.

At the General Meeting of the Society, held November 21, 1783,

"The Committee reported that they had read the following letters to them referred:-

From the Rev. Mr. Seymour, dated St. Augustine, June 7, 1783; acquainting the Society that he is to do the duty in St. Augustine for the Honble: and Rev. Mr. Forbes during his absence, or until the Spaniards take possession of the Province. To Mr. Forbes and Sir James Wright, Mr. Seymour refers the Society for an account of his losses and sufferings, as well as the present great distress of himself and family.

The inhabitants of his Parish in Georgia, have lately wrote to him, proffering their services to have his name taken out of the Bill of Confiscation, if he will return and live among

<sup>4</sup> Sermon preached by Bishop Stevens at 50th Convention, Diocese of Georgia, 1872.

<sup>5</sup> S. P. G. *Annual Report for 1783*, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> S. P. G. Journal, Vol. XXIII, pp. 195-196.

them. He was much beloved by these people as a Clergyman; and nothing but the present unhappy system of politics could ever have induced him to leave them. He is much at a loss what answer to return them; and would have been glad of the Society's advice on the occasion. When he leaves St. Augustine, he intends to go to Providence, where, if no clergyman be already appointed, he requests the Society to nominate.

He has lately drawn for his half-year's salary, and hopes his bill will be duly honoured.

AGREED to recommend, that if Mr. Seymour shall repair to Providence, the Society will confirm him there with the continuance of his present salary for some time longer.

RESOLVED to agree with the Committee.

At the General Meeting of May 21, 1784,

<sup>7</sup> The Committee reported that they had read the following letters to them referred:-

From the Rev. Mr. Seymour, dated St. Augustine in East Florida, 14th February, 1784; acquainting the Society, that, Mr. Forbes, having found it necessary to go to Europe for the benefit of his health, he, (Mr. Seymour) remained to attend the cure of St. Augustine; which, owing to the great accession of Loyalists from the two Carolinas and Georgia, had turned out an exceeding hard one. Mr. Forbes, to whom Mr. Seymour had recommended the Society for farther information concerning him, is since dead; and since he left Florida, there has not been another Protestant Clergyman, of any denomination, besides Mr. Seymour, in all that country. A Dr. Turnbull, having, several years ago, carried out a considerable number of Minorcans to East Florida, as servants, a Roman priest attended them, who, being a very discreet and prudent man, has been much respected for his good conduct in Florida.

In his letter of last June, Mr. Seymour applied to the Society to be appointed to the Bahamas, if no other person had been appointed. He now repeats the request. His health has lately been, and, he blesses God, still is, very good: and as he has been used to a warm. climate, which now agrees with him, he dreads the severe winters of Nova Scotia.

While Mr. Forbes remained in Florida, he, (Mr. Seymour) frequently went to the more remote parts of the Province; and particularly, to a large Settlement on St. John's River.

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<sup>7</sup> S. P. G. Journal, Vol. XXIII, pp. 333-336.

The People were thankful for his services; and behaved to him with generosity. They invited him to reside among them; as he would have done, had not the Articles of Peace arrived, and put an end to all such hopes.

The Society's bounty, the Surplice fees, and a small benefit from the Garrison, have just enabled him to keep alive his unfortunate family. There seems not to be the least prospect of their ever receiving the least compensation from the Americans for the losses his family sustained among them: though the Inhabitants of his Parish have earnestly desired it.

The Spaniards are daily expected; as the Governor has officially given public notice of the emigration. Mr. Seymour finds it prudent and necessary to remain with the Governor and Garrison to the last.: and then to go to Providence in the Bahamas. Governor Tonym has always behaved to him with great attention and kindness.

Since the 8th of June, he has baptised 94 children; married 33 couples, and buried 47 corpses.

He has also attended several condemned criminals in the very hottest season of the year. That duty was very uncomfortable. The poor wretches appeared very penitent, and thankful for his punctual attendance.

AGREED that a gratuity of 30 pounds be granted to Mr. Seymour.

From the above we must agree that a foundation of the English Church existed in Florida, not without prospects of development. Seymour supplemented the work of Forbes ; later he succeeded him, thus becoming the only Protestant minister in the province. How much Anglicanism would have grown had it not been for the return to Spanish occupation, is matter for conjecture. But with the departure of the English, the missions of the S. P. G. in Florida came to an abrupt end. The church at St. Augustine was pulled down and the material used for the building of a Roman Catholic church. It is said, however, that one devoted family used the Common Prayer Book service privately for forty-five years.<sup>8</sup>

EDGAR LEGARE PENNINGTON.

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<sup>8</sup> Chorley, *op. cit.*, p. 124.