

WILLIAM KNIBB.*

THE author of this beautiful little volume has, from early life, cherished the warmest interest in the African race, and especially that portion which has been naturalised in the Island of Jamaica. Her sainted father was, from her infancy, a prominent member of the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society; and her home was the frequent temporary abode of its missionaries. Among them, William Knibb, when in England, was often a visitor. From childhood his person was familiar to her; and his accounts of negro slavery and its horrors excited her commiseration, while his passionate public addresses stirred her soul to its lowest depths. What wonder, therefore, that in the preface to her book she should say, "The first thought of writing an account of William Knibb had its birth in the Centenary year of the Baptist Mission. Not a word too much was said about Carey, but some of those who remembered the Jubilee meeting at Kettering, knew that Mr. Knibb, a Kettering man, had been on that occasion a centre of interest. It seemed a sad thing that one who had done so much for the sons of Africa should pass in any degree out of memory." Yet, very remarkably, at the CENTENARY celebration in the same town, the only mention of his name was in a few words by one who had the strongest reason for thinking that that name should never be forgotten.

The Memoir opens with Mr. Knibb's EARLY DAYS. These are narrated briefly, yet so as to enable the reader to see him as the boy, the man, and the young Christian convert, revealing in the buoyancy of youth the qualities which, by the grace of God, developed into the noble character that, in after life, fitted him to become the champion of Jamaica's freedom. In a few touching lines we are admitted into the sick chamber of his saintly mother, and, as she draws aside the curtain, and looks out from the window on this her second son, listen to the solemn farewell words with which she parted from him: "Remember, I would

* "WILLIAM KNIBB, Missionary in Jamaica." A Memoir by Mrs. John James Smith, with an Introduction by the Rev. J. G. Greenhough, M.A. London: Alexander & Shephard.

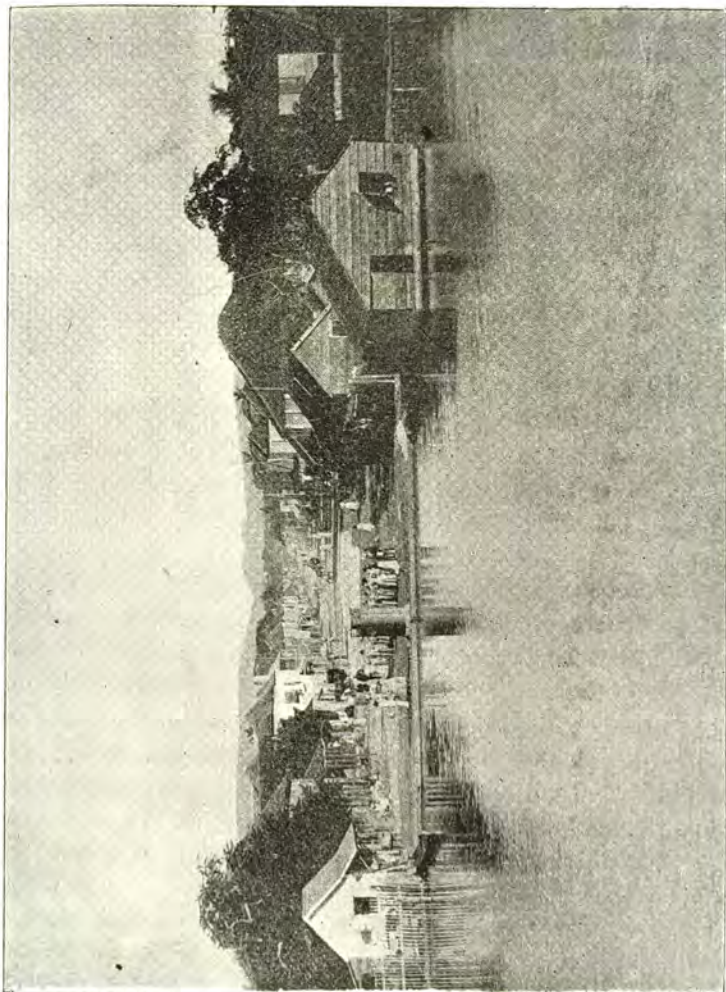
rather hear you had perished in the sea, than that you have disgraced the cause you go to serve."

The son, from whom this heroic, faithful, and prayerful mother was now separated, landed in Kingston on the 15th of February, 1825. The letter which he writes to her, while descriptive of the moral and spiritual degradation of those to whom he was sent with the light and liberty of the Gospel of the grace of God, seems in the latter part to have been prophetic of the distinguished share he was to take in their emancipation from the physical bondage in which they were held. Thinking most of the moral evil which slavery fosters, he says: "The cursed blast of slavery has, like a pestilence, withered almost every moral bloom. I know not how any person can feel a union with such a monster, such a child of hell. For myself I feel a burning hatred against it, and look upon it as one of the most odious monsters that ever disgraced the earth."

William having been sent out by the Baptist Missionary Society to succeed his brother Thomas, as a missionary schoolmaster, took charge of the school which the latter had conducted in the city of Kingston. There are one or two still living who have pleasant memories of his successor in this capacity. In the schoolroom William was at once at home, rejoicing in the joy of the "little dears," as he calls his sable pupils, "leaping for joy" on his entering it for the first time. He was equally at home in the playground, where he gambolled with them in their games, seeking to win their hearts to the Saviour by giving to them his own.

Mr. Knibb is mostly thought of with exclusive reference to his conflicts with slavery; the cruel persecutions he suffered; his heroic zeal, and his impassioned eloquence as the champion of negro freedom. But in this memoir of his life and labours we see with what whole-hearted earnestness he devoted himself to the higher and the spiritual objects of his mission. For nearly seven years we follow him quietly pursuing them, instant in season and out of season, teaching the young, preaching the Gospel, visiting the sick, ministering spiritual consolation to the afflicted. Beautiful are some of the pictures drawn by himself in letters which Mrs. Smith quotes. Among them the "Baptism at Port Royal," the death-bed of a Christian slave, and the service of prayer

and praise with a few poor slaves, at which they sang, "Come, let us join our cheerful songs," to a negro tune, in a negro hut. But during these very years, and among these very scenes,



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SAVANNA-LA-MAR.

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he was eye-witness to cruelties which required him to place the strongest restraint upon himself to suppress the burning indignation which was kindled in his righteous soul.

Slavery was rampant; and it was not long before Mr. Knibb and his brethren had to encounter its hostility. Our readers will find in these pages ample details of what the author aptly calls the "ERUPTION OF THE MORAL AND SOCIAL VOLCANO," the fires of which had long been burning. It has often been said that Christianity and slavery cannot long exist side by side. So it proved in Jamaica. Notwithstanding the extreme caution of Christian missionaries, not to assail and not to interfere with the hateful institution, the irreconcilableness of slavery and the Gospel soon became evident to the slaveholder. The Gospel, therefore, by any and every means must be extirpated, and the missionary who proclaimed it must be banished. The slavemaster threw down the gauntlet. The Gospel and the God that revealed it were challenged. There could be but one issue to the conflict. In narrating the events of 1830-32, Mrs. Smith's Memoir graphically describes it. The narrative indeed is given without bitterness, and with the calmness and impartiality of historic truth. The statements are vouched for by indisputable authorities, and Knibb and his brother missionaries received the most complete vindication from the vile accusations alleged against them.

The conflict was now transferred from Jamaica to Great Britain. To escape threatened assassination, commissioned by his brethren, Mr. Knibb with his family, on the 6th of April, 1832, sailed from Kingston to England. When the pilot came on board in the English Channel, he brought the news that the Reform Bill had passed. "Thank God!" exclaimed Mr. Knibb. "Now I will have slavery down. I will never rest day or night till I see it destroyed, root and branch." Soon after they landed the annual meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society was held, at which Knibb was appointed to speak. His speech at that meeting struck the death-knell of the gigantic evil he had determined to destroy. It was on the 1st of June. And from that day the freedom of Jamaica was secured. Our readers will find the thrilling details of the death-throes of slavery in the volume before us.

But the Act of Emancipation passed by the Imperial Parliament was not the only outcome of this hour of mercy. The chapels and mission-houses, which had been ruthlessly destroyed by the

infuriated pro-slavery mobs in Jamaica, must be rebuilt. Nor did Knibb and his brethren, Burchell and Phillippo, then in England, cease to agitate, nor did anti-slavery advocates cease their efforts,



FALMOUTH BAY AND TOWN.

until the funds for rebuilding them had been raised. In aid of the object £6,195 was voted by the Parliament of Great Britain, to which, in the course of a few days, the sum of £13,000 was contributed in voluntary offerings by the British public.

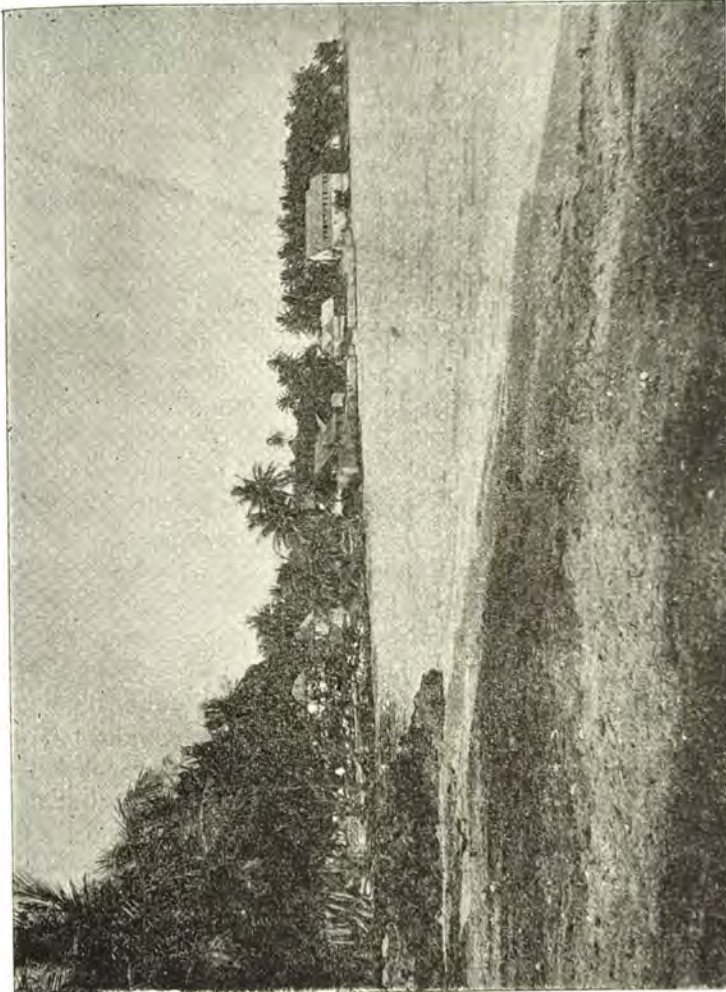
The chapels destroyed were Falmouth, Montego Bay, Sav-la-Mar, Brown's Town, St. Ann's Bay, Fuller's Field, and Octro Rios. The spacious and substantial buildings which replace them now stand as noble monuments of the anti-slavery enthusiasm and Christian zeal which the eloquence of Knibb in a pre-eminent degree had invoked. Having accomplished the purpose of his visit to England, he returned to Jamaica, October 25th, 1834, but too late for the day when the bondsmen exchanged slavery for apprenticeship. Yet the ever-memorable 1st of August was celebrated by assembled thousands with joy and gratitude. But Knibb's arrival had a joy and satisfaction of its own. Crowds of his people walked to Rio Bueno, the port at which he landed, a distance of twelve miles from Falmouth. On his landing some of them took him up in their arms. They sang, they laughed, they wept. "Him come; him come for true. Who do we come for we king? King Knibb; him fight de battle; him win de crown."

The hero of the day had now before him work which would tax his utmost strength. Falmouth chapel was in ruins; and first and foremost the new one must be erected: converts in large numbers were waiting for baptism; day and Sunday schools must be provided with teachers; and a multitude of other claims be met.

On the 1st of August, 1838, complete freedom was accomplished by the abolition of the apprenticeship system, which had in many respects proved more cruel and intolerable than slavery itself. Then the whole population of Jamaica was jubilant. To some of us the story of its celebration is as familiar as that of the emancipation of ancient Israel from the bondage of Egypt, but it may not be so to large numbers of the present generation. To such we earnestly commend Mrs. Smith's Memoir.

Space will not allow us to follow the narrative through succeeding pages, every one of which is replete with interest; letters to Mrs. Knibb and their children, to his churches, to his brother missionaries. It might seem to some, as Mrs. Smith remarks, that the complete emancipation of the negro would be the fulfilment of his labours. To Mr. Knibb it was the opening of fresh effort. One form of effort only suggested the necessity of some other. In addition to his own special burdens, he had on his heart the

care of all the churches. So it was that in almost every great emergency his brethren looked to him for help. Thus, as their representative, he made two visits to England between the time of



[photograph by Valentine and Sons.

RIO BUENO.

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his return to Jamaica and the date of his death. The instructive details of these visits are faithfully given in the work before us.

But fully to appreciate the outcome of such a life as that of William Knibb, we must look at the Jamaica Mission as it is at

the present time. Knibb, with Burchell, and Phillippo, and Dendy, laid the foundation of a work which has been well sustained by their successors; and to the goodly proportions in which it is still being carried forward Mr. Greenhough has given honourable testimony in his charming Introduction to the Memoir. Among the first to promote the settlement of free villages was Mr. Knibb, in which there are large and thriving communities. Mr. Greenhough testifies to the industry of the people, hundreds of whom he saw toiling early and late in a way of which no British labourer would be ashamed. He says the people have made great advance in both mental and moral qualities, and speaks of their strong sentiment in favour of education, and the laudable ambition to have their children raised in social status. "These pages," he says again, "show the profound interest which Knibb took in the establishment of schools. The happy results of his foresight are everywhere apparent. Nearly all our churches have their school-house and schoolmaster, and my visits to these schools brought me to the conclusion that the children are nearly as well taught, and perhaps more eager to learn, than in our Board schools at home."

"Knibb was equally solicitous about the training of a native ministry, and the institution of Calabar College was largely due to his efforts." "Two-thirds of the churches are now happily shepherded by men of their own colour," who were trained in it, "and this proportion is gradually increasing." "Two-thirds of the thirty or forty students are being trained as schoolmasters, the rest for ministerial work." It would be pleasant to quote at length from Mr. Greenhough's admirable Introduction, as illustrative of the results of the lives of Mr. Knibb and his coadjutors. His testimony to the spiritual condition of the churches is specially valuable. But lack of space forbids our quoting it.

Mrs. Smith's narrative closes with a tenderly affecting account of Mr. Knibb's death, and that of his faithful and devoted wife after some twenty-five years of widowhood. But enough, we hope, has been written to induce the readers of the BAPTIST MAGAZINE to purchase and circulate the soul-stirring memoir hereby commended to them.

D. J. EAST.