

THE LATE HON. S.T. CHRISTIAN, C.B.E., B.A., LL.M., Q.C., M.L.C.

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I think it was suggested that I put down something on paper about Sydney Christian not because there are not some who can speak with more intimacy than I of him but probably because there are not many whose paths have crossed his as persistently throughout the varied scenes of his career.

In my youth Sydney helped introduce me to some of the little Latin I know. With his help I learnt that Gaul was divided into three parts. Like Gaul, Sydney's life can be divided into three parts. The first part was in Antigua where he was born. His father, as many venturesome West Indians did in that day, had gone to seek his fortune in Panama. It was therefore Sydney's mother who had the brunt of the responsibility in raising the family and who exercised the chief influence on his upbringing. She was quite a personality - I know because I boarded in her home for several years. She was a Sankey-singing, firm talking woman who ran her house in kindly, if sometimes dictatorial fashion. She had certain simple rules which you were not expected to question: do your home-work; go to church on Sundays; wash behind your ears; put on clean school clothes twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. Like many men of achievement Sydney's formative years bore the strong influence of his mother. He went to the Antigua Grammar School at what probably was the golden age of that notable institution. Preceding him were a number of boys whose later achievement would have done credit to a school many times larger: the Malone boys, including Sir Clement; the Camacho boys, including Sir Maurice; S.B. Jones; D.C. Canegata; and then Sydney himself. He never won a university scholarship because in those days such scholarships were few and far between. He took the next best alternative. He studied for a London external degree and did, for those days in Antigua, the unheard of thing of passing. He got through in French by the resourceful device of visiting the children's play-ground every morning and there striking up an acquaintance with a children's French governess, one of the few people who could speak the language in English-speaking Antigua. He taught at his

old school for some years. Of the students who passed through his hands there was probably none who over the years spoke more unreservedly of the debt he owed to Sydney than Teddy Bell (later Chief Justice in British Guiana). There was probably none of his students of whom Sydney was prouder than Conrad Stevens, the eminent surgeon now in the Virgin Islands. During this period Sydney was in some ways rather overshadowed by his older brother - tall, handsome, debonair, a good slow bowler and better slip fielder. Sydney did not think that there was in Antigua at that time as much promise as his ambition sought. So he left his school and Antigua. On the speech day before he left the boys sang, as they ^{say} on other speech days, those verses from Ecclesiasticus beginning: "Let us now praise famous men". This was fair comment because he later became one of the school's most distinguished sons. He migrated to the United States where, at the end of the first World War, challenge and prosperity beckoned.

There began the second part of his life, a part that was new and different. He worked his way through college, became a lawyer and in a few years was one of the leading personalities in Harlem. He played a notable part in a most notable achievement by Negroes in New York in the 1920's, the Antillean Holding Company. Our paths crossed in New York in 1932 and it was impressive to see the respect with which the Counsellor (as they called lawyers there) moved in his adopted community. As successful as he was in his profession he decided, I think, that he did not wish his children brought up in the American atmosphere of the 1930's. So he took his savings, went to London University to gain a British legal qualification and returned to Antigua to start a law practice for the second time.

Thus began the third part of his life, a part that again was new and different. He did not have an easy time starting life afresh as a barrister-at-law in the Leeward Islands. Clement Malone was at the peak of his career as an advocate and Burrowes in Antigua had most of the chamber work under control. Changes came, as changes must, and after some years Sydney's practice became the largest in the Leewards. As his stature grew he became not only a Leeward Islands leader (Member of Legislative Council, Member of Executive Council) but a West Indian figure. He became a representative on meetings of

the Caribbean Commission but the West Indian association for which he will be most remembered is the University College of the West Indies. He was nominated to the College Council and remained on it longer than any other government representative. He sent his two boys to the College and often said that he could give no greater demonstration of his confidence in the institution. He secured Milneford scholarships for young Antiguan students to study at the College and was in large measure responsible for Antigua's making to the Princess Alice Appeal Fund a contribution per head higher than any other unit in the Caribbean, not excepting Jamaica or Trinidad. Finally, he was one of the three government members of the College Council appointed to make recommendations for a new Principal of the College and came a sick man to Jamaica in late February to participate in these important decisions. This must have been his last public act for he returned home and in a few weeks was dead.

Sydney Christian was a scholar and a rounded man. He had legal qualifications in two countries, and excellent qualifications in both. He was at one time prominent in politics but became an outspoken critic of the majority party and this in Antigua is a political misadventure. He was one of those rare people whose private as well as public life could bear scrutiny. He was plain-spoken, often too plain-spoken in private to encourage that intimacy which would have made him, to a large circle of friends, "one of the boys". In public he was too prone to call a spade a spade not to have made enemies. Because, however, his plain speaking was associated with a still more marked quality, integrity, this trait grew into one of his most respected virtues. When it will be forgotten what things passed him by because he refused to compromise his principles, his friends and foes alike will hold in lively memory those simple virtues which he possessed in such measure: forthrightness, integrity and generosity.

Because Sydney was a quiet and rather unobtruding man his stature was probably greater than either he or his contemporaries recognised. It would have warmed his heart to have known that when he was at the University College in February last the academic members of the College Council were agreed that if the University College of the West Indies were able to confer a Doctor's degree, he would have been a fit and proper person to be selected

to receive such honour.

As his career could be divided into different parts so was the man's life itself made of contrasting differences; an acknowledged statesman abroad who could not gain an elected seat at home; a plain-speaking, almost brusque, man who attracted much affectionate regard; a man who (having a large family of his own) dug into his reserves for their education and yet was prepared to dig still deeper to educate other people's children; born too early, he did not enter a university in his youth but lived long enough to be one of the architects of a place of higher education which "arising out of the West" would provide at home to the new generation privileges which he had had to seek abroad. It may well be that, increasingly, as the West Indies becomes more conscious of its past and present, the memory of this restrained, unobtruding scholar from Antigua will, because of the life he lived, honour and be honoured by his people.