

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF
SOUTH AFRICA.

No.

22 / 67

OFFICE OR INDIVIDUAL

From

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Confidential.

SUBJECT

TRISTAN DA CUNHA

Private memorandum furnished by
Rev. H.M. Rogers to Society for Propagation
of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

1925

29 June

PREVIOUS PAPERS

22/66

MINUTES

? To Min for information.

[Signature] 22/7

[Signature]
22/7/66.

Secretary to see this file 22/66.

See *[Signature]* d. 15.7.15.

SUBSEQUENT PAPERS

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were also assisted by Mr Gane's Fund, but that, in spite of this, I was obliged to sell my own household effects in England to cover the expenses of getting here and purchasing stores, (this was a hardship, though it could not be avoided, as we were newly married).

I regard the cost of bringing a missionary and his wife and family here, as almost prohibitive to private enterprise and seriously to be considered by any Church Society.

The missionary volunteering should be at once informed of all the difficulties, viz. a long wait for a ship to bring him, no certainty as to when or how he can be removed to return home, either sick or well, the very appalling bad conditions here (I have not stated conditions here spiritually, morally or mentally, which are depressing enough).

There is, of course, no doctor and the midwife is past her work and the people are ignorant on this matter. (This should be told to the missionary's wife).

As to the character of the people, - lying, thieving, quarrelling, are ordinary.

I write all the above as a private and confidential report for S.P.G. and not for publication.

(Sgd) H. MARTYN ROGERS.

The following confidential with other correspondence from Mr Rogers, was received at S.P.G. House on March 12th 1925, and would presumably have been written whilst Mr Rogers was still on the island.

A.S.B. 12.3.1925

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Conditions at Tristan da Cunha, as regards the life of the Missionary.

Conditions at Tristan da Cunha have all changed since

grumbling, as they found it a distinct hardship to get or spare the meat or potatoes, being often in want themselves. Milk, butter, fat of eggs, and often wood, were supplied either very short or not at all.

The Missionary ought to have enough stores to be independent of the people as they now feel it very difficult to supply his family needs. He should have stores for 2 or 3 years clear of all edibles, clothes, boots, and other ordinary necessities of life.

We suffered much inconvenience over our stores as the people being so poor and so short, begged much and some stole a deal off the ships each time our stores arrived. We were obliged to pay for any services rendered, or help as in washing cleaning, or any work done, in kind. Also we were expected to give present and share all our stores; consequently we went very short ourselves and suffered much hardship. This the missionary, unless very firm and hard, must expect. We could get nothing without giving or changing (i.e. bartering for it). I do not think it wise for the missionary's wife to be without an English companion-help, as we were. The island people are not to be relied on and the life is too hard and lonely as the people have quite a different outlook and interest and are no companions, nor do they understand English ways.

The missionary would have to provide wood and glass and all materials for a house as nothing left behind by the last missionary could be counted on for an instant. Nor should he count on any island things (i.e. butter, milk, fat, fruit, etc.) He must bring a new absolutely everything he might require, as schools books and materials, Church necessities, household furniture, bedding, crockery, lamp oil or candles, in fact simply anything and everything.

I may say that S.P.G. treated us most liberally and kindly in respect to a grant for passages and outfits, and we

had in trifling quantities. There are no green vegetables or fruit.

The winter climate goes as low as freezing point some days, and most days is below 50° F, but we or the people can have no fires, save only a small fire to cook by, when cooking, never all day or at night, as the wood supply is now short and hard to get at. We never got enough wood scarcely to cook by.

The drinking water is contaminated by animal excrement from geese etc. The whole island is swarming with rats and mice. Fleas, bugs and human lice abound. Fleas are everywhere. Flies (houseflies, and in the summer, bluebottles, are very troublesome.

The people are very unhygienic and insanitary in their ways. Refuse is always thrown about, i.e. fish and meat entrails, to be consumed by dogs and pigs, or to decay. This breeds smells and flies. They never bury any dead animals, but leave the carcasses anywhere to decay. The place is all over bones. They kill all beasts in the middle of the settlement, right alongside the houses. There are, of course, no sanitary conveniences. The people are primitive in this way. There is much overcrowding in the houses. Soap is so scarce that no one can wash or bathe; (there are no baths even for children). They wash by dipping their hands in cold water and wiping them on their clothes. Clothes are washed in cold water.

We suffered from worms and dysenteric diarrhoea constantly, so much, that I called it "Tristan sickness"; also worms caught from the bad food. The people have these diseases; also many suffer from rupture. Sores and festers are not uncommon at all times.

The people supplied us with meat, potatoes, milk and wood, in turns, each family taking one week. They found this a hard condition and after the second year, there was some

grumbling

the Rev. J.G. Barrow and his wife were on the island and very much for the worse.

No passing ships can be relied on to take or bring mails or trade with the island or supply any kind of stores. The whale ships no longer touch at the island as heretofore. The island is on no trade or passenger route. There are no chance ships: ships are never even sighted. Months, and even years, go by without a ship. The British Government does not regard the island as of any importance. War ships only call after intervals of several years, the interval between the visit of the "Dartmouth" and the "Dublin" was about three years. As I write, it is nearly two years since there was any mail or warship.

In consequence of this scarcity of shipping, there is great distress always on the island as the people are always in want of both food and clothes. The islands are quite unable to support the increasing population (now nearly 140 persons.) Potatoes - the one crop - fail two years out of three, owing to wind and rain and the very poor soil. For many months the people subsist often without any vegetables at all, on birds (sea birds), and fish and sea birds eggs. Often in the winter, for days and even weeks, no fish can be caught, so the people absolutely starve.

The live stock is getting few in numbers, poor, small, badly bred, often diseased. I do not regard much of it, pigs, sheep or cattle, as fit for human consumption. It would be condemned and not eaten anywhere else. In the winter months all live stock is poor; half-starved, and unfit for food. Many animals die. The milk is insufficient for the needs of the people. Often the cows are diseased and die. Many families own no live stock at all.

There is no fat in winter; butter we never get, and milk is bad and makes us sick. Dripping and lard are only to be

S.P.G. AFRICA SUB COMMITTEE. MARCH 24th 1925.

CONFIDENTIAL Memorandum from:-

The Rev. H. Martyn Rogers, recently returned from
The Island of Tristan Da Cunha, South Atlantic.

Mr Rogers was accepted by the Bishop of St. Helena in 1922 for the Mission on this island, which is in his diocese. News, was received on March 10th, 1922 that Mr & Mrs Rogers had been safely landed on the island. Only two important contracts have been secured since, viz: the visit of the Shackleton-Rowlett Expedition, "The Quest" in about April or early June of the same year, and the visit of H.M.S. Dublin (with the Bishop of St. Helena aboard,) in March 1923.

News was received at S.P.G. House from the Diocesan authorities, Capetown, on March 9th (letter, W.E. Ranby, Diocesan Secretary,) that Mr and Mrs Rogers, with their son, born on the island, arrived at Durban on a ^{Spanish} boat "Ramon da Larrinaga" and that their passages had been taken to England, on the Society's behalf, on SS. "Balmoral Castle", due to reach Southampton on Monday, March 16th. The following confidential memorandum to the S.P.G., with other correspondence from Mr Rogers, was received at S.P.G. House on March 9th 1925, and would presumably have been written whilst Mr Rogers was still on the island.

A.H.D. 12.3.1925.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Conditions at Tristan da Cunha, as regards the Life of the Missionary.

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UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.
Confidential.

RECD. G.G.O.
21 JUN 1925
22/67

DOWNING STREET.
29 June, 1925.

22/66

My Lord,

With reference to my despatch No. 130 of to-day's date, regarding Tristan da Cunha, I have the honour to transmit to Your Excellency, for the confidential information of your Ministers, a copy of the private memorandum furnished by the Reverend H. Mertyn Rogers to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which accompanied the Society's letter of the 20th March.

Memo.

2. Mr Rogers states that on religious and philanthropic grounds he hopes that the memorandum may not be considered to prejudice the idea of settling the people in South Africa. He does not consider them in any way undeserving of State assistance, but rather as a people much hampered by their environment, and capable, elsewhere, of improvement mentally and morally.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,

humble Servant,

GOVERNOR-GENERAL,
HIS EXCELLENCY,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE,

THE EARL OF ATHLONE, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., D.S.O.,
etc., etc., etc.

Isamery
Ministers ✓
Information
22/67
21 July 1925
ATHLONE