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# MINISTRY IN A WEST INDIAN TOWN

## John Law in Port of Spain

1845 - 1870

Port of Spain was the key strategic spot in Trinidad, the place in which the church might be expected to grow most rapidly, yet J. M. Phillippo, the Jamaica missionary, visiting the town for the Baptist Missionary Society in 1844, called it 'the very seat and synagogue of Satan, the ultimate emporium of commerce in this part of the New World'.<sup>1</sup> The church in Port of Spain had been formed by June 1843 by the first missionary of the BMS to be appointed to Trinidad, the former schoolmaster George Cowen.<sup>2</sup> Even before formally taking up his post, while awaiting instructions from the Society, Cowen had written that he was meeting privately with 'a few of our faith and order, who came from America', and who welcomed the prospect of a new mission.<sup>3</sup> By June the same year, Cowen was able to write:

A few members of baptist churches from America, and one from Sierra Leone, have united with me in church fellowship, and formed the first baptist church in Trinidad.<sup>4</sup>

It is probable that the members from America were the refugees, or their descendants, who had been settled in the Company Villages of south Trinidad by Governor Sir Ralph Woodford in 1815.<sup>5</sup> Some of the settlers had left their lands and drifted to the town for work. Cowen was not strictly correct in saying that the Port of Spain church was the first in Trinidad. The settlers included zealous Baptists who had founded churches; but by the time Cowen found them in the 1840s they were in a state of decay. At any rate the original nucleus of the Port of Spain church consisted of a varied group of people. Apart from the Americans and the person from Sierra Leone, there was a widowed business woman, Mrs Revell, who had been baptized, with her late husband, in London by Dr John Rippon. She had emigrated with him, first to Nova Scotia, then, about 1825, to Port of Spain. Mrs Revell, even after being widowed, had made many business trips to London and had used these occasions to plead with the BMS to begin a mission in Trinidad.<sup>6</sup> At the other end of the social scale was the former slave, Maria Jones, whose remarkable educational and spiritual progress so impressed George Cowen.<sup>7</sup>

This young church prospered. Cowen opened a preaching station at Corbeau Town, in a hired room where he preached four times weekly. Here he could make contact with the fishermen who worked on their boats in the Gulf of Paris. Cowen also preached to a crowd in the open air at six o'clock on sabbath mornings, and reported that 'they listened to the story of a Saviour's love with some interest'. At a second site at Newtown, about a mile out, Cowen preached once a week to 'a few who venture near'.<sup>8</sup> But Port of Spain was a 'benighted place', and Cowen reckoned that all that could be done for the moment was sowing, leaving others to reap later. Meanwhile, what was needed was faithful, patient people, and French and Spanish scholars who could communicate with the population. Cowen recommended going 'out of the track of regular and formal worship', and 'attacking boldly, in season and out of season'.<sup>9</sup>

Benighted it may have been, but the town was also the home of a large English suburban population, easily accessible and 'awfully destitute... of the means of Christian instruction'. The BMS representative, J. M. Phillippo, urged the purchase

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of the premises previously owned by the Mico Charity, for which Cowen had worked as a schoolmaster, and noted that 'several respectable and influential individuals' had already contributed sums to Cowen for the erection of a place of worship.<sup>10</sup> Thus mission premises were acquired for Trinidad, at the considerable cost of £1,220,<sup>11</sup> in accordance with the BMS decision to use the special Jubilee Fund of 1842 partly for the extraordinary expenses of new fields.<sup>12</sup> The new church, then, got off to a good start, having local supporters in membership, opportunities of working among the English expatriates as well as among the poor, and enjoying financial help from the influential. When Cowen left, to work for the remainder of his career among the Company Villages, a church of fifty-one members had been formed,<sup>13</sup> with out-stations around the town, and with a number of schools in operation.

This was the town, and the church, in which John Law was to spend his entire missionary service. Law had been trained at the Baptist Academy at Bradford and was accepted for missionary service during his time there.<sup>14</sup> On Wednesday evening, 10th September 1845, he was ordained and set apart for the work of the BMS in Trinidad, at the South Parade Baptist Church in Leeds. The formal account of this event records that the prayer was offered by James MacPherson of Bramley, that Mr Saffery gave an address about Trinidad, that Law made the customary statement of his call, and that the ordination prayer was offered by Mr Giles, the minister of the church. The new missionary heard 'a most impressive and affectionate charge' from Mr Acworth, his tutor at the college.<sup>15</sup> Despite the prominence of some of the participants,<sup>16</sup> the event does not appear to have made much impression on South Parade. There is no record that Law had ever been a member of this church, and no note in its Minute Books of his ordination. It seems that John Law set out for Trinidad leaving his wife at home. The Minute Book does record that 'Samuel Stafford, Sarah Stafford, and Mary Ann Law (late Stafford, Daughter of the above, and now the wife of John Law, who has recently left this country as a missionary to the Island of Trinidad) were admitted members, being dismissed to our Fellowship from the Baptist Church at Wakefield'.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Cowen was fretting to get his new colleague out to Trinidad. 'I am sorry brother Law has not yet made his appearance, although I trust he is now on the way...', he wrote.<sup>18</sup> But Law had arrived by December, if not earlier, and we get a glimpse of the new missionary acclimatizing himself in the new environment and new culture, making himself at home in what was to be his life's work. In June 1846 he wrote:

I now feel entirely at home in my new field of labour. At first I felt confused and bewildered. Every thing was strange. Now, however, I see my work, see my difficulties, and feel my way, and I can in the strength of divine grace say, 'through Christ I can do all things'. My labours are occasions of unmingled delight. My brother Cowen having gone to labour in Savannah [sic] Grande, the whole work in Port of Spain and neighbourhood entirely devolves upon me. Though I have sometimes nine meetings in the week, my health and strength are good. Some of the stations promise to bear fruit not many days hence.<sup>19</sup>

This health and vigour had been preceded by a serious bout of illness during the preceding December and January, shortly after Law's arrival. On the 5th January 1846 Cowen had reported that Law was recovering from a severe attack of dysentery fourteen days previously and had been confined to bed ever since. Drs Anderson and Vanburen were still attending him and predicted a speedy recovery. Cowen himself

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was confined to bed in the next house, unable to give him any assistance, 'which was a source of grief' to him. But Law was not uncared for, having many kind friends, in addition to Mrs Law, who, it seems, had not been long behind him in coming out to Trinidad.<sup>20</sup>

The illness over, John Law went back to work. In the letter of June 1846, already quoted, he reported that he had baptized three persons, and added them to his little church. The last of these (baptized the Sunday previous to his letter) was Mrs Tutelby, daughter of Mrs Revell.<sup>21</sup> In the early years of his ministry, the church grew rapidly. Membership reached 117 by 1849, an increase of 66 on the figure for 1843. In February 1853, the stone-laying of a new building took place, the new chapel being opened for worship the next year.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in the years 1843-1848 five chapels and schoolhouses had been established, the four schools containing 180 children. By the end of 1847 four churches had been formed, numbering 76 members, increasing the following year to 96. By 1849 the number had risen to 167, according to D. J. East, though this figure appears, in context, to be inclusive of the central church and its outstations in the suburbs.<sup>23</sup> These outstations were Corbeau Town, where Cowen had established a preaching place, Garcia's Barracks, Dry River and Cocorite.<sup>24</sup> At the main church Law's public services were well attended, the place of worship being generally filled; but Law was much discouraged 'by the apparent want of labour, and the low moral state of the people round him', although he found his spirits refreshed by a visit to the Savanna Grande or southern, Compagny Village churches.<sup>25</sup> One would have expected the slow pace of these country churches to have been depressing after the rapid expansion of his own congregation; but perhaps the break from the town was what he needed. But the impression of a growing church in the town is confirmed by the remark of George Cowen and his wife, arriving back after some months in England:

We were delighted beyond measure to meet our beloved friends, Mr and Mrs Law, in tolerable health, and the town congregation encouragingly increased since I last saw them.<sup>26</sup>

The growth continued slowly. It was reinforced by individuals like the young man who appears to have escaped from slavery in America, whose baptism was reported, the candidate having 'given us every evidence of being a subject of divine grace'. He had not been able, when he arrived, to read a word, not so much as the alphabet, so Law thought; but in the Baptist schools he had learned to read the Bible well and was teaching a New Testament class in the sabbath school. He conducted family worship daily in his father's home and, though only a poor apprentice, would now and then bring Law a dollar 'to help the church'. He also encouraged others to come to the church. There were others like him in touch with Law, who therefore felt 'more than formerly encouraged in the work of the Lord'. There was a steady, if not daily, increase in numbers, and attendances at the 'sabbath school' had also increased.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from this trickle of individual additions to the church, there was at one point the reinforcement of a corporate group of Protestant refugees from Madeira, who had fled from religious persecution in their homeland. Sympathetically received in Trinidad, some of them stayed with the Laws in the Mission House as their guests. Seven of the group were baptized and joined the Baptist church, but by 1847, a year after their arrival, most were formed into a separate congregation under William Hewitson, their minister in Madeira; later they were led by Mr Vieyra. Law, however, used to preach to some sixty persons in Portuguese, after the English sermon on Sundays.<sup>28</sup> Presumably he learnt the language from his guests in the

Mission House, for it is hard to imagine that he had emerged from the college at Bradford with a knowledge of Portuguese.

Another group of immigrants around Law's stations consisted of the free Africans brought into the island after Emancipation. They lived around the Dry River chapel and school, having abandoned estate work as soon as they could and settled on plots to which they had no legal right. The BMS Secretary, E. B. Underhill, visiting the area in 1859, noted that in this part of the town many African usages had been preserved. These were squatter communities, housed in rough accommodation of mud and thatch, and 'among them is a large shed, devoted to night dances, and to the noisy music of banjo or drum. Drunkenness is prevalent; the rum shop is their bane and their ruin'.<sup>29</sup> What impact the Port of Spain church ever made on this rough area is unclear; there is no record of any member recruited from this district.

Law found work also among a third group, who, though perhaps not technically immigrants, were said to come for the most part from Sierra Leone. These were the soldiers of the West India Regiment, who were normally stationed in Trinidad, though recruited in Africa. Some thirty of them attended the 'Sabbath School' Law held on Sunday afternoons. Here they studied reading, some just beginning, while others were capable of reading well. Communication with them was not easy: they came from a variety of tribes and had no common language. Law used to hold services for them in the barracks during the week, and found these well attended.<sup>30</sup> Underhill found himself helping the soldiers in the Sunday class to pronounce 'the words of Holy Writ', and noted that the barracks services had the strong support and backing of their Commanding Officer,<sup>31</sup> who doubtless found it convenient to have his men taught English, whether or not he supported the missionary cause for other reasons.

The Port of Spain church was still not large, a mere enclave of evangelicals in a largely Catholic town. Underhill gave the membership as fifty-eight, of whom about fourteen or fifteen were of Portuguese descent, the rest, with few exceptions, natives of the island, either of English or African descent. Law's congregation varied with the season, but averaged about eighty.<sup>32</sup> Membership seems not to have touched the Spanish or French-speaking majority at all. Neither was there any outreach towards the East Indian labourers then being imported into the island. It is just possible that some contact was being made with the small Trinidad Chinese community, for there seems to be a reference to the marriage of a Chinese lady, shortly after Underhill's visit, in the BMS minutes.<sup>33</sup>

The heterogeneous population of Trinidad can never have been easy to reach in such a way as to weld them into a united multi-cultural congregation. With the English, the Africans and the Portuguese, Law had done very well; and yet in a sense the church was marginalised. Law, who could preach and write in Portuguese, never spoke French, the language of the majority. Underhill, in 1859, had asked Law to employ a colporteur or scripture-reader, with the implication that this person must speak French. Indeed, so far as Underhill knew, no Protestant missionary in Port of Spain was French-speaking.<sup>34</sup> Here was an obvious source of weakness and limitation in the mission: the majority language was left to the Catholics, though in time English came to displace French.

Law himself was conscious of his limits. In the years during which he had to supervise both the church in Port of Spain and its stations, and cover the Company Villages in the south, between the death of Cowen in 1852 and the arrival of W. H. Gamble in 1856, the work and the climate told on his health. His appeals to the Society for two missionaries to be sent out, one to be entirely devoted to the French and English population, became urgent,<sup>35</sup> but no multi-cultural or multi-lingual

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mission ever developed.

Despite its small membership, the church had outgrown the original building, which was simply the lower storey of the missionary's house. A new building was therefore put up next to the residence, a stone-laying ceremony being held on 7th February 1853. Lord Harris, the Governor, performed the ceremony. Law opened proceedings by saying that the new building would enable the congregation to worship without interruption, the former buildings having been right on the public street. He also announced that 1,200 dollars had already been raised towards the cost by the congregation and their supporters. On this subject the *Trinidadian* newspaper remarked: 'We hope the example set the public of erecting places of worship by voluntary subscription alone, will not be without influence on the community'.<sup>36</sup> The new chapel had cost some £1,000, of which the BMS had given £150 in two or three grants. The contributions of the congregation were expected, Underhill reported in 1859, to pay off the outstanding debt of £150 in two years, or three at the most.<sup>37</sup>

The BMS Secretary ended his remarks on his visit to Port of Spain with a tribute to the 'active and laborious life led by Mr Law', and with rejoicing 'at the high esteem in which he is held'.<sup>38</sup> It appears, indeed, that Law had a reputation for being too busy even to write home. The *Missionary Herald* editor chided him:

Mr Law's letters are always brief. But he is always at work. Unless he has some very special and stirring news to tell he does not feel disposed to write. Yet a missionary's tale of long continued labour without apparent fruit is instructive, and not only excites sympathy but *may stir up many hearts to pray*.<sup>39</sup>

Some years after this Law seems to have earned a similar reproof and replied:

It is indeed a long time since I had the pleasure of writing to you, but my silence has not been the result of negligence or of want of love to yourself and the blessed work in which we are engaged. Lately I have been fully occupied in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am preacher, schoolmaster, and printer, or any thing, as the case may require.<sup>40</sup>

This active missionary was grateful to receive some relief with the arrival from Demerara of a young schoolmaster and his wife, who had come at Law's request. The couple, Mr and Mrs Best, were baptized Christians and had already taught in a school in Demerara for some years. Mr Best had taken charge of the Dry River school and had built up a good attendance there. He also served as a local preacher at Cocorite on the Sunday morning, and ran the Sunday School in the same place. Law commented that Best's assistance was of great value to him on the Lord's Day:

Formerly my work on the sabbath was killing to the body, and now I have as much work as I can undertake with comfort. I still have every Sunday three preaching engagements, two in English and one in Portuguese; but the whole of the afternoon, I have for the Sunday School, which is a source of great delight.<sup>41</sup>

One occupation which took up Law's time was printing, an activity started immediately on arrival, if indeed he did not take over a press from Cowen, for it is said that a poem entitled 'The Baptism' was printed in 1845, on paper made of plantain leaf; and that Law used his press and plantain leaf paper to provide hymn

sheets for his Portuguese congregation.<sup>42</sup> At the time when Law was apologising for his long silence because of pressure of work, the press was giving him trouble. At the end of November 1848, however, he reported that it was in order again and that a young man had been printing on it constantly for the last three months. By then Law had produced a Portuguese hymn book, and had started his series of 'Trinidad Tracts'. The sixth of these was just off the press: all of them treated of 'popery', which Law described as 'the great curse of this land'. Among other productions Law had just written and published his first letter addressed to the Roman Catholic bishop of Trinidad, exposing the 'fearful errors' contained in a catechism the bishop had caused to be circulated among his people. It was Law's aim to fulfil his obligation to preach the gospel 'to all to whom I can have access either by the living voice or the press'. But printing was costly not only in time but in cash; that year (1848) Law had spent 50 or 60 dollars on printing, and had received money locally only from a Portuguese Christian and an African brother, whose total gifts amounted to four dollars. Law, therefore, sent home copies of the printed tracts in the hope that friends there would give towards the necessary funds.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, Law printed a new and enlarged edition of the Portuguese hymn book, which had been readily bought by the people. The profits of this, 20 dollars, had been used to buy more printing materials and to publish some new tracts, one of which he sent with his letter reporting this.<sup>44</sup> Ten years later he was still publishing tracts and a hymn book (the latter may have been in Portuguese or English); the arrival of his sample copies and a report on his work is noted briefly in BMS minutes, with no comment.<sup>45</sup>

The effectiveness of Law's tracts is hard to assess. The tracts deal competently but with no special originality with the common topics of debate between Catholic and Protestant. They cannot have had a very wide circulation, given the limited literacy of the time and place. Moreover, the Catholics for whom Law's arguments were intended were more likely to read French than English. Perhaps the Tracts were more successful domestically, serving to confirm Law's own flock, and the congregations of his Protestant missionary colleagues, in their faith.

It is clear from his constant harping on the evils of 'popery' in the Tracts that Law was fiercely opposed to the dominant Catholicism of Trinidad. Possibly he was too fierce; at any rate the BMS offered some advice to him in respect of his speaking or writing, or both. What that advice was is not too clear, but Law responded:

Your letter dated the 12th Sept. is now before me. I have read it again and again with much pleasure, and I trust with profit. I feel that I greatly need the council [sic] you tender. I am deeply impressed with the importance of the topics you name, as the most befitting themes of the ambassador of Christ in a country like this. I hope, if my life is spared and grave given me for another year, to present these topics to the people here in as simple, impressive, and scriptural a form as possible.<sup>46</sup>

Without discovery of the letter Law had received, there is no very firm interpretation one can put on this. It does, however, show that Law's writings were being looked over critically and helpfully by the secretary, Joseph Angus.

The climax of the conflict with the Catholics, or at least the most dramatic manifestation of it, occurred in 1851. Cowen, Law's colleague in the south, visited him and found that the Catholics were planning a 'jubilee' that year, in connection, Cowen thought, with the appointment of their archbishop. The church planned to erect a 'Calvary' on a hill just east of Port of Spain, to which pilgrimages could be made, 'without the trouble and expense of visiting the Holy Land'. On 27th July that

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year the jubilee was introduced by the Abbé Poirier to his congregation, and their aid was sought to level the ground for the 'Calvary'. According to Cowen, those who helped would earn a 20-year indulgence. Some two or three hundred people assembled to qualify for this. When they had been at work for two or three days, Cowen and Law together visited the site, well provided with tracts, which many people were willing to receive. The white owner of the site and a coloured man who seemed to be overseeing the task were 'mortified' to observe people leaving the work to get tracts. They told Cowen the missionaries were not welcome. Cowen, however, found many of his former school pupils among the crowd. When the tracts had all been given out, Cowen and Law sought to leave but were mobbed by a rabble led by two or three white youths, whom Cowen thought to have been instigated to this by the Catholic leaders. The trouble was stopped by 'a man of influence', who regretted what had happened, though a Catholic himself. Cowen at least had the grace to admit, in his account of the incident, that perhaps Cardinal Wiseman might have suffered similarly at the hands of a Protestant mob in Westminster, if he 'had put himself in the way of it as we had done'.

In due course a huge wooden cross, well banded and bound with iron, was erected on the mount, and a procession of Catholics, led by the archbishop and his clergy from all parts of the island, came to the place 'to worship the image they had just made and set up'. A book of prayers was published by the archbishop for the occasion. Within a day or two of the setting up of the cross, though, a stroke of lightning had struck it and shivered it to pieces - 'an unmistakable expression, I am led to think, of Heaven's resentment of their God-dishonouring absurdities'. This was an unusual event to happen in Trinidad, and Cowen, while admitting that such things could occur by natural processes, reported that some Catholics attributed the breaking down of the cross to Law's prayers. In Brother Law, wrote Cowen, the Catholics find 'a determined enemy to their mummery and nonsense', and added, for good measure:

God grant that all his prayers, and the prayers of all true Christians for the downfall and destruction of popery itself, may prove equally efficacious as in the case of its symbol.<sup>47</sup>

Cowen's report of this story leaves little room for doubt of his, or Law's, attitude to the Catholics. The dominant place of Catholicism in the religious life of the island was always a trial to the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, who were excluded in this period from government support. The fierce polemic of Law's tracts (No.I - 'The Sufficiency of the Bible', No.II - 'Infallibility') and Cowen's (No.XIX - 'The Temporal Supremacy of the Pope') reflects the sense of grievance in the hearts of Protestant Dissenters against the Catholic Church. It is also likely that the ferocity of tone reflected the so-called "Papal Aggression" of these years 1850-51, following the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain. Cowen's own account of the 'Calvary' incident referred to the possible mobbing of Wiseman, the Catholic cardinal whose flamboyance and tactlessness had stirred up so much resentment against his church.<sup>48</sup> The editor of the *Missionary Herald*, in introducing Cowen's account, told his readers that 'popery' had attempted an 'aggression' in Trinidad on the Protestant part of the population.<sup>49</sup>

Law was also responsible for supervising the Baptist schools in Port of Spain, which he had taken over from his predecessor Cowen. Like the other missionaries he favoured secular education, such as was promoted by Governor Harris through his Ward Schools. To break down the sectarianism so rife in Trinidad, Lord Harris proposed to teach only secular subjects in the government-run schools and to leave



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religious teaching to the churches and the home, thereby, he hoped, promoting goodwill, uniting society, removing divisions between rich and poor, Christian and heathen, Protestant and Catholic.<sup>50</sup> These well-meaning ideals did not work in Trinidad, for they ran counter to the ideals and principles of the churches, especially the entrenched Catholic majority. Because the administrative capacity was not available to make purely government schools work in many areas, it was probably inevitable that in the end the island returned to a system of 'dual control' of education, in which aided denominational schools played a leading part.<sup>51</sup> Governor Arthur Gordon resolved the conflict in 1870 with the advice of an Irish school inspector, P. J. Keenan, whose investigations led him to recommend a return to the denominational system. John Law appears on a committee formed to draft suggestions whereby denominational and government schools could be founded simultaneously.<sup>52</sup> When the Educational Ordinance of 1870 was proposed, Law was found opposed to it and represented the English-speaking opposition at a meeting held in the Greyfriars (Scottish) Church in the town. From this meeting came the formation of an Education League, to procure for the Ward School system of secular schools a fairer chance than it had yet had; to watch the working of schools founded under the Ordinance of 1870; and to draft an Education Bill for the Legislative Council to provide for School Districts and School Boards, National Rate Schools, and to regulate the funds and powers of the education committee.<sup>53</sup>

Preaching, pastoring and education did not prevent Law from attempting extension work. In 1868, two years before his death, Law made a boat trip to Carenage, eight miles from Port of Spain, to preach. It had been a good week and Law had been cheered the Sunday before his journey by larger than usual attendances and by 'the felt presence of God in our midst'. On the Monday, the day of the visit to Carenage, which had been requested by two inhabitants of the village who came to his church, Law found that nearly the whole community had come to hear him. He was received most gladly and preached three short sermons, with much singing and many prayers, the people listening intently and requesting another visit. On this occasion he had taken his wife and family with him: Mary Law was a great help on these 'missionary excursions', as she was able to lead the singing. In the same letter Law reported that he was dealing with five enquirers who had come to him to converse 'about divine things'; this, too, had cheered his heart.<sup>54</sup>

It did not always go so well. For reasons that are obscure, Law experienced some dissension in his later years and:

on account of dissatisfaction with some acts of the Pastor, the greater portion of the better off and influential members withdrew themselves and went over to Greyfriars.<sup>55</sup>

The actual cause of these defections was apparently something Law had done to offend the better-off part of the congregation. It is hard not to suspect that Law was more radical socially than some members of the church, especially perhaps the English expatriates or creoles. J. H. Poole, Law's successor this century in the pastorate of Port of Spain, wrote that 'Mr Law was blessed with a considerable congregation of intelligent and well-to-do people',<sup>56</sup> but says nothing about any of these leaving. One cannot help but notice, in reviewing Law's work, the emphasis he seems to have placed on pastoral work among the refugee (and presumably poor) Portuguese Protestants, on the illiterate soldiers from Africa and on the outlying stations and slums. To combine this kind of ministry with the support and loyalty of the wealthy is not always easy. Like most ministers, Law may have made misjudgments. Perhaps this is what Inniss was hinting at when he remarked: 'If he

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[Law] did wrong he was sorry for it and did his best to remedy it. What more can any man do?<sup>57</sup> Inniss clearly did not think Law had done much amiss:

My recollections of Mr Law are very kindly ones. He was of a kind and generous disposition and very fond of young people, whom he sought, by kind word and faithful teaching, to lead into the right way, and he was much beloved by them.<sup>58</sup>

As a deacon of the Port of Spain church of later days, Inniss was in a good position to know.

John Law practically wore himself out in the service of Trinidad Baptists. Not only did he have sole pastoral responsibility for the main church and its offshoots and schools and a wider ministry in the community, seen in his educational work, but from time to time he had to visit and take charge of the southern churches too. Four whole years, from Cowen's death in 1852 until Gamble's arrival in 1856, passed with no resident missionary in the southern district, and Law had to cover for the vacancy. It was obviously an impossible task and Law had to beg the Society for help. Even the travelling was a problem; the villages were then remote backwaters, accessible only on horseback or on foot.<sup>59</sup> At least it can be said that Law's contacts with the south were encouraging. In 1848 he was able to meet with twelve entirely satisfactory baptismal candidates at Indian Walk Church, where the black settlers' leader was William Hamilton, survivor of the original group of ex-Marines placed in the villages.<sup>60</sup> To Law we owe the information that Hamilton had been flogged, as a slave in America thirty years before, for conducting a prayer meeting with his fellow-slaves.<sup>61</sup> To Law, also, we owe an account of the result of the work of his late colleague, Cowen:

I have just returned from visiting our stations at Savanna Grande. At all those where there is a church the work of God seems to prosper. At the Third Company, New Grant, and Montserrat, there are interesting little churches and every appearance of an abundant harvest. The precious seed which our dear brother Cowen has sown and watered with many tears is springing up and bearing fruit to the praise and glory of God ... These are the fruits of brother Cowen's labours...<sup>62</sup>

For the last fourteen years of his service Law's colleague was W. H. Gamble, who had been converted under his ministry in Port of Spain and had been brought up in the town.<sup>63</sup> It must have been a shock to Gamble when Law died, suddenly, in March 1870. Law had preached as usual on Sunday, had gone visiting on Monday, and was taken ill about 7.00 p.m. on Monday evening. The doctor had been reassuring but Law continued to be in pain. The doctor was sent for again but arrived to find his patient already dead. The cause of death was said to be 'malignant fever', coming upon a constitution already debilitated by long residence in Trinidad. His widow was in a state of distraction; she had three young children. Gamble had come up to Port of Spain from the south by boat for the funeral, which took place at 5.00 p.m. of the same day, only three hours after death, 'so hastily are we compelled to bury in this climate'. Despite the short notice, all were assembled for the funeral, including all the dissenting ministers in Port of Spain.<sup>64</sup>

It is clear that Law's death was unexpected. He had worked hard and faithfully in one area and one church, apart from trips into the south, since 1845. In twenty-five years he never returned to England, so far as we know. The tragedy of his

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sudden death for his wife and children was at least cushioned by the generous provision made by the BMS for their support. A sum of £300 was voted, and this was 'very favourably invested in the purchase of a small estate, the proceeds of which would support Mrs Law and her family'.<sup>65</sup>

At his funeral the Presbyterian minister, George Brodie, a long-time colleague who had taken part in the stone-laying ceremony for Law's church back in 1853, remarked that 'no man knows in what respect he is held till the day he dies'.<sup>66</sup> A proper estimate of the man may perhaps require a longer perspective than that. We have seen how Law had been plunged into a town ministry straight from college, and had stuck at it all his career. He had even managed to cover the other half of the BMS work for years during vacancies and to visit the southern villages. But, by his own admission, he had been sorely stretched to give oversight to the central church and its outstations, its schools and its evangelistic opportunities, to say nothing of his care for printing, his polemical writings and his educational interests. There is nothing to suggest that Law was exceptionally gifted, but he was clearly an influence in the lives of such as L. O. Inniss, the writer and later deacon of the Port of Spain church, and W. H. Gamble, the missionary, who must have been one of the young people of whom Law was fond. The only recorded failure concerns the departure from the church of some well-off people - and that may well suggest, though it does not prove, a defect in the defectors rather than in Law. Here, then, we have a missionary pastor scarcely heard of outside his area of service and since his own generation but, like many such, a model of faithful and enduring service.

### NOTES

1. *Missionary Herald* (hereafter *MH*), November 1844, p.375, Phillippo's Report.
2. S. G. Poupard, 'Baptist Beginnings in Trinidad', *BQ* 14, 1951-2, pp.232-4, provides a brief account of Cowen's career.
3. *Baptist Magazine and Missionary Herald* (bound together, hereafter *BM/MH*), March 1843, p.173, Cowen's letter, n.d.
4. *BM/MH* Sept. 1843, p.498, Cowen to BMS, 15 June 1843.
5. The present writer's thesis, 'The Baptist Churches of South Trinidad and Their Missionaries, 1815-1892' (M.Th. Glasgow 1988) contains an account of these immigrants and the work of a succession of BMS missionaries among them.
6. L. O. Inniss, *The Diamond Jubilee of Baptist Missions in Trinidad, 1843-1904*, Port of Spain 1904, p.1.
7. *BM/MH* dec. 1845, Cowen's letter, 18 Sept. 1845; *BM/MH* March 1848, pp.178-82; an anonymous author, obviously Cowen, published this former slave's story in *Maria Jones: Her History in Africa and the West Indies*, Haverfordwest Mission Press, Port of Spain, n.d., among the 'Trinidad Tracts' in the BMS archives.
8. *BM/MH* Sept. 1842, Cowen's letter, 15 June 1843.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *MH* Nov. 1844, p.375, Phillippo's Report.
11. *MH* May 1845, p.76, Annual Report of BMS for 1844.
12. Resolution of the Central Committee of the BMS, printed and attached as Appendix A in the Minute Book of the Jubilee Sub-Committee, BMS Archives.
13. L. O. Inniss, *A Short History of St John's Baptist Church, Port of Spain*, Port of Spain 1929, pp.3-4; E. B. Underhill, *Life of J. M. Phillippo, Baptist Missionary in Jamaica, 1881*, p.219; D. J. East, 'The West Indies', *The Centenary Volume of the Baptist Missionary Society*, ed. J. B. Myers, 1892, p.214 (hereafter *Cent.Vol.*). East adds that Cowen had baptised twenty people in his first year.
14. *MH* May 1845, BMS Annual Report 1844.
15. *BM/MH* Nov. 1845, p.597.
16. On Giles' involvement with missionary affairs, see B. Stanley, 'Some Support for Overseas Missions in Early Victorian England' (Ph.D. Cambridge 1979), p.285. The tutor, James Acworth, was formerly a student at Bristol Baptist College, Ward Scholar at Glasgow University, and previous pastor at South Parade, Leeds. He was at this time President of the Horton Academy, which he moved to Rawdon. He was the only man to occupy the chair of the Baptist Union four times. A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 4th impression, 1970, p.235.
17. I owe this information to the Revd Harry Weatherley, MA, BSc, formerly minister of South Parade, Leeds, who kindly consulted the church minute books for me (letter to author, 8 January 1981).
18. *BM/MH* Dec. 1845, p.679, Cowen's letter, 18 Sept. 1845.
19. *BM/MH* Sept. 1846, p.586, Law's letter, 20

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- June 1846.
20. **BM/MH** Apr.1846, p.250, Cowen's letter, 5 Jan. 1846.
  21. **BM/MH** Sept. 1846, p.586, Law's letter, 20 June 1846.
  22. Inniss, *Short History*, pp.3-4.
  23. East, 'The West Indies', *Cent.Vol.*, p.214.
  24. **BM/MH** May 1848, p.319, Statistics from BMS Report 1847.
  25. **BM/MH** Aug. 1848, p.509, editor's comment on Law's letter, 7 March 1848.
  26. **BM/MH** Aug. 1848, p.510. Cowen's letter, n.d., but following his arrival in Trinidad, 20 Apr. 1848.
  27. **BM/MH** March 1851, p.183, Law's letter, 13 Dec. 1850.
  28. E. B. Underhill, *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Conditions*, 1862, p.20 f; Underhill's official Report to the BMS on his visit of 1859 says that Law's portuguese congregation was 25-30 strong, not 60. some 14 or 15 of them were members of the Port of Spain church: **BM/MH** Dec. 1860, p.797.
  29. Underhill, op.cit., p.25.
  30. **BM/MH** Dec. 1860, p.797, Underhill's Report.
  31. Underhill, op.cit., p.24.
  32. **Bm/MH** Dec. 1860, p.797, Underhill's Report.
  33. Minute Book, Africa and West Indies Committee, 23 Sept. 1862. Letter no.222, Law to BMS Secretary.
  34. **BM/MH** Dec. 1860, pp.797-8, Underhill's report.
  35. East, op.cit., p.215.
  36. Inniss, *Short History*, pp.3-4, citing *The Trinidadian*, 9 Feb.1853.
  37. **BM/MH** Dec 1860, p.797, Underhill's report.
  38. *Ibid.*, p.798.
  39. **BM/MH** Aug. 1860, editor's introduction to a letter, n.d., from Law.
  40. **BM/MH** Feb. 1849, pp.122-3, Law's letter, 21 Nov. 1848.
  41. *Ibid.*, p.122.
  42. S. G. Poupard, op.cit., p.233.
  43. **BM/MH** Feb. 1849, p.122, Law's letter, 21 Nov. 1848.
  44. **BM/MH** Mar. 1851, p.183, Law's letter, 13 Dec. 1850.
  45. Minutes of Africa and West Indies Sub-Committee, 14 June 1861, recording letter no.73 from Law, 6 May 1861.
  46. **BM/MH** March 1851, p.183, Law's letter, 13 Dec. 1850.
  47. **BM/MH** Nov. 1851, pp.525-7, Ccwen's letter, 25 Aug. 1851.
  48. Cf. O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 2, 1971, pp.271-309.
  49. **BM/MH** Nov. 1851, p.525, introduction to Cowen's letter, 26 Aug. 1851.
  50. J. A. R. K. Samarasingh, 'The History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago From the Earliest Times to 1900', (London Ph.D. 1964), pp.156-7.
  51. E. B. Rosabelle Seesaran, 'Church and State in Education in Trinidad, 1814-1870', (Univ. of West Indies M.A. 1974) discusses the educational conflicts in detail.
  52. Samarasingh, op.cit., p.251; Keenan's 'Report on Education in Trinidad' is in the House of Commons Sessional Papers 1870, L (450).
  53. Seesaran, op.cit., pp.303-4.
  54. Law to Underhill, 9 Oct. 1868, BMS Archives.
  55. Inniss, *Short History*, p.5.
  56. J. H. Poole, 'The Baptist Church in Trinidad: An Historical Sketch', typescript, n.d. but c.1944, in BMS Archives, p.1.
  57. Inniss, *Short History*, p.5.
  58. *Ibid.*
  59. Inniss, *Diamond Jubilee*, p.10; East, op.cit., p.215 (containing minor errors of date); Poole, op.cit., p.2.
  60. W. H. Gamble, *Trinidad Historical and Descriptive*, San Fernando, Trinidad 65, p.113, for a portrait of this remarkable leader.
  61. **BM/MH** Mar.1848, p.185, Cowen to BMS Secretary, n.d. but before he departed from England on 17 Feb.1848; Cowen was here passing on information derived from a letter from John Law.
  62. Inniss, *Diamond Jubilee*, pp.9-10.
  63. **MH** extract placed in a cuttings book, otherwise empty, dating from late 1856 or early 1857, BMS Archives, Shelf VI/2.
  64. **BM/MH** Aug. 1870, p.543, Gamble's letter, 9 Mar.1870.
  65. Minutes of Africa and West Indies Sub-Committee, 13 Sept. 1870, letters from Gamble, Nos.187 and 134, dated 22 June and 8 Aug. 1870.
  66. **BM/MH** Aug. 1870, p.543, Gamble's letter, 9 Mar.1870. Brodie's participation in the stonelaying ceremony is recorded in Inniss, *Short History*, p.4.

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## PRINTING PROBLEMS

Two copies of the January *Quarterly* have been returned because several pages had not been printed. The Editors apologise for such problems, which are beyond their control. If you have any serious problems of this kind, please inform the Treasurer of the Society, so that we can take the matter up with the printers.