

Accolades, G-G

A tribute to Sir Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke, retiring Governor-General of Jamaica, by Honourable Roylan Barrett, C.D., J.P., Custos Rotulorum for the parish of Trelawny

THE EDITOR, Sir:

IT MUST have been that the Reverend George Blythe, the pastor of Jamaica's first real Presbyterian Church built at Hampden in the parish of Trelawny, felt that Goodwill would have lived up to its name, when he used his own money to buy lands and create

this Free Village in the post-emancipation era. For he was a man who both preached and practised the word of God by treating all human beings equally, whether they were slaves or not and, by this token, very frequently got himself in trouble with the authorities from time to time.

Of course the district lived up

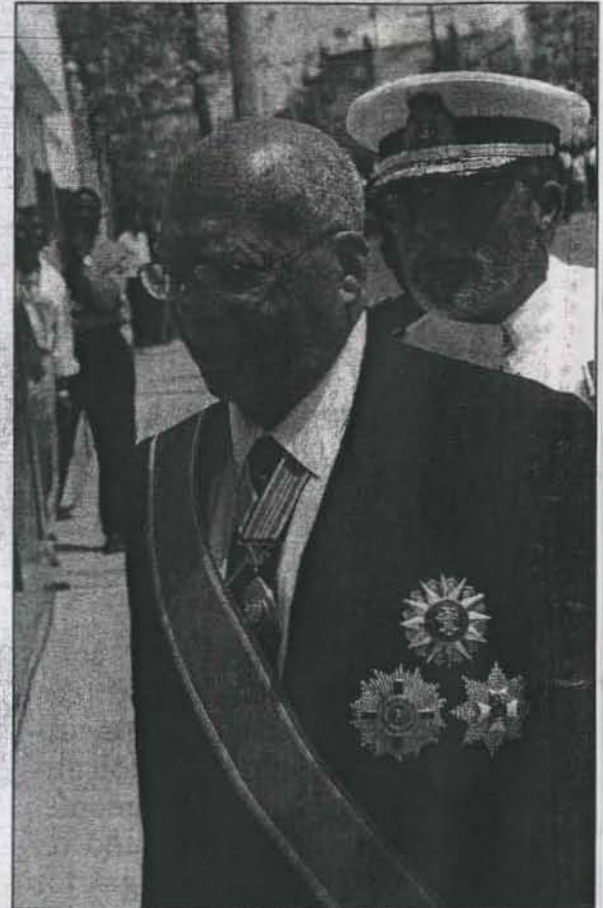
to expectation as, in the year 1915, it produced a great man named Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke, who has been our fourth Governor-General for the past 15 years. It was he who installed me as the custos for the parish of Trelawny in 1991 and has been my mentor ever since.

CHANGED IMAGE

During this time, I have watched and assisted the goodly Governor to change the image of his office and that of the Custodes', bringing them closer and more accessible to the people of our nation and more relevant to the time in which we live and function. Beginning by refusing to attire himself in that Boys Scout looking ceremonial dress, with hat and plumes and all, and in its stead wearing dark lounge suites bedecked with the Jamaican insignia of the Order of the Nation conferred on him on his appointment, the remoteness and aloofness which characterised the offices in the past

were eliminated. The change drew much of our fellow Jamaicans into the fold of nation building and inspired all, especially our youngsters, to participate more in national activities.

As the prolific batsman he was, he never missed a scoring opportunity. In the very year of his appointment, the Governor-General's Award scheme was presented to him for endorsement by the late Honourable Douglas Fletcher and he scored heavily. This scheme sought to recognise and honour those who had fought life from humble beginnings and succeeded in making a signal contribution to their community and parish. It became the perfect foil to the widely held belief that country people were being overlooked for conferment of National Honours, as this award was bestowed on one person per parish annually at a county ceremony. A Plaque and Scroll of Achievement were presented to each. Thereafter all awardees



NORMAN GRINDLEY/DEPUTY CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

Governor-General Sir Howard Cooke on his way to the Throne Speech in Parliament.

for the year were invited along with their guests to King's House for lunch and more adornments. The scheme itself moved from humble beginnings and has now attained national recognition and acclaim. On the retirement of Sir Howard, its present name will become a misnomer. It should be renamed the Sir Howard Cooke Award scheme.

He commended many organisations' concepts and policies to the Custodes for support.

When computer labs were but fledgling in some of our schools, he invited the late Mrs. Gloria Knight to address us and to demonstrate ways and means by which we could assist in spreading this learning tool in our various parishes. He was a strong supporter of the Boys Scout and Girl Guides movements, as he felt in this world of rapidly deteriorating morals, the movements would provide hope and proper training for our youngsters. Being so convinced, he travelled from parish to parish exalting their virtues and encouraging us as Custodes, the police and other citizens, to promote and support the movements.

He brought the people and the Custodes closer to the maintenance of law and order in the nation; for the Custodes were requested to work and consult with the various ministers of justice and officers of the police force to sensitise the citizens to their moral duty to assist in the maintenance of law of our nation. This resulted in the training of Justices of the Peace in this regard. At our annual meetings, one could expect any guest to be there, invited by the Governor-General to request our assistance in their projects: Hands Across Jamaica, homecoming and good old cricket, readily come to mind.

The area which I believe the Governor-General has left the most indelible mark is in fostering and recognising volunteerism. By his foresight and his persistence, he has raised the bar of



RICARDO MAKYIN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Governor-General of Jamaica Sir Howard Cooke.

volunteerism to a great and noble height. He recognised that volunteerism was not only practised by the well to do as was thought; but was in fact a hereditary habit of all well thinking Jamaicans – born and practised in our free villages.

A PIVOTAL ROLE

Above all, he was aware that our nation, Jamaica, Land We Love (or at least so we sing at times) was born out of volunteerism. He consistently fostered the movement and made King's House available for all functions. When United Nations declared

standing. Our presentation "Towards a National Volunteer Policy" was highly commended and our overall performance during the year was so outstanding that we along with seven other nations were accredited three International Volunteers to work in Jamaica for two years. For obvious reasons they were posted in Trelawny. At the end of their tour of duty, the town of Falmouth was awarded the 'City with a Heart' Certification

by the United Nations. These were all because of Sir Howard's insight and support.

Needless to say, Sir Howard could not have been so effective and visionary without the encouragement and help from his wife, Lady Cooke. She has been, patently and by his own admission, a tower of strength in his life. Her suggestions have always been incisive and her participation added decorum to the occasions.

I thought that Sir Howard's labour to elevate the common

Jamaica man and woman to national recognition had really borne fruits, when at a ceremony at King's House to select the Most Outstanding Volunteer Of the Year from the fourteen parishes, as the awardees, approached him individually for their plaques, he looked at them and recognising a familiar face from the parish of St. James, exclaimed, "Wait a Quacco that?"

To that came the most pleasing reply, "Yes teacher, a me said one".

the year 2001 The International Year of the Volunteers, the Governor-General immediately assumed a pivotal role in the year's activities. He attended every function organised in its name. He named Custos Canon Weeville Gordon and me to chair the National Committee and succoured and encouraged us as we planned and staged various events without much corporate or governmental assistance.

We won the International Song Contest vied for by the 110 participating nations. Our Exhibition Booth at the closing ceremony in Geneva was out-

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