

## THE ISLAND OF MAURITIUS.

BY THE REV. G. J. FERCKEN.

The island of Mauritius was unknown to European nations until the year 1505, when it was discovered by the Portuguese navigator, Mascarenhas. It had then no inhabitants. In 1598 the Dutch took possession of it and named it "*Mauritius*," in honor of their stadtholder, Count Maurice of Nassau. Though they built a fort at *Grand Port* (south of the island) and introduced a number of slaves and convicts, they made no permanent settlement in Mauritius and finally abandoned it in 1710. It was taken by the French, who changed the name and called it "*Ile de France*." To its first governor, the celebrated *Matr e de Labourdonnais*, is credited the introduction of the sugar cane in the island, thus making it to this day the main industry of the inhabitants. During the long war between France and England, at the commencement of the nineteenth century, Mauritius was a continual source of great mischief to English *Indiamen* and other merchant vessels, and at length the English Government determined upon an expedition for its capture. This was effected in 1810, and upon the restoration of peace, in 1814, the possession of the island was confirmed to Britain by the treaty of Paris.

It was stipulated in this treaty that the inhabitants would retain their own laws, customs and religion; and thus the island is still largely French in language, habits, religion and predilection. One of its most distinguished governors, Sir Robert Farquhar (1810-23) abolished slavery. The island is, to the present day, an English colony, whose power is concentrated in the hands of the governor and legislative council.

Mauritius lies 550 miles E. of Madagascar. The island is somewhat triangular in shape, is 36 m. long and about 23 m. broad. Its total area is about 710 sq. m. From its mountainous character, Mauritius is a most picturesque island and its scenery is very varied and beautiful. It has been admirably described by *Bernardin-de-St.-Pierre*, who lived in the island toward the

close of the 18th century, in PAUL ET VIRGINIE, that most exquisite idyl familiar to many.

Mountain masses may be seen in the northwest, southwest and southeast of the island, varying from 500 to 2,700 feet in height. The few rivers are small. In the dry season little more than brooks, they become raging torrents in the wet season. That the island is of volcanic origin may be seen in several places from the remains of ancient craters, so distinguishable in the centre and southwest part of Mauritius.

The climate is pleasant during the cool season of the year (May to November), hot in summer (December to April), except in the elevated plains of the interior, where the thermometer ranges from 70° to 80° F., while on the coast, generally, it ranges from 90° to 96°. *Port-Louis*, the capital, is oppressively hot in summer. Those who have sought for cooler quarters have made their homes on the uplands of the interior. The favorite residential town is *Curepipe*, where the climate resembles that of the south of France. It is built on the central plateau, about twenty miles distant from Port-Louis, by rail, and 1,800 feet above the sea. It has now a population of 20,000 and has become the second capital of the island. On the railway, between Port-Louis and Curepipe, are other residential towns, Beau-Bassin, Rose Hill, Quatre Boones, Phoenix, Vacoa, all of them healthy, pleasant and attractive resorts.

Numerous calamities have, in the last part of the nineteenth century, overtaken the island. In 1854, cholera caused the death of 17,000 persons; in 1867, 30,000 people died of malarial fever; in 1892, a hurricane of terrific violence caused immense destruction of property and serious loss of life; and the year after, great part of the capital was destroyed by fire. There were, in addition, several epidemics of small-pox and plague. During 1902-1905 an outbreak of surra caused great mortality among draught animals; notwithstanding all these calamities, the Mauritians have succeeded in maintaining the island in a more healthy condition than it ever was. The one thing which the population dreads most in the summer season are the severe cyclones, accompanied by torrents of rain, which often cause great destruction to houses and plantations; but they ap-

pear to be less frequent and violent than in former times, owing, it is thought, to the destruction of the ancient forests and the consequent drier condition of the atmosphere.

It is hardly credible for any one to believe that on such a small area of only 710 square miles there lives and moves a population of 380,000 inhabitants. It is certainly one of the most densely peopled regions of the world, having over 530 persons per square mile. Of the 380,000 souls that people Mauritius, 300,000 are Hindoos or Indian coolies, who have emigrated there to work the sugar plantations. Of the remaining 80,000, 4,000 are Chinese (mostly shop-keepers); 16,000 are whites, and the remaining 40,000 are colored people of African or mixed descent.

The 16,000 white people are mostly descendants of refugees of the French revolution, and this is the reason why French is more commonly spoken than English, though both languages are taught in the public schools. But the dialect which is more universally used among the illiterate and the uneducated is a sort of French *patois* or jargon, invented by the former slaves and known as the *creole* language. It is exceedingly childish and ludicrous.

Being of considerable fertility, the soil of Mauritius is especially suitable for the cultivation of the sugar cane, and the prosperity of the colony depends almost entirely on this one article of production. The quantity of sugar exported rises, annually, to 200,000 tons. The only things to be dreaded every year are the cyclone and various diseases which attack the canes. We might also mention here, in passing, the aloe-fibre, the most important export, amounting every year to some 2,000 tons.

Railways connect the principal places and sugar estates on the island. There is, in all, over 120 miles of railway, all owned and worked by the government. The public roads are wide, clean and well kept, and hundreds of automobiles cross the island to-day in all directions.

As to religion, one-third of the population is Christian. Those who belong to the Roman Catholic faith number 120,000, mostly colored people. Of course, the 16,000 whites are included in this

number. There are also 7,000 Protestants belonging to the Anglican and Presbyterian faith; these are helped by the State grants. The Mohammedans number over 30,000. The 4,000 Chinese and the 200,000 Hindoos are, of course, heathen. The New Church Society numbers 150 members and, in that dense population, are like a drop of water lost in the ocean, and yet this "little flock," to whom it hath pleased the Father to give "the Kingdom," is not a negligible quantity in that far remote island of the Indian Ocean.

To retrace the introduction, establishment and development of the New Jerusalem Church in Mauritius is the object of this article, which, we trust, will interest every reader of the LIFE.

It was in the year 1847 that the doctrines of the New Dispensation were first introduced in Mauritius by Mr. G. H. Poole, a friend of John Augustus Tulk, the founder of the Swedenborg Society. Though an Englishman, he had, previous to his landing in the isle, been a school teacher in Adelaide, Australia, and had now come into the colony to engage in the same profession. He was a man of classical education, refined understanding and pleasing manners. Having nearly all of Swedenborg's works, he lent them, and even gave several volumes to his colonial friends. The first who received them was Monsieur L. E. Michel, an artist, and two others with him whose names are unknown to the writer. After the departure of Mr. Poole, who resided only three years in Mauritius, these first receivers worked with great zeal in order to enlighten their fellow-colonists, entering into correspondence with Mr. Le Boys des Guays, and procuring from him a large number of the French translations of the Writings.

It was about five or six years after Mr. Poole's departure from the island that a man, who did a telling work on New Church lines, joined the movement—EDMOND DE CHAZAL! Though born a Roman Catholic, he was then, like most men of his time, bent to skepticism and was a follower of Voltaire. A New Church tract, handed him by Monsieur Michel, converted him to God and to the New Dispensation! From that day on, he read the Doctrines, studied the internal sense, sent Le Boys des Guays great sums of money to publish the ever multiplying

translations of the Writings into French, started religious services, drew up a Liturgy compiled from those of the Convention and the Conference, and gathered around him, every Lord's Day, white and colored people, who found in the New Church theology the inspiring and consoling truths of Divine Wisdom.

Of course, the introduction of "a new religion" which drew adepts from the two great official Churches could not but kindle the ire of their spiritual conductors. Mr. de Chazal was mercilessly attacked in the religious press; but being fearless and a fighting-man, he took up the gauntlet, and, with irrefutable arguments, silenced his assailants. The Society still keeps jealously in her library those precious documents as a reminder to future generations of the serious dangers that threatened the nascent church.

In January, 1859, the receivers of the Heavenly Doctrines organized into a Society, and was incorporated by an Ordinance of the Mauritian Government. It is therefore an officially recognized Church, though grants have ever been refused to her.

In 1860 Mr. de Chazal offered a place suitable for a library and reading-room. The Society appreciated the advantages of such a measure, took steps to meet the necessary expenses, and books were there deposited.

An able monthly review was also published, L'ECHO DE LA NOUVELLE JERUSALEM, which was discontinued after his decease.

Mr. de Chazal died in 1876, some twenty years after his acceptance of the Heavenly Doctrines, much regretted by his friends and even by those who had so fiercely opposed him. With him the Society lost her helmsman, who was not only her leader and defender, but also her staunch supporter, for Mr. de Chazal was a wealthy planter, whose generosity was unbounded. His memory is still and ever will be cherished in Mauritius by all New Church people, and pleasant remembrances cluster around the name of this great champion of our faith.

Mr. de Chazal had for associates in the work such eminent men as Joseph Postourel, Napoleon Lesage, Georges Mayer, A. H. Ackroyd, zealous, learned and highly esteemed men in the colony. Messrs. Mayer and Ackroyd were magistrates of two

important districts, while Mr. Lesage worked in the Registry Office of the Government. These gentlemen had all passed away when the present writer arrived in Mauritius in 1906 to assume pastoral work. Only Mr. Ackroyd is still living and resides in England. They conducted the services in French on the Lord's day, administered the sacraments, performed marriage and burial ceremonies, and looked faithfully after the flock. And so this lay regime continued thirty years after M. de Chazal's death until the first minister landed in Mauritius in 1906. And here is shown the great loyalty of the Mauritius Society that, for some sixty years, it existed, lived and prospered without the ministry of a duly ordained pastor—a case unknown in the annals of the New Church!

But a church of sixty years' duration was not without her tribulations and vicissitudes. And so there occurred removals by death and emigration, mixed marriages of young people of the Society with Protestants and Roman Catholics, which caused defections and desertions. But what was, perhaps, most prejudicial to the strengthening and consolidation of the Church was the lack of religious instruction to the children in doctrine as well as in the letter of the Word.

It is also to the credit of the Mauritius Society that, apart from the drawbacks, no dissension ever occurred, not even between the white and colored elements of the congregation, so that we may indeed say that there has been "Peace within her walls."

The present membership amounts to 150, counting the children who have not, as yet, been confirmed or partaken of the Lord's Supper. Of this number, some 50 belong to the colored element; and, be it said to their credit, they are respectable, educated people, loyal to the Church, and animated with strong, religious sentiments.

The Society has two church buildings. The older one is in Port-Louis, and is simply a spacious, commodious wooden house, as are most of the houses in Mauritius, with several adjoining rooms, which serve for vestry-room, and a library, which has most of the Writings and collateral works of the New Church, both in French and in English. It is in this building that the

services were held in M. de Chazal's time and down to the present day. It is ever dear and sacred to all the members of the Mauritius Society and seems to have conserved a sacred sphere of by-gone days.

The other one is a large stone building, constructed in 1907, at Curepipe, on the high plateau, where most of the white people reside. The writer, while in Mauritius, held two services every Sunday, one at Curepipe, at 8:45 a. m., and the other at Port-Louis, at 11 a. m. The distance between the two places is only 19 miles and is rapidly traversed in the space of an hour by rail. The average attendance at both services is from 70 to 80 every Sunday. Of course, there is always a full turn-out on Christmas and Easter Day! The minister organized also two weekly classes for the religious instruction of both the young and older people, which resulted in much good to all those who attended them.

The Society has recently secured the pastoral services of the Rev. C. A. Nussbaum, of the General Convention. We wish him and the Society much success. The seed sown shall surely bear fruit. They labor not in vain "who sow beside the waters!"