

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WEST INDIES. By J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock. (Macmillan; 18s.)

For anyone who knows something, or even nothing, about the West Indies this book will be of absorbing interest. It is well-written, is well-produced and includes four maps and a number of excellent and entertaining illustrations. The ground it covers is amazingly extensive.

Nevertheless, for a Catholic reader with some knowledge of the West Indies this Short History is disappointing, and, on two or three occasions at least, irritating. Knowledge—or at least a sympathetic understanding—of Catholicism would seem to be a weak spot in the distinguished members of the West Indian University College who wrote this book. And yet the West Indies are largely Catholic and the Catholic Church has exercised considerable influence on their development. It is significant, perhaps, that Jamaica and Barbados which, exceptionally, have but little Catholic history behind them seem almost to have received more attention from our authors than all the other islands put together. At all events, except for the almost pre-historic times of Las Casas and the Spanish, not a single word is said about the share of the Catholic Church in the good work of civilizing the vast majority of the population in most of the islands. And yet as recently as thirty-five years ago I recall a planter, a Cambridge man, saying of one particular island that had it not been for priests, the people would have been a howling mass of savages. An exaggeration, no doubt, yet one containing a certain amount of truth. Catholic Missions, it should be remembered, aim at being centres not only of religious ministrations but of such all-round social formation and education as the people can absorb.

To be ignored touches one's pride: to be maligned is rather easier to face because of the possibility of defence and counter-attack. On page 128, the only occasion in the book when the Jesuits are mentioned, we learn that the island of Martinique had suffered both from English maritime pressure 'and from the commercial speculations of the Jesuits'. It is always easy to have a back-hand slap at the Society of Jesus; but in such a book as this, is it not also rather cheap? The point, in fact, is quite interesting, and in fairness some further information might have been vouchsafed. It may be true that in the neighbouring island of Dominica the Jesuits ran an estate and left the spiritual care of that island to the Franciscans. But the truth of the matter is that in those days to have an estate was almost as normal as it was for every individual of any standing to own slaves. Actually in Martinique the Jesuits were also engaged in pastoral work, so that one wonders if there was not some explanation for their commercial speculations. In Grenada, the Dominicans owned an estate with a chapel attached to

it—fortunately for them, since the spiritual care of the rest of the island, once in their hands, was, somewhat arbitrarily, taken away from them and handed over to the Capuchins. But even these, in their turn, acquired considerable property in St George's district: missions cannot be run without money.

Again, on page 184, the authors reproduce a quotation from a Governor of Trinidad which, to the ordinary reader, will be quite unintelligible. Governor Woodford did not approve of the way in which a certain Methodist preacher had been dealing with the slaves, attempting to turn them into preachers, and he said so in a letter addressed, presumably, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Then he concluded his remarks with these words: 'Let me entreat you to do what you can about a Bishop for us'. But what bishop, and for whom? On this page and the following the authors lump all 'missionaries' indiscriminately together. Not so this Protestant Governor of Trinidad to whom the Catholics of that Colony are very largely indebted for their cathedral in Port-of-Spain. I should not be surprised to learn that it was for a Catholic Bishop that Woodford was appealing; and actually in 1819 the Right Rev. James Buckley was appointed. If the matter was indeed worth mentioning, might it not have been elucidated?

On page 187 I notice that James Stephen is lauded as 'most upright and conscientious of public servants'. In Grenada, at all events, if there were any memory at all of this Crown Lawyer, it would be execrated—as further reading in the history of that island would have revealed.

These are but blemishes, and perhaps arguable ones at that; so it gives me great pleasure to say in conclusion that this book, into which the fruits of so much solid work and scholarship have been packed, is worth a great deal more than eighteen shillings.

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ARBELLA STUART. By P. M. Handover. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 30s.)

In spite of the vanished letter, this is still poor Arabella Stuart, 'Royal Lady of Hardwick and Cousin to King James', as the sub-title describes her. The new spelling is unquestionably right, but something of the romance of her name vanishes in the change.

Was there ever in all English history a more unfortunate woman than Arbella Stuart? Well do the words of Shakespeare's sad Richard II apply to her: 'tell thou the lamentable tale of me, and send the hearers weeping to their beds'. Arbella's 'lamentable tale' is told superbly and movingly by Miss Handover. Skilfully, devastatingly, Miss Handover dissects the characters who ruined Arbella's life. Her feminine shrewdness, supported by her immense knowledge, unmasks the rascals and rogues who played with the life of this potential successor of Elizabeth I.