

REMEMBRANCE

**THE MOST HONOURABLE
SIR HOWARD FELIX HANLAN COOKE, O.N., G.C.M.G.,
G.C.V.O., C.D.
FORMER GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF JAMAICA**

BY

THE MOST HON. P. J. PATTERSON, ON, OCC, PC, QC

AT

**STATE FUNERAL
HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL
FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 2014
10.00 A.M.**

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National Heroes Day, October 2005, at the Award of Honours,

Lady Cooke whispered to me –

“Howard will be 90 next month – but believe me, the man is no ordinary 90.”

There was no need to enquire what she meant. For by any test or measure – irrespective of the sphere or criteria for judgment – **Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke** was indeed no ordinary man. He was extraordinary – as a nation builder, a teacher, a community leader, a mentor, a preacher, a father and an exceptional human being. He was a mentor for life.

When he began his earthly sojourn, he was to share space and time with a small number of persons, who had been born into slavery. So the legacy of centuries of human exploitation was a part of the actuality of his earliest years.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Up to age 11, the young Howard indulged in his favourite pastimes – horseback riding, marbles and as a pugilist. He displayed a tendency to rebelliousness which led him to do everything else except attend school regularly. In desperation, his mother packed him off to Grange Hill Elementary School, where he became one of twelve boys boarding with the Headmaster, Frank Theophilus Sinclair.

With Teacher Sinclair as mentor and father figure, young Howard began devoting his intellect and energy to a mastery of academics, agriculture and the performing arts.

In January 1933, Howard Cooke made his way to Kingston, one of the 120 hopefuls, fiercely competing for 20 spaces only, who would be put through a grueling two-day written and oral examination. He emerged at the top of that batch and entered The Mico, as a confident, articulate, academically competent young man, nurtured in Christian values with a love for rural Jamaica.

He was not about to submit to the ragging and bullying that was the Freshman's lot and so he immediately organized his peers to carry the fight to the Seniors. In the pitched battle that ensued, Cooke and his Freshmen gave a good account of themselves. The following week four seniors, who identified "the young upstart" as the ringleader, waylaid and taught the "grub" a painful lesson. Young Howard planned his retaliation and executed it methodically by tackling each one in due turn. In the words of the Good Book, he "smote them separately, hip and thigh".

Howard Cooke's ability to lead was quickly recognized in every sphere of endeavour. Although the youngest, he was selected the senior student for his batch and chosen to teach the first lesson in the Practising School. He was already a fine cricketer, but had never played football. He eventually captained both teams, as he subsequently did later when he returned to St. James.

It was the quality of his performance at the Mico Training College and his willingness to challenge traditional approaches which branded him early as a leader, a progressive thinker and an activist prepared to give unstinting service in any endeavour to which he was committed.

BUILDING THE NEW JAMAICA

This was the most intense period of ferment and change in Jamaica's history.

For three weeks in the 1938 Labour Rebellion, the Jamaican working people brought the colonial administration to its knees. Out of the ferment sprung the opening to launch a Party as the national vehicle to unite all democratic organizations and dedicated to the "idea of developing Jamaica as a whole".

Howard Cooke was burning with a fervour to be part of that progressive movement, pledged to the fight for Adult Suffrage, Self-Government and upward social mobility. At 23 years of age, he was chosen to be a pioneer that would help to draft the Constitution and design the policy framework of The Peoples National Party.

What he had achieved before his 24th birthday, few manage to accomplish in an entire life time.

With the social, economic and industrial fabric in tatters, the young Howard Cooke was inspired to share his skills and energies with those who wanted to fashion a new and better Jamaica.

TEACHER COOKE

With his unerring eye for pulchritude, his marriage with the radiant and brilliant Teacher, Ivy Sylvia Lucille Tai, was the first to be celebrated in The Mico Chapel, 75 years ago. They remained perfect partners to the very end.

On his appointment as Head Teacher of Belle Castle All-Age, he dedicated himself to moulding the lives of children whose future would open doors of opportunity not envisaged by them or their parents.

To offset a meager salary, he purchased hundreds of coconuts and gave them to the villagers to boil oil. He asked for nothing in return except the cuddly water and trash which he fed to his pigs and chickens. The income from this enabled him to provide for his family and private tuition, free of cost, to all ambitious pupils.

Born to teach, he was always searching for innovative ways to make children learn.

He believed that Teachers and the Education Institutions were critical foundations to raise national consciousness and in charting our own course to create a new independent relationship with the rest of the world.

He commanded total respect. While at Barracks Road he caned a boy for being late and sent him home. When the boy returned to the school compound with his father to confront The Headmaster, Howard promptly gave him a fine caning also and ordered him to be a better parent.

A COLOSSUS

Building communities was the central purpose of his activities, whether as Teacher, Member of Parliament, as Insurance Executive or as a Lay Preacher. He was a pillar of every civic, cultural, sports and business group in St. James.

His influence throughout Western Jamaica was colossal. It is in this part of Jamaica that he was most able to translate effectively Norman Manley's vision that an independent Jamaica must rely on self-reliant communities, populated by self-respecting, confident individuals whose collective efforts could lead to their empowerment through economic, social and spiritual upliftment.

-A MENTOR FOR LIFE

Beyond the appreciation of his work among us and his exemplary service, we treasure the life of Howard Cooke for what it revealed about the importance of truth, fortitude, prudence and faith.

He was proud of who he was - in the work he did - as family man and patriarch, teacher, churchman, philanthropist, political representative, manager in the insurance industry, Minister of Government, Governor-General.

His relationships in all of these roles - his speech, his actions - consistently reflected a deeply held spiritual conviction that he was on earth for a purpose beyond personal gain and material advancement. His every exploit was to promote the greater good for all.

He was never overwhelmed by the trappings of high office, nor ever displayed a sense of entitlement, despite his historical role in shaping the political agenda. His disarming smile and his encouragement of younger persons to freely speak their minds helped to build their confidence. He was urbane and humane - gracious, dignified and of stately bearing.

To him, serving his island homeland with humble pride was a natural obligation. So his was a genuine humility.

Political engagement for him was simply a means to the greater end of full national development. Narrow partisanship of any kind never coloured his principles, nor even defined his positions, utterances or action.

He took his political reversals with equanimity and malice toward none.

But in the rough and tumble of political contests, he was always able to hold his own.

[Red Square and the brave Warriors of Old

“The battle is the Lord’s”]

He sought to serve his people in ways which developed the best in them, by encouraging their creativity; always conscious of the fact that as a people there was more in our shared lives to unite us than those elements which divided us.

He used every avenue to encourage us to draw strength from our achievements as a nation, while exhorting every Jamaican to develop our full potential in the wonderfully creative dimensions of our being.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL

Himself, an early and outstanding nationalist, he regarded The National Anthem, The National Pledge and The National Motto, as the bedrock that should shape our destiny.

As Governor-General, he was guided by three broad views of the office.

- **The first** is that the office should be viewed as an instrument to develop a sense of unity by being accessible to all Jamaicans, irrespective of race, colour, religion or social status.
- **The second** is that the office should be kept abreast with the major changes occurring in the society and be exposed to the main currents of thinking within the country and the world.
- **The third** is that the office should be one of the main instruments of national unity and social inclusion.

He was never content to be an Honorary Patron for just another Title – but always eager to become actively engaged as a standard bearer for the success of each Organisation and advance of the particular Enterprise.

The Jamaica Agricultural Society, The Boy Scout Movement, The International University of the Caribbean, The Jamaica Institute of Management, The Lay Preachers Initiative, The Jamaica Cricket Board were among the many beneficiaries of his steadfast support.

He established the Governor-General's Achievement Award to recognize people for the work they were doing in their communities.

To avoid isolation, he initiated regular meetings with leaders from different sectors of the society. A revered leader in his own church, he created an Ecumenical Council of all religious groups which met regularly at King's House.

For 15 years, The Most Honourable Sir Howard Cooke discharged the constitutional functions vested in him with such balance and distinction, that divergent executive functions, one after another, were entrusted to the office by bi-partisan agreement and national consent so that the Governor-General is no longer confined to purely ceremonial duties, as Her Majesty's Representative.

THE LAST STALWART

Howard Cooke belongs to a highly distinguished group of Jamaican leaders whose mission was to transform the social, cultural, political and economic landscape of our country. His was a contribution marked by excellence; derived from a strong sense of purpose and fueled by the firm conviction that our people should not be constrained to being "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in their own land.

It is incontrovertible – Howard Cooke occupies a unique space in the annals of Jamaican history. He ranks among the finest of our pioneers. He is now the last of a special breed –

- The oldest surviving representative of the Jamaica Union of Teachers;
- the final survivor of that revolutionary body which became the architects of our modern political structure;

- the last Member of the short-lived Federal Parliament of the West Indies;
- the acknowledged Dean of Caribbean Presidents and Governors-General.

To his eternal credit he lived his beliefs, and in so doing set high standards of integrity, honesty and Christian witness, driven by the Divine hand – “To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with his God.”

He has earned deservedly a unique place in the pantheon of Jamaican patriots.

HIS EPITAPH

We have been privileged to benefit for eight memorable decades from an extraordinary life.

The marvelous Journey from Goodwill to the conferment of the sceptre at King’s House on Emancipation Day 1991, is the story on which fables are written. Howard Cooke’s relentless pursuit of an inspired life-long mission ensured the outcome of its positive realization. This son of noble St. James has managed to fashion the template for our own indigenous nobility.

As we honour his memory and write his epitaph –

Let us recognize the integrity of character and the unshakeable sense of civic duty and dedicated responsibility which impacted on all aspects of his life and seminal work.

Let us pledge anew to emulate his virtues and build on the values he maintained set and to complete a work admittedly still in progress – The building of that new Jamaica which relies on the resilience, tolerance and strength of its people; which fulfils the promise of our native land – triumphant, proud and free.

Dr. The Most Honourable Sir Howard Felix Hanlan Cooke issues his final proclamation today, "God is Good".

Loud, let the Trumpets sound in the glorious halls of Valhalla.

His mighty work on earth has ended – Amen and Amen.