

Preface

RETURNED EXILE HAD ITS GENESIS IN A FRIENDSHIP which began more than forty years ago in 1974, when Estelle and Margaret met as postgraduate students of history and law at William Goodenough House, London, a residence for Commonwealth students. At their first meeting, Estelle, a Ghanaian, mentioned her West Indian heritage and shared details about her grandfather, George James Christian, originally from Dominica in the Eastern Caribbean. Christian had trained as a lawyer in London, migrated to the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1902 and contributed to the development of society in that country. He had also documented his experience and left behind a collection of papers. Margaret, of Trinidad and Tobago, was immediately intrigued by the story of this West Indian who had gone back to Africa. It was this initial conversation, and a long-lasting friendship faithfully maintained by snail mail in the pre-technology era, that convinced Estelle and Margaret they were meant to co-author this biography about Christian's life and legacy, a unique testimony of reverse migration.

In 1991, seventeen years after that first meeting, the co-authors began to research Christian's life in the Library at Gray's Inn, London, where he had studied law. In the ensuing years, oral-history research was conducted in Dominica and Ghana with Christian's surviving children, other relatives and friends. This included an interview with one of the later migrants, George Stanley Lewis of St Lucia, brother of the Nobel laureate Sir Arthur Lewis and personal friend of Christian, who migrated to the Gold Coast in 1929. (A list of people interviewed is given in appendix 1.) In 1994, twenty years after that first meeting in London, Estelle and Margaret reunited in Ghana to continue the research in the National Archives in Accra, Cape Coast and Sekondi.

This first full-length biography of Christian chronicles his experience as a

student in London and his migration to the Gold Coast, where he had a successful life as a lawyer, father and family man, businessman, philanthropist and politician. He also served as honorary consul for the Republic of Liberia, was very involved in Freemasonry and was engaged in a wide range of public service activities. Christian left a legacy through his service and involvement in the society, as well as through his descendants who were also professionals. He was the central figure among a small group of doctors, lawyers, businessmen and other West Indian professionals who migrated to the Gold Coast in the early decades of the twentieth century. This biography also highlights the migration process and aspects of the lives of these other West Indians. Included among this disparate group is Bishop Joseph Oliver Bowers, also of Dominica, who migrated to the Gold Coast shortly before Christian's death. Christian kept his connections with his homeland alive with visits every few years and maintained contact with friends and relatives there until the end of his life in 1940.

Apart from the detailed narrative of Christian's experience in the Gold Coast, some chapters provide contextual information that will have a wide appeal to readers with an interest in the legal profession and Gold Coast history. Chapter 4, for example, provides details about the establishment of Achimota College (formerly Prince of Wales College and Achimota School) and the friendship between Christian and Dr James Kwegyir Aggrey, known as "Aggrey of Africa", which is documented by correspondence. Chapter 5 deals with the celebrated case of Dr Benjamin Knowles, a British doctor who was charged with the murder of his wife.

Over the years, as the research evolved, the authors took advantage of opportunities to make presentations about Christian, either singly or jointly, at conferences on both sides of the Atlantic. The first paper on Christian was presented at a conference in Trinidad and Tobago on "Henry Sylvester-Williams and Pan-Africanism: A Retrospection and Projection", hosted by the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, and Oberlin College, Ohio, in the United States, January 4 to 13, 2001. Christian was one of the delegates who had attended the first pan-African conference organized by Williams in London in 1900, and it was considered appropriate to present the results of the research at this conference. Other presentations were made in the Dominican Republic (2006), Ghana (2007), Barbados (2007) and South Africa (2010). Extracts from the research on Christian have been used in professorial and

other memorial lectures presented at the University of the West Indies campuses in 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012. (A list of the publications and presentations that feature Christian is given in appendix 2.)

The major source of information for this biography, as substantiated by the copious notes and references provided, is the George James Christian Papers (GJC Papers), created and amassed by Christian and maintained by his family, especially his daughter Essi Forster, after his death. The GJC Papers and associated oral-history interviews served as unique reference sources that profile the contributions made by Christian and other West Indians who went to the Gold Coast in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The majority of photographs used in the book are included in the GJC Papers and have been reproduced with permission of the West Indiana and Special Collections Division, housed at the Alma Jordan Library, the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. Those sourced from other collections are referenced in captions.

The GJC Papers were donated to the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, on 22 June 2005, when Estelle Appiah officially handed over her grandfather's papers and signed a deed of gift to the university, with Dr Maude Christian-Meier, another granddaughter of Christian, as the witness. This decision to donate the collection came as early as 1991, after a visit by Estelle to the university, and consent was given by her mother, Essi Forster. The collection will be available for use by scholars and researchers from 2016.

The authors hope that this biography, which profiles the life, legacy, professional and personal contributions of “returned exile” George James Christian to Gold Coast society, will be a useful source of information for students, teachers and researchers, in support of studies on the African diaspora, pan-Africanism and Gold Coast history in the first half of the twentieth century.

Margaret D. Rouse-Jones and Estelle M. Appiah
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Figure P.1. Official handover of the George James Christian Papers to the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, 22 June 2005