

SIERRA LEONE INDEPENDENCE.

There was a holiday feeling in Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone as Independence Day drew near. Divine Service on the previous Sunday in St. George's Cathedral was a thanksgiving, at which the Archbishop of York officiated. An air of rejoicing could be sensed everywhere. In the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone there has been none of the strife which, elsewhere, has sometimes preceded the granting of independence. Visible on all sides was the joy of people welcoming their new status, happy that they would soon be standing on their own feet. But there was no resentment of their past colonialism. Long affection between the British and the Creoles ensured a smooth changeover.

Evidence that Independence Day was rapidly approaching was the arrival of the Duke of Kent.

His Royal Highness represented the Queen. He was welcomed by Sir Maurice Dorman, the Governor of Sierra Leone, who presented Lady Dorman. Premier Sir Milton Margai presented the many important people who had come from all over the Colony to pay their respects.

The Guard of Honour was paid the compliment of a proper inspection by a professional soldier.

The Duke was enthusiastically acclaimed all the way from the Airport to the city boundary of Freetown.

As far back as 1799 Freetown received its Royal Charter. Now the Mayor and Aldermen welcomed the Duke with a loyal address and presented him with a gold key bearing the crest of the city. The forms of British municipal government are punctiliously observed. After that ceremony the Duke drove to Government House, where he stayed for the next few days.

Next day there was a regatta, mainly an affair of canoe racing, with the type of craft used in unloading merchant ships, at places on the West African coast where there are no harbours.

Not all the fun was on the water. At Breckfields Recreation Ground there was a display of traditional dancing.

At the Government House Garden Party the Duke met most of the important persons of the Colony and Protectorate, presented by the Governor and Lady Dorman. The Colony, established at Freetown and its surroundings, is peopled by the Creoles, descended from the liberated slaves who settled there in the late 18th Century.

The Protectorate consists of the hinterland inhabited by a variety of tribes; mostly Muslims. British control of it dates from the 1890s.

The Duke earned praise by the friendly manner with which he won the confidence of the guests. He spoke to nearly all of them, certainly to representatives of every part of the Protectorate. It all seemed to indicate that the old antagonisms between the Creoles and the tribesmen will disappear, when independence gives to all of them the feeling that Sierra Leoneans are one nation; women included. Under the new constitution the House of Representatives will be open to women members. The first one to be elected is Madam Ella Gulama (on the left). Mme. Ella sits for the Moyamba District.

How different it must all have been for rulers in the hill country, not far away, and little touched as yet by European ways. Sierra Leone's Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, was a happy man as he drove to the State opening of Parliament. Cameraman Pat Whitaker headed the Pathe film-team putting on record this historic day in the life of the country.

The Queen, in sending her cousin to represent her on this day underlined the close ties between the Royal House and the Colony and Protectorate. The presentatives were already assembled to hear the Duke read the speech from the Throne. In that message Her Majesty welcomed Sierra Leone into the Commonwealth family of nations. Then, as her representative, the Duke conveyed the Royal instruments of Sierra Leone Independence to the Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai.

All over the country it was the signal for rejoicing; much of its expressed in dancing.

Britain and the rest of the Commonwealth wholeheartedly welcome Sierra Leone into the British family of free peoples.