

EDUCATION IN THE GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS COLONY

A (1) The Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony is a British Crown Colony administered by the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. It comprises the following administrative areas:--

The Gilbert Islands--16 islands

The Ellice Islands--9 islands

The Fanning Island District--3 islands

Ocean Island.

With the exception of the last named, all are low coral atolls, situated in mid-Pacific and some of them being more than eleven degrees from the equator. Ocean Island, or Banaba, which is the administrative headquarters of the Colony and the seat of a valuable phosphate of lime industry, lies some 250 miles to the westward of the Gilbert Group and is the only "high" island in the Colony.

(2) The Colony extends over a million square miles of sea but the total land area is less than 180 square miles. The atolls are long strips of land from a few yards to five farlings in width and nowhere more than 15 feet above sea level. Many enclose five lagoons, which may be up to 50 miles in length.

The islands are barren, virtually nothing growing except the coconut, the pandanus and a coarse edible root called "babai" (*alocasia indica*).

(3) The climate is warm but fairly dry and tempered by trade winds. The temperature ranges between 78° and 86°. The islands, which have the romantic appeal of the real South Seas, so lacking in the more fertile high groups, are well described by Stevenson as enjoying "a superb ocean climate, days of blinding sun and brousy wind, nights of heavenly brightness."

(4) The population of the Colony is roughly 35,000, distributed as follows:--

Gilbert Islands--27,700
Ellice Islands--4,200
Ocean Island--2,200
Fanning Island District--about 500

of this number, all but 598 (238 Europeans and 360 Asiatics) are Pacific Islanders. The majority of Europeans and nearly all the Asiatics reside on Ocean Island, in connection with the phosphate workings.

(5) The Gilbert Islands, together with Ocean Island, are inhabited by so-called Micronesians. They appear to represent a fusion of three racial groups. The basic stock is Melanesian or Papuan and blended with

this we find two immigrant groups, one coming from the Malay archipelago and the other a pure Polynesian folk from Samoa. The Ellice Islanders are Polynesians, being a mixture of the Samoan and Tangan branches of that race. There is no indigenous population in the Fanning Island District. The Gilbert Islanders speak a common language, Gilbertese, and the Ellice Islanders a dialect of Samoan.

- (6) The natives take a large share in the administration of their own islands and the system of local government by native bodies under European supervision has proved a great success. The Native Courts on each island, consisting of Village Councilors (Kaubure) sitting under a Native Magistrate, have executive, judicial and, to a certain extent, legislative functions.
- (7) The islands lie sheltered to a large extent from modern civilization. They have a very selective contact with European culture through the trader, missionary and government official and, formerly, through the bloc-humber and blockbinder. The islanders appear to be happy and contented, busy with the affairs of their village and island, and evincing little interest in events in the outside world. No non-native is allowed

to own land and there are no European plantations. The native population is increasing rapidly, though on some islands any further increase is rendered difficult owing to the natural limitations set by the barren environment.

(8) The 1931 Census gives the following Literary figures:--

NATIVE POPULATION OVER 10 YEARS OF AGE

	<u>Can Read</u>	<u>Cannot Read</u>	<u>Can Write</u>	<u>Cannot Write</u>
Gilbert Islands	16,417	3,564	14,459	5,522
Ellice Islands	<u>2,697</u>	<u>138</u>	<u>2,651</u>	<u>184</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>19,114</u>	<u>3,702</u>	<u>17,110</u>	<u>5,706</u>

Excluding Ocean Island.

255 in the Gilbert Islands and 117 in the Ellice Islands were able to speak English, but all but 97 of these returned for the Gilbert Group resided on Tarawa or Butaritari Islands.

B

- (1) The first school in the Colony was started Abaiang in the Gilbert Group by Dr. Hiram Bingham, the pioneer missionary to the islands. Dr. Bingham reduced the language to writing and made a fine translation of the Bible. He also wrote several text-books on various school subjects and compiled a dictionary. Education was connected closely with other mission work and expanded pari passu with missionary progress generally. By 1870 the Boston Mission, working from Abaiang, had built churches and schools on most of the Northern and Central Gilbert Islands, Tabiteuea being their southernmost limit.
- (2) In 1865 the London Missionary Society, operating from Samoa, placed native teachers on most of the Ellice Islands and by 1870 they had expanded as far north as Beru, where they made contact with the Boston Society. The Roman Catholics commenced work in the Gilbert Group in 1888, but here extended their operations to the Ellice Islands.
- (3) By 1900 nearly every village in the two Groups had a school, most of the Protestant schools being in charge of Hawaiians or Samoans. The London Missionary Society and the Roman Catholics followed the Boston Mission in that year and built central schools for the training of

pastors and teachers and a policy of interval control was followed henceforth. The Ellice Islands, however, continued to be controlled from Samoa and the village schools there are, to this day, staffed to a large extent by Samoans. In 1917 the London Missionary Society took over the work of the Boston Mission in the Northern Gilbert Islands.

- (4) In 1898 government schools were founded in the five Central Gilbert Islands but they were felt to duplicate the work of the mission schools and the scheme was abandoned. In 1913 the government again took a practical interest in education by voting the sum of #275 to mission schools and printing presses. This sum was made an annual payment and increased to #500 in 1917. In 1920 the government set up an Education Department and a secular day school for boys was started on Ocean Island. In 1922 a central government boarding school, the King George V School, was founded on Tarawa for the training of selected youths for the government service. In 1926 an analagous institution was founded on Vaitupu, in the Ellice Group.
- (5) During 1930, by agreement with the two missions, the government commenced a teacher-training department in

connection with the King George V School. Five teachers were sent annually by each mission and received instruction in class organization and teaching methods in addition to a refresher course in general knowledge. For financial reasons a halt has had to be called in this scheme, although from an educational standpoint the results were most encouraging. Some 25% of the school children in the Gilbert Islands are, however, being taught in the new "improved" village schools.

C

- (1) Government policy "is to leave the control of village education in the hands of the missions, and to encourage and assist such education by the training of village teachers at a government centre and at government cost; and to give grants to village schools which are under the teachers trained by the Education Department."-- Annual Report on Education for 1934.
- (2) The training of selected youths for service in the various branches of the government is also undertaken by the Education Department, King George V School at Tarawa having been founded with this purpose in view. There is a school for European children on Ocean Island.
- (3) All education in the Colony is free, and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Instruction is limited to the primary standard. In most subjects the village schools stop at a point about half-way through an ordinary elementary syllabus. The boarding schools and the European School go through the whole syllabus. It is considered that all the needs of the community are met with by these standards.
- (4) Theology forms the principal subject in the mission central schools while clerical work is taught at the King George V School.. These form the principal subjects of vocational training, though elementary agriculture, handicrafts and domestic duties are taught in some schools.

D

(1) At present the educational needs of the Colony are being served by the Government Educational Department, in collaboration with the Protestant London Missionary Society and the Roman Catholic Mission of the Sacred Heart. The educational system may be summarized as follows:--

(a) The Government Educational Department

- Schools:--
1. King George V School, Tarawa. A boarding school run as far as possible on public school lines and training selected youths for government appointments. 15 boys under a European headmaster.
 2. The Baraban School, Ocean Island. A day school with 50 boys under a native master supervised by the headmaster in charge of the European school.
 3. The Ellice Islands School, Vaitapu. A boarding school for Ellice Island youths, the more promising students being sent on to the King George V School. 60 boys formerly under a European headmaster but now under native teachers.
 4. The European School, Ocean Island. A day school for European children. 4 boys and 4 girls under a European headmaster.

Staff:--

The Superintendent of Education
2 European Headmasters
5 Native Teachers

(b) The London Missionary Society--Gilbert Islands

- Schools:--
1. Rangorango Training Institution, Beru. A training school for pastors and teachers and a boarding school for boys and girls. 140 male and 95 female scholars under 7 European and 9 native teachers.

2. Maukao School, Abaiang, A central boarding school. 30 male scholars under 2 European and 2 native teachers.
3. Three intermediate boarding schools on Arorae, Vernonti and Maiana Islands, preparing pupils for the central establishments. 64 boys and 6 girls under 3 native teachers.
4. Ninety-six village day schools, of which 18 are "improved" schools. 3,013 scholars (1,467 boys and 1,546 girls), of which 1,054 are in "improved" schools.

(c) The London Missionary Society--Ellice Islands

- Schools:--1. Motufoua School, Vaitapu. A central boarding school. 40 male scholars under a native teacher.
2. Nine village day schools. 770 scholars (364 boys and 406 girls).

(d) The Mission of the Sacred Heart.

- Schools:--1. St. Michael's School, Abemerma. A training school for married teachers. 23 male scholars under 1 European and 2 native teachers.
2. St. Joseph's School, Abaiang. A seminary for preparing candidates for the priesthood. 26 male scholars under 3 European and 1 native teacher.
3. The Sacred Heart School, Butaritari. A boarding school specializing in the training of half-caste boys. 41 male scholars under a European teacher.
4. The Convent, Butaritari. A boarding school specializing in the training of half-caste girls. 60 female scholars under 4 European sisters.

5. Seven Convent boarding schools for girls.
267 girls under 16 European sisters.
6. One hundred and six village day schools,
of which 12 are "improved" schools.
2,217 scholars (1,200 boys and 1,017 girls),
of which 441 are in "improved" schools.

Note:--All figures are for the year 1934.

- (2) All "improved" village schools are inspected annually by the government and an efficiency grant is made for Colonial revenue to each school as a result of the inspection. The maximum grant obtainable by a school is #20, half of the marks being awarded on the assessed efficiency of the pupils and half on that of the teacher.
- (3) The government expenditure on education for the financial year 1933-34 amounted to #4,490 of which #386 was for the education of European children. #1,241 of the total expenditure was receivable from various sources.

Details of this expenditure are as follows:--

- (a) Cost of Administration #752
- (b) Cost of Government Schools #2,366
- (c) Grant in aid to Central Mission Schools #500
- (d) Grant in aid to "improved" village schools #276
- (e) Training of Teachers #210

The percentage of Expenditure on Education from Colonial Revenue, to the total Expenditure from Colonial Revenue is 8.

The amount spent on Education, as shown in government records only, amounts to 31- per head of population.

E

- (1) Educational problems in the Colony are relatively few and simple. The Department, under the Superintendent of Education, Capt. F. G. L. Hollard, has been engaged for some time in the task of devising a syllabus which will serve to build up a system of morality based on Christian principles, develop physical well-being, and at the same time utilize to the full such indigenous material as is not incompatible with Christianity. It is recognized that, since the native system of character and physical training has been destroyed through contact with western culture we are under an obligation to replace it with a system more suited to modern conditions. Stress, therefore, is laid throughout on moral and physical development rather than the mere inculcation of literary knowledge.
- (2) At the present time financial considerations preclude any major extension of educational work in the Colony and, indeed, a certain measure of retrenchment has been found necessary. It is hoped, however, that this condition is only temporary and that further development work may be possible in the near future.
- (3) The medium of instruction throughout the Gilbert Group is the vernacular, the only exceptions being the King

George V School and the Roman Catholic Boarding School at Butaritari. English is taught as a special subject at a few schools but the standard reached is low, though it is a popular subject. In the Ellice Islands only the government school uses the vernacular, the medium of instruction in the village schools being Samoan. It is questionable whether, even if it was possible, there would be any advantage in making English the medium of instruction as, owing to the isolation of the islands, the virtual absence of a European population and the fact that a common language in each Group already exists, the arguments for English are at their weakest.

- (4) Linked with the above we have the problem of text books in the vernacular. Much attention is being paid to this subject at the present time and it is hoped that the present poverty of suitable text books on certain subjects will be remedied in the near future. In the Ellice Islands Samoan text books are used.
- (5) Up to the present there have been three different systems of spelling the Gilbertese language in use by Protestants, Roman Catholics and the Government respectively. Owing to the efforts of the Superintendent of Education it appears probable that a system acceptable to all three bodies will shortly be brought into use.