

VOLUME XLVI

NUMBER 1

THE MISSIONARY

REVIEW *of the* WORLD

JANUARY, 1923

WHO IS TO BLAME?

J. LOVELL MURRAY

358
354

A STUDY OF SOULS IN AFRICA

W. C. WILLOUGHBY

NEW CHINA ON THE WAYS

J. C. GARRITT

A CHURCH PROGRAM FOR IMMIGRANTS

RAYMOND E. COLE

PERSIA—TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO AND NOW

ROBERT E. SPEER

INDIA IN THE MELTING POT

WM. MOYSER

MISSIONARY METHODS FOR MEN

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THE NEW YEAR AROUND THE WORLD

THE New Year appropriately follows the celebration of the Coming of Christ into the world. While the Gospel of peace and good will has not yet been heralded to all men, the messengers of Christ are scattered all over the world and wherever, around the earth, Christ's day truly dawns, there a New Year of light and life, of joy and peace will follow. What a wonderful experience it would be to be able to follow the first rays of the sun as the earth turns eastward and to hear from people of every race and tongue their welcome to the Sun of Righteousness! How much more wonderful it would be if the coming of the New Year, 1923, should mean, as the day dawns around the world, the disappearance of ignorance and superstition, of hatred and strife, of selfishness and sin before the victorious and vitalizing Light of the World!

LOOKING BACKWARD OVER 1922.

AMERE mention of outstanding events of the past year calls to mind the crises through which the world has been passing and the problems that remain to be solved. There have also been epoch-making events and signs of real progress.

In North America there have been distressing coal and railroad strikes, prohibition enforcement contrasted with bootlegging; the Ku Klux Klan has been offset by interracial cooperation; religious fundamentalist controversies; mission board reorganizations; the International Sunday-school Convention was noteworthy for its readjustments, and the International Y. M. C. A. Conference for the adoption of the "Paris Basis." A vigorous \$3,000,000 campaign has been waged in the United States for the Women's Union Christian Colleges of the Orient; many of the mission boards report increased receipts for their work. In Canada a new school of missions has been established in Toronto.

Ten Years in the Belgian Congo

BY REV. T. C. VINSON, LUEBO, BELGIAN CONGO

Missionary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States

THIRTY years ago, on April 18, 1891, the American Presbyterian Congo Mission was founded at Luebo. Under the providence of God, the work has been one of continued progress. The success has been due, in a very large measure, to the evangelistic spirit that has prevailed in the hearts of the people. The pioneer missionaries were guided by the Holy Spirit into the midst of a people whom God had marvellously prepared for the Gospel. One door after another was closed until they found an entrance at Luebo, twelve hundred miles in the interior.

One unique feature of the Mission has been the manner in which the people themselves have come seeking the Gospel and asking that teachers be sent to them. Every forward step in the occupation of new territory has been in response to an invitation from the people. These calls have always been so numerous that at no time has the Mission been able to meet the demand, to say nothing of attempting to go into any territory uninvited. The calls have often been pathetic and heart-breaking to the missionaries, because the people had to be sent away empty handed. The greatest trial has not been that of an unresponsive people, but our inability to meet the demands made upon us.

As an example of the appeals that have come we quote the words of a powerful chief, who sent a delegation to us a few years ago:

"I, Kalamba, the King of the Lulua, have long been a seeker after life. I have gone West as far as the Great Waters, but the Portuguese satisfied me not. I went to the East and the Belgians gave me perfection guns which said, 'I take life, but do not give it.' I have sought to the South but the wizards comforted me not. But passers-by have declared your Gospel to me, and I am satisfied at last. My searchings are ended. I and my people are yours. Accept as a guarantee my own child whom I am sending you. But come quickly here to my own home, where we await you. Your God make you merciful to me."

With such appeals constantly coming it is not difficult to explain the numerical progress which the mission has made during the past ten years. The figures given below cover the ten year period from 1911 to 1921.

In 1911 the mission consisted of two stations. Since that time one of these has been abandoned because of its close proximity to the other and four additional stations and one sub-station have been opened. During this period the number of out-stations occupied has increased from 156 to 564, and the native force, including evangelists and teachers, has increased from 200 to 1,737. The number

of communicants has advanced from 7,700 to 20,738. The yearly average number of those received on profession of faith during the last ten years is greater than the sum total of all those received during the first ten years. In the early part of this decade the medical work was largely in the hands of laymen and therefore of a minor character, but now, with the increase in the medical staff, over 60,000 treatments are given annually. During this period the missionary force has increased from sixteen to fifty-seven.

A distinct advance has also been made in the realm of Bible translation and Christian literature. In Bible translation this mission adopted a policy which is not shared in common with other societies working in the Congo. The ordinary method has been to translate the New Testament first and then to follow with the Old Testament. This mission adopted the policy of Bible paraphrases. The basis of this work was the International Sunday School lessons covering a period of three years. A more or less literal translation was made of these passages and the intervening passages were paraphrased thus forming a fairly complete story of the Bible. This task was not nearly so difficult as that of literal translation, and yet it was sufficient to meet the needs of a primitive people by giving them the fundamentals of the Gospel in the simplest form possible. The wisdom of this plan has abundantly justified itself as the truth has been presented to the people in the form of a progressive revelation. It was never intended to take the place of the Bible, but merely as a preparation for it. The work of literal translation has not yet been completed, but during the last ten years the entire New Testament and the first eight books of the Old Testament have been placed in the hands of the Christian people.

Contact with the Word of God has meant intellectual progress since the function of the Truth is to make the recipient free. Thirty years ago not a man, woman or child knew a letter of the alphabet for the simple reason that in this region the language had not been reduced to writing. Now there are thousands that can read the Bible and hundreds can proclaim the Truth in an intelligent manner.

Marked progress has also been made along spiritual lines. In measuring the spiritual progress in a heathen country, we should not take the Church at home as our standard. There the Kingdom has made some progress toward changing the whole society. The Christian, as a rule, lives in a moral atmosphere. He has back of him generations of social refinement and at least has a consciousness of sin. But here these things are conspicuous by their absence. The people have behind them an unbroken history of hundreds and perhaps thousands of years of ignorance, superstition and gross immorality. There is little evidence of a consciousness of sin and very little public sentiment even against the grosser forms of evil but we should note the progress made in the face of adverse circumstances.

In developing Christian character we have adopted the policy of beginning at the very earliest possible moment, consistent with spiritual attainments and power, of laying on the infant church itself the responsibility which naturally grows out of an active participation in Christian experience and activity. Along with this policy and moving *pari passu* with it there has been the corresponding principle of increasing the power and authority of the leaders of the native church. These principles have been the chief factors in the development of the native church. One essential element in the enrichment of character is responsibility. If we assume that the native Christian is too weak and ignorant to be trusted with authority and responsibility we keep the church in swaddling clothes, retard their progress and lose for the cause of Christ the service which they could have rendered. We also limit the transforming and energizing power of the Holy Spirit for He no doubt wants to work through them greater things than we have imagined. Our idea, then, has been to give the native church, gradually, but as soon as possible, all the functions and authority of a complete church organization.

Pursuing this policy of laying definite tasks and responsibilities on the individual Christian, and by selecting and training more carefully those who seemed to be most responsive to the teaching, the native church in 1911 had reached the stage where elders were chosen and a church session established on the local station and presided over by the missionaries. At that time only six had reached this stage, while now we have twenty. In the meantime the responsibility has been laid more and more upon their shoulders and the standard of the eldership has likewise been advanced. The local sessions on the station now practically control the affairs of the church, and only bring their actions to the missionaries for review. Elders have also been placed in control of large sections of outstations and two or three of them can meet and decide matters on their own responsibility. In proportion to the opportunities and advantages that they have enjoyed we believe that it is not exaggerating to state that the work and spiritual qualities of the elders here will compare favorably with those at home. Now the church has advanced one stage further and three native pastors have been ordained. One of these did not meet the test of increased responsibility and had to be reduced to the eldership, but the other two have done splendid work. We are now looking forward to the ordination of other pastors and we hope in the not distant future to organize a Presbytery.

The Christian body has always been evangelistic in spirit, scattering the seed of the Gospel from village to village. The thirteen thousand received into the church during the last ten years have been the fruit of the personal work done by the native Christians. The missionary has merely followed, making a little more careful examination and receiving the candidates.

In the past ten years much real progress has also been made in the attitude of the Belgian authorities toward the missionaries and the natives. In 1911 the attitude was certainly not one of friendliness toward Protestant missions. The Government itself was so interwoven with the Romanists that it was often difficult to separate the two. A great deal of trouble was due to religious propaganda, but the State authorities rarely ever laid a restraining hand upon the offenders. Religious liberty existed only in theory. Native Christians were often subjected to injustice and at times to open persecution. The missionaries themselves were not immune from insults. Two of our own number were assaulted with sticks and rocks while passing a Roman Catholic station, but the case was never brought to trial. But we are happy to note that the change which has taken place in Belgium has been reflected in the Colony during the last two years. Certainly the present attitude of those who are in authority in Belgium is one of impartiality to all who are laboring for the moral welfare of their African subjects.

At last public opinion in Belgium has awakened to the moral aspects of colonization. As in evidence of this we quote the words of King Albert spoken to the First National Colonial Congress assembled in the Senate Room in Brussels, December 18 to 20, 1920. In the presence of the very representative gathering the King declared:

“The Belgian nation herself now is empowered with complete sovereignty on the Congo, and assumes before the whole world the responsibility for the development of the Colony. Colonization is one of the highest functions of societies arrived at an advanced stage of civilization. But there are no functions without duties, and the first of all is the mission of the motherland to emancipate the primitive races. One cannot deny that those races were often sacrificed at the beginning of modern colonization. Those at the center had exclusively in view their own selfish interest. For the honor of humanity I am glad to state that the progress of moral and political ideas, and a truer apprehension of the real interests of both parties concerned, have modified the theory and the practical methods of civilization.”

At this same conference the Colonial Minister, M. L. Franck, said, “Belgium has in Africa heavy responsibilities and she must accept them. In the Congo we want not so much laws and regulations as *men* of the highest type. Each man we send there is entrusted with a mission. Forced labor is contrary to justice; it is condemned by our moral conscience. We will remain faithful to the system of free labor, strictly. Free labor only can give satisfactory and permanent results. It obliges the employer to better the living conditions of the workers and to develop them. We have been unanimous against the reintroduction of forced labor with all its abuses.”

The newly appointed Governor-General, M. Lippens, seems to be animated by these same high ideals and has pledged himself to their fulfillment. If such ideals as this are kept uppermost in the minds of the officials of the Colonial Government, who can measure the progress that will be made during the next decade?