

Missions.

LETTER FROM MR. LEE.

From a letter by Rev. Willberforce Lee, missionary, we make some extracts. Mr. Lee had been six months in the country at the time of writing; and beginning to get acquainted with the country, the people and the work, gives his impressions and experiences.

He first describes their location, and their style of houses. They are in the country of Bihé, nearly 300 miles from the sea; about 5,000 feet above the sea level. Their river is the Yukalonga, which runs easterly to the Coanzo. They are on the north side of this small river. Between the houses of Mr. Lee and Mr. Currie runs a small stream, (which supplies them with "nice cold water all the year round"), falling into the river. Their "Summer gardens" are in the bottom-lands of the river. Their "Winter gardens" and fields on the high ground round their houses. Poles are set upright in the ground, about 18 inches apart; and smaller poles interlaced, perhaps four inches from each other. Then well-wrought clay is added, 'till a pretty good "wall" is made. The roof is a thick thatch of grass. The walls and ceilings are lined with white cotton. The floors are of several coats of well-mixed clay, beaten down. He hopes to cover his floors by and bye, with native mats.

Concerning the people, Mr. Lee writes:

Now for a word about the people. But let me first say my impressions of the people and their customs have continually changed since coming here, and that for the better, or I should say, in favor of the people. You will therefore take them as the impressions of a new-comer, and not the certain knowledge of one long accustomed to their modes of thought and life.

The people impress me as being a strong, active, intelligent, peaceable race. They average about the same height as Canadians, that is the men, but the women are as a rule taller than those at home. In color there is a wide range from the black of the Canadian Negro to a light brown. The average color being a dark brown, almost the shade called seal brown. I find as I have grown accustomed to being among them that the color is pleasant to the eye and has nothing that is repulsive in it.

As traders these people, Biheans, are keen shrewd bargain-drivers, and evidently are as much

bent upon securing wealth as are the worshippers of "the almighty dollar" at home.

Their morality is low, very low; but this I am convinced is only because they know no better. Yet their marriage and family laws are quite strict, and violators are heavily fined. But, as is too often the case at home, the crime appears to be "getting caught," and not the performance of wrong action.

There are heavy penalties imposed upon any one caught stealing or injuring another's property, which shows they well know that honesty is a virtue.

Each country has its king, and each village its chief (Sekulu). The chiefs are answerable for the well-doing of their people, and each village pays tribute to the king of the country.

If a man in a village is quarrelsome and unmanageable, he is sent to the coast on some pretext; and is there sold as a slave. In that way the lazy or useless members of their villages are disposed of. The crowning curse of the people is their *superstition*. Their belief in almost every form of fetish is firm. Witch craft is a matter-of-fact with them. Fetish doctors do a *big business*. Polygamy is the rule. Of drunkenness, I have seen very little since leaving the coast: although the people will do almost anything for rum. Yet taking them altogether, as far as I have seen, they are a happy, industrious people; and only need the light of the gospel to develop into a race of manly Christians.

The little children please me much. They are, as a rule, pretty little mortals, as happy as the day is long. Their parents and elders are, generally speaking, very kind to them.

The deference paid by the young to the old is very marked. When an older person enters a place a younger at once provides him a seat. Any little "chore" that is to be done is performed by the youngest present, provided he is not too young or small. An old man hands his pipe to a younger, or to a boy, and the latter fills it, lights it, and hands it back.

Then, too, I have been much pleased to notice their invariable rule of sharing one with the other. If any one has food, or any thing of that kind, each one present gets a share of it. No matter how small the original portion is, it is divided between young and old.

On the whole, I am favorably impressed with the people; and feel that a missionary's life can not fail to be of great use here. Once the gospel has free course among them, they will become a worthy race.

In closing I may say, and I know it will please you to learn it, that both Mr. Currie and myself have enjoyed good health during the past month. My health has been *uniformly good* ever since I left