

Mission Field

CENTRAL AFRICA.

(From a lecture delivered at a meeting of the Gleaners' Union of Christ Church Brooklyn, E. D., New York, by the Rev. Llewellyn Caley.)

Although the coast-line and sea-board countries of Africa have been familiar for many decades, the vast interior was unknown until the last fifty years, and a great part until the last twelve or fourteen years. Part of Africa has been known for 4,000 years. The knowledge of Egypt goes back to the days of Abraham; the knowledge of Carthage to the time of Hannibal and the Punic wars; the knowledge of the west coast to the fifteenth century, when it was discovered by the Portuguese. It was at this time that the mouth of the great river Congo was discovered.

The continent of Africa contains one-quarter of the entire land area of the globe. That is to say, it equals North and South America combined, or North America and Europe put together. This vast continent is estimated to have a population of 350,000,000; more than one-fifth of the human race.

Once central Africa was thought to be desolate, now it is found to be a region possessing a most magnificent system of lakes and rivers, having no less than 80,000 square miles of lake water, and the Congo system, the second largest river and river basin in the world. The Congo and its many and large tributaries have been explored for 11,000 miles, giving 22,000 miles of river bank, which forms a longer line of navigable water than the whole coast-line of Europe, and these banks are crowned with thousands of villages, providing scope for a comparatively easy and terribly needed missionary evangelization among the many millions of heathen that dwell in the Congo basin; the population being estimated at from fifty to seventy millions.

The popular notion that all Africans are Negroes is a mistake; it is true, most Africans are dark, but not Negroes. From Cape Colony to eight degrees north of the equator all the variety of races belong to the great Bantu family, and are entirely distinct from Negroes. An African traveller has thus described them: "The Bantu is a fine, tall, upright man, with delicately small hands and well shaped feet, a fine face, high, thin nose, beard and moustache." The proper home of the Negro is in the immense Soudan, north of this region.

The Congo basin forms a very large part of the Congo Free State, which is about as large and as populous as the United States. In this vast territory the liquor traffic may not be abused, the slave trade is prohibited, missionaries are entitled to help and protection, and black and white men are considered equal before the law. In religion, the many millions that inhabit this vast area are not idolaters in the general sense; they have idols, it is true, but these seem to be used more as charms and fetiches; they do not worship the heavenly bodies, or deify the elements; they have, however, a hazy belief in a future life, which leads to many cruelties being practised. Some of the tribes

are cannibals, but are ashamed of it, and try to conceal it from the white man.

The two great curses of central Africa are the slave trade and the drink traffic. That grand explorer, Livingstone, who first unveiled the horrors of the slave trade, spoke of it as "the open sore of the world." It is to-day in the region we are speaking of, especially in the eastern side, which is more easily reached by the Arabs coming from the coast. * * *

Central Africa's second great curse is the drink traffic. This affects most the western part, and the horrors arising from this iniquitous business are most terrible and almost incredible, and, sad to relate, this trade, which is degrading, demoralizing and destroying the natives, is carried on by the three most prominent Protestant nations, America, England and Germany. The drink, principally spirits, is of the worst kind, being almost absolute poison, and the profits are enormous, amounting in some cases to 700 per cent. A few years ago Germany sent 7,000,000 gallons, America nearly 1,000,000, and England over 500,000 in one year, and the traffic has been increasing since. A firm in Boston has undertaken to produce 3,000 gallons a day for seven years for the Congo. How terrible it seems that this fierce and fatal fire-water, well called "distilled damnation," should be brought to them by the so-called Christian nations. We talk of the wickedness of the heathen, what of ours? They do not know what is right, we do; and yet this crime-creator of corrupt Christendom of the vilest description is shipped there by millions of gallons!

It should, however, be borne in mind that this trade is fatal to all other branches of commerce, for it destroys the tribes with whom merchants with a conscience might carry on legitimate trade. Now, the coast and villages are strewn with empty rum bottles and gin cases, a sight to make devils laugh and angels weep, and what must be the feelings of our Saviour Christ whom these nations profess to take as their example? Truly, as Thompson says: "Africa had better always have been the dark, unknown continent if this is to be the end of it." Surely this shall not be the end of it; surely the Christians of America and England will bestir themselves to see that this unrighteous trade is restricted, and also to take to the poor, benighted heathen nations to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone will teach them how they may be able to resist the temptation of, or overcome, the terrible habit. We are not responsible for the ages gone by in which these people were allowed to remain in darkness; but now that central Africa has been opened up, we are responsible.

It seems to us that no part of the world has so strong a claim on the Christian Church as central Africa. Think of a new world at the end of the nineteenth century almost unevangelized! What must Christ think? We say almost unevangelized, for there are some brave and true men and women at work there, seeking to proclaim the glorious message of their Lord and Master, but, oh, how few—about seventy or 100 working amid 70,000,000.

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