

Editorial and Contributed.

IN CENTRAL AFRICA.

FOUR Missionary Societies are at work in the Congo region—the American Baptists, the English Baptists, the Swedish Society, and the Congo Balolo Society. The aggregate working force is about eighty, with twenty stations and numerous outposts. The history of the work covers only thirteen years, in which time seven churches have been organized among the Bakongo people, with 1,500 communicants, and perhaps half as many more “probationers.” The difficulties experienced at the outset were enormous, for the natives were full of suspicion and distrust, thinking the white strangers must be slave-traders or state officials, and both classes were feared and dreaded. When this prejudice was dispelled, the missionaries were free to go where they would and found their stations, and soon their message began to take effect.

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A remarkable feature of these missions is the character of the native converts. A large percentage of them are said to be “persevering, energetic, aggressive Christian workers—such workers as put to shame the feeble and childish efforts of many Christians in our own land.” They are very decided in their religious convictions, and the lines of moral character are sharply drawn. They seem to know nothing of those refined distinctions by which character is shaded off until it is almost impossible to tell to what class it belongs. To them, every man, white or black, high or low, is a “son of God,” or a “son of the devil.” So important is this broad distinction considered that one of the first questions to a new acquaintance will be, “Are you a son of God?” If the answer is in the negative, they will not hesitate to say, “Then you are a child of the devil,” and at once proceed to preach the Gospel with all the earnestness in their power.

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The work of the native evangelist is developing on the Congo, and bids fair to solve the problem of the evangelization of Africa. These native preachers are said to be wonderfully eloquent—natural orators—and their language is adapted for most effective delivery. A significant fact is that the natives will believe the Gospel far more readily from one of their own people than from the lips of the foreign missionary, perhaps because in the former case they hear “every man in the tongue wherein he was born the wonderful works of God.” Bands of workers go out at their own expense, travelling from village to village, preaching

the Gospel, and often remaining away for weeks at a time. Another significant fact is that the simplicity and usefulness of a native evangelist is spoiled by a visit to England or America. He becomes self-conscious, despises his kindred, and wants to live like the foreigner.

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A striking characteristic of the native Christians is their loyalty to the Word of God, and it is all the more remarkable in contrast with their independence of any dictation on the part of the missionary. Let any rule or precept be insisted upon, and they will debate the point with vigor; but once show them that it rests clearly upon the Scriptures, and there is at once an end of all controversy. “The Lord hath said it,” is the common remark, “and we must obey.” This reverence for the Scriptures soon creates in the people a quick and tender conscience, and this leads to a prompt application of Bible principles to the affairs of daily life. A missionary gives the following illustration:—“Travelling through strange villages one day, I saw a woman by the roadside with a pawpaw beside her. I asked her what she would sell it for, and she named a price; I bade the boy who was with me to take it away for our noon-day meal. ‘No, no,’ she cried, ‘the pawpaw will not be ripe enough till to-morrow; go down the road, sir, and you will find plenty more that are ripe enough to eat now.’ This woman had heard the Gospel from a native evangelist, and thus she applied it to the most ordinary concerns.

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The Congo Free State embraces an area of 1,680,000 square miles, with a population of probably not less than 50,000,000. There are fifteen or twenty different tribes, speaking as many different languages. One tribe alone—the Belols—is estimated at 10,000,000. So far as known, there is not a single town in the interior that will refuse to receive a missionary; but they hate the state officials almost as much as the slave-trader, and as the state obliges all vessels to fly its flag, the missionary is often regarded as an official in disguise, and treated with suspicion. When he has proved by deeds—words go for nothing—that he is a true friend of the people, his way is clear, but it often takes a long time to do this. On one occasion a missionary found himself in peril of his life, but a message came from another village, saying, “Let him alone, he is a missionary.” Immediately these who had threatened him apologized, saying, “We have no complaints against the ambassadors of God.” Missionaries are called “ambassadors of God,” and Christians are called “witnesses of Jesus Christ.”

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The missionaries concede that one native evangelist