

Thus it was in answer to twenty years of daily earnest prayer that the first missionary to the Pongas set foot in that benighted country.

On the west coast of Africa, more than one hundred miles north of Sierra Leone, lies the country of the Pongas, a rich and fertile district, thickly peopled by natives, though unhealthy to Europeans. It was once well known to slave-traders, who collected their large cargoes of wretched Africans and carried them across the Atlantic to slavery. Now its inhabitants live peaceably in villages, each governed by its chief; but they are idolaters, grossly superstitious and immoral in their lives. The chief of the village of Fallangia, however, had been brought to England in his youth, had received some Christian teaching and learnt to read and write English. On returning to his native land, though retaining the English name of Richard Wilkinson, he fell back into practical heathenism, till in the year 1835, at the age of forty, he was visited by a dangerous illness. Conscience then awoke and accused him of many sins against God. Forgotten truths crowded on his mind, and he longed for more instruction, and for means of grace. He vowed, should his life be spared, to pray daily that God would send a missionary to him and his people. He recovered and kept his vow.

Meantime there lived on the other side of the Atlantic an active pious clergyman, of the name of Leacock. He was of the same age with the chief Richard Wilkinson, and had laboured partly in America, partly in the West Indies. In 1854 he was in his native island of Barbadoes, interesting himself for Western Africa, the country which had so long supplied the West Indies with slaves. While raising money to support the mission there, the cholera broke out in Mr Leacock's parish. He and his wife devoted themselves to the sick and dying, then the disease attacked her, and she was taken from him. When the first sorrow was over the good man saw in the blow a call to a yet more devoted life, and he offered himself to the bishop as first missionary from the West Indies to Western Africa. He was gladly accepted, and with a young negro (Mr. Dupont) as his assistant, sailed the next year for Africa by way of England.

He went in faith, doubtful on what part of the vast coast-line of Africa to set up the standard of the Cross, knowing nothing yet of Fallangia and its chief. So he placed himself at the disposal of the Bishop of Sierra Leone, and worked with him at Freetown for a short time. He then heard of the Pongas as a country wholly given to idolatry and grievously wronged by the slave trade. His heart burned to go there: the Bishop bade him God speed; the captain of an English man-of-war offered to convey him to the very place, and without delay he and Mr. Dupont set sail, and were landed on the shores of the river Pongas, whence the country takes its name.

In the presence of the English captain the missionaries were warmly welcomed by Matthias Katty, king of the Pongas, and the chief Kennybock Ali, who promised them a house and garden and their protection if they would remain and teach their children. Accordingly they settled themselves in a hut in the village of Tintama, and prepared to open a school. But when the captain had sailed all was changed, the children were kept back, and they were neglected and even plundered by the natives. Though discouraged, Mr. Leacock was still waiting and hoping, when one day he was surprised by a visit from a young black man, who with a respectful manner and in good English said, "Sir, my name is Lewis Wilkinson, and I am a son of Mr. Wilkinson the chief of Fallangia. I bring an invitation from my father, and an apology for