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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

A Voyage to Fernando Po

(Concluded)

In these days when the Cairo to Cape road is as thronged as our Great North Road, and visitors to Africa seem to seek only game-reservations and gold and diamond mines and snake-parks and tribal dances and pygmy villages, the giant Watusi or the white rhino of Hluhluwe, John Clarke's diary is a refreshment.

One of the many interesting things about him is his thorough preparation for this journey. So well had he read all the printed material he could lay hand upon concerning this coast it was as though he had visited it before. Thus he was prepared for the age and solidity of the forts and the size and shape of the settlements. And no diarist ever took greater care to record exact shade and tint of sky above and earth beneath, of forest or garden tree and the fruit thereof, the ebony of Negroid, dark-brown of Aku, golden hue of Mandingo, the manifold creole complexion and feature and the ashen leper and the blotched albino. It was an honest to goodness desire to inform.

Illustration of this is in his seeking the graves of L. E. L.¹ at Cape Coast and Lander in Fernando Po.

"Called upon Captain MacLean, brother to the Governor. He came from Perthshire in Scotland about nine months ago, and still retains the appearance of one who has not long suffered the heat of an African sun, or the still more fearful heat of an African fever. Dr. Prince asked which was the grave of Mrs. MacLean, and a black soldier pointed out two rows of yellow brick set on edge surrounding twelve red tiles. There is no marble monument,² no inscription to mark the spot where are deposited the ashes of the once gay and admired L. E. L.³ By her side are the remains of an officer's wife, and those of the Rev. Philip Quaque,⁴ both with inscriptions."

"I preached in the afternoon from 2 *Cor. v.* 14-15, interpreted by Mr. Smith, a young man of colour who teaches school

¹ Laetitia (Letty) Elizabeth Landon, 1802-37, minor poetess of London, the rejected by Forster (the biographer of Dickens) who suddenly married George MacLean and accompanied him to Cape Coast, where she died eight weeks later.

² One now on wall of great hall of fort.

³ It would be interesting to know if Clarke had read any of Miss Landon's very slight contributions to English literature.

⁴ Fantee native of Cape Coast, 1741-1816, took degree at Oxford, appointed Chaplain of Gold Coast and held the office fifty-years.

in the fort, and once acted as secretary to Governor MacLean."

"Dined with Mr. Smith, son of the late governor,⁵ who showed us the bedroom in which Mrs. MacLean died. He is a gold merchant. At his home tasted "Relish" and examined Loddgis and Son's celebrated work on flowers."

George MacLean had been given, for services rendered in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast governorship after the death of Sir Charles McCarthy in the First Ashanti War, and held office 1830-1837 (?) for a London Company of Merchants. A man of some character who spent a £4,000 annual grant in creating a virtual protectorate over considerable area of the Fantee country,⁶ blending native with European justice and teaching love of soil in a Garden of Experiment.⁷

This bit of the coast with its beautiful lake and garden and inviting landscapes pleased Clarke. "Walked to Fort William, where a lighthouse is erected, for which each vessel entering the harbour pays a small sum to the Governor. Several native soldiers were on guard. They cleaned our shoes and seem filled with gratitude on receiving a shilling among eight or ten of them. From the Fort a fine view of the country is afforded, the road to Coomassie on our right, and to the west that to El-Mina, a white fort seen in the distance."

He was pleased also with some he met there, the young man of colour, Mr. Smith, who had been "accomplished for his position (schoolmaster) by being sent to England," and Sam Quamina, head canoe-boy of the Governor, "far advanced above his countrymen in intelligence and civilisation."

As interpreter of sermons Sam "took fifteen minutes to translate five minutes." "When he became concerned about his soul he sent away Tanawah his younger wife and was lawfully married to Parabah, the other and elder. He keeps a most respectable lodging-house for sea-captains. Instead of asking me for anything he made me a handsome present of mats of native workmanship" . . . "Went off to ship in canoe put at our disposal by Sam Quamina."

A couple of other portraits follow. A man "dashed by the King of Ashanti to Mr. Freeman when he visited Coomassie, now called Isaac Freeman. He looks happy, contented and well. He was a prisoner taken in war, and was expecting each day to be put

⁵ MacLean's predecessor.

⁶ See Stephen Gwynn's *Life of Mary Kingsley* (28-9 pp., Penguin Edition).

⁷ Other such gardens were planted by William Waddy Harris, a Liberian, in his own country, and Sir Samuel Lewis, a second generation Repatriated African and first of his race to be knighted by Queen Victoria, at Waterloo in Sierra Leone.

to death. His country is a long way to the north, and his numerals different to any I have yet collected."

"At Tabou saw one of the men picked up at sea mentioned at page 348 in Dr. Oldfield's Journal. He knew Captain Irving⁸ again. He was one of the two tried at the Old Bailey, on Friday the 6th of March, 1835, for the murder of Captain Glasscott. He and the other were acquitted, but the mystery was never solved."

A procession of native kings crosses these pages of the diary.

"King Baffo of Cavelly is a tall, athletic personage, forbidding in appearance, but the American (mission) station three miles away meets with no sort of interruption or annoyance. He was dressed in black hat and blue and red handkerchief."

"King Pay is the chief of the place (St. Andrews), but does not visit ships. King George came to represent him. He was ornamented with the brass drops from an umbrella."

"Another king, whose name sounded like Queer, presented figure to suit name. He wore blue coat of marine as skirt, tied by pieces of blue cloth, (and) one of a corporal above (with) white handkerchief and black hat. His beard was plaited, as was that of another monarch named Jambla."

He is never too busy to note things in native houses, like the fifteen wash-basins at Cape Palmas and the many clocks in home of neighbouring village. The buildings, also, "swish, balls of clay that harden in the sun and last a long time and keep out insects." The walls were erected in layers "2 foot thick and 3 in height," each layer allowed to dry before the next was added.

Prices interested him, the bullock bought for under 4/- and the other for "some powder and a gun," and peculiarities of some of the animals. "Took on board an African sheep with hair instead of wool." "Bought sheep that measured 21¼ inches in girth, height 20½, length 23½, tail 9, head from crown to tip 6 inches." And he never misses ornament of odd character, tobacco-pipe, snake-bone or skin, bits of calabash, fowl-beaks, bird-claws, hawk and parrot feather, monkey tails, belt of wooden bells with teeth as rappers, skulls of small dogs in hair. Also aggrry beads.

"One of his (Big Tom's) followers (at Adonay river) had sixteen rows of blue and white beads as wristlets and sixteen or eighteen on each leg as anklets, below the knees large square (hanging) pieces of bone, with mixture of beads, and round his neck other beads, some of them agra (aggrry) and jsopoe. Agra beads are valued at their weight in gold.⁹ Dr. Prince took his photograph. He was called Anthony Toby, Yaggragna in native

⁸ Master of the *Golden Spring*.

⁹ The five in the British Museum are valued at £1000 each.

tongue, and came from Three Towns. He was one of the few who had survived the red-drink (red-water) ordeal."

"Rich boys wear yellow beads, sometimes mixed with the more valuable agra species. The way of finding agra beads is not clear. Some say they are dug from the earth.¹⁰ A person who had a large one said it cost him five akeys of gold dust. They are of varied colours, are pretty, the colouring going through their entire substance. Some are holed. Imitations, made in England, are easily detected. The popoe beads are long and of a blue colour."

He then goes to trouble of compiling table of values—8 tacoes equal akey, 16 akeys equal one ounce, etc. Maize, he says, is used for tacoes, liquorice-seed (small, red, with black eye) for half tacao. The tacao being valued at 3d., akey at 2/-. "Some of the merchants will not trade for anything less than 5/-. 10 heads of tobacco are given for an akey of gold dust, which at 1/6d. is 24/- an ounce."

Wonderful man, one murmurs, looking up from the fading pages packed with such details as those just quoted and others like—"Cape Palmas has teeming population and the colonists are increasing. . . . Grand Drewin men were athletic and noble in appearance. . . . So curious, they put their hands in my pockets . . . the native cloth worn is strong and looks well . . . cords of goat and ox skin . . . plaited hats perched above hair and kept in place by large nail . . . waist-bands of yellow money-tails . . . wristlet of monkey-teeth . . . ivory rings on thumbs . . . hair tied in tufts, a work of great patience, skill and time."

He writes at some length of early coastal evangelists, mostly Liberated Africans¹¹ like William de Graft, who released by Mixed Commission Court in Freetown was helped back to Cape Coast as he had ambition to preach to his own folk, one of the many assisted down the coast by Captain Potter the Wesleyan skipper of Bristol. William de Graft was bluff hearty man of great mental and physical strength, as his fellow-students at Richmond testified when he was sent there for training.¹² He preached the enforcement of the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, and had strange mesmeric power over his disciples.

Jasper Smith,¹³ also helped home by Captain Potter, was

¹⁰ They are often uncovered during the Rainy Season.

¹¹ Repatriates, taken off captured slave-ships, hospitalised, christened, given new start in Freetown and Sierra Leone villages and down coast. Like most of the First Generation of Sierra Leoneans those met by John Clarke were of endearing character or possessed characteristics making them individual.

¹² He was twice in England, the second time in 1841.

¹³ The Repatriates were named by the C.M.S. from the list of their £10 subscribers.

another preacher. He preceded de Graft by a few years and had quite a congregation in his house for prayer and Bible study, when "the son of Boanerges" arrived preaching his Mosaic Gospel. There followed clashes, almost riots, until 1834 when Captain Potter brought along yet another Repatriate, the Rev. Joseph Dunwell, to do something about it. And Dunwell, a lean but tireless man, between planting "stations of his faith and order" along the coast from Accra to Axim, reconciled Smith-ite and de Graft-ite by merging them into his Cape Coast "station."

One would like to know more of James Acra, who kept his head shaven save for wiry tuft in centre, and had spent some years in England, and now travelled the coast and some of the inland countries collecting gold-dust for a Bristol firm. And Jack Massey who had lived in Liverpool and London and claimed to have been an 1781 Repatriate but sometimes got his story of masters and skippers mixed, he also having been a sailor. "He spoke English well," says Clarke. "When I challenged him regarding Church attendance he readily described all the routine of a service and some of the things he had heard ministers say in sermons. He offered, if a teacher was sent (to Grand Bereby) to interpret for him and to build him a new house and see that the children attended for instruction."

The Krumen not only had Clarke's sympathy, they troubled his conscience. Those shipped as crew he took for granted, but as the *Golden Spring* drifted down the coast others appeared who had no duties aboard and were suspiciously cooped below.

"Dec. 13. Lord's Day. Therm 86. 6 Krumen were shipped. I quite believe the poor boys have next to nothing to do with the matter, for they are put below and strict guard set lest they jump overboard."

"Dec. 14. Came to anchor for night at St. Andrew's, called King George Town on the map by McQueen and Sasandria by the natives. . . . The river here was once a great place for slave trading, and they say is not altogether free of it yet. . . . Three of the new Krumen have deserted, one of them distinguished by his yellow skin and his ability to speak English. He had been made head-man over the others, and was highly valued by the Captain."

"Dec. 17. Opposite Gold Coast. Have now 85 Krumen aboard. These poor creatures live on rice and palm oil, sleep under a sail-cloth, and upon the whole are quiet in their demeanour."

"Dec. 22. 8 of our Krumen managed to escape during the time we had been ashore. 80 are left, to be employed as wood-cutters at Fernando Po." "Dec. 23. Teaching wood-cutters their

letters, Dr. Prince and the Congo boy and the two Mates helping." "Dec. 24. One Krumen knows all his letters. His father is a fetich-man of Cavelly and he dances amazingly, jumping and turning in the air."

"Dec. 29. Teaching Krumen respecting the Creation (our first parents) and Sin and Jesus. The Drewin people listened, one who knew English interpreting."

At last they reached Fernando Po, an island in Bight of Biafra twice the length of the Isle of Wight and about seven miles broader. Its shores are steep, its sea-strand narrow, its mountains volcanic. From distance it looks beautiful tropical hill, but near it is heart-breaking, with unpathed peaks, one 10,000 feet, impenetrable forests and unfordable torrents. It is one of the West Coast's worst malarial centres.

Its people the Bubi (Bube, Ediya) are Bantu, and in Clarke's time unclothed hunters bringing down game with stone axes. The Bubi¹⁴ have the mountains and the Repatriates and their descendants the plains. The few European traders¹⁵ dealt in cocoa, coffee, sugar, tobacco, vanilla and kola. Quite soon John Clarke presented the language of these Bantu folk to the outside world in his *Adayah Vocabulary* and *Introduction to the Fernandian Tongue*.

The island has been Portuguese, Spanish, British, Spanish again to 1900 when handed over to French. John Becroft, a man of mystery to John, was Governor for the Spanish from 1844 to 1854 and British Consul from 1849.¹⁶ Port Clarence is the capital.

"In the bay beyond Clarence lay the steamer *Quorra*, mentioned in Laird's Journal ('112 ft. beam 15, depth 8, horse-power 40, begun March 1832, launched 29 May, sailed from Liverpool 19 July'), and beyond are the remains of the *Alburkeh*, the old packet *Hope*, a Portuguese hulk and another. Many mournful reflections are connected with these, especially those that ascended the Niger in 1832-3. Two small slave ships are also here, formerly engaged in the Trade from the main to the Island of Princes, carrying 25 to 50 each voyage, but now used as cattle and goat boats."

"The *Ethiophe* (is) at (Clarence) wharfe in which Captain Becroft (Beecroft) had been up the Niger, he being one of the first with whom we shook hands. He had nearly reached Bousaa, but had lost four men. In a previous voyage to Idda he had been

¹⁴ See Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa*, 1897.

¹⁵ About 500 in the 80's, now 1000.

¹⁶ Followed by T. J. Hutchinson, who wrote *Impressions of Western Africa*, 1861, and whose ameliorative work there is still effective, and Sir Richard Burton (*Wanderings in West Africa*) from 1861 to 1865.

only four months absent. Saw also Dr. King, his surgeon. The *Ethiopia*, 40 horse-power, was taking in supplies for Bimbia, Cameroons and Calabar."

The first entry after landing shows the courage with which Clarke and Prince faced their task. "Took house at 10/- per week, furnished with 2 beds, 3 tables, sofa, chair, and removed into it. Well fitted for our purpose. It is like Jamaica work, only my dear fellow labourer there is not here to share the work with me. Feelings too painful to express came over my mind, at other times I am filled with joy by the assurance that I am in the path of duty, where God wishes me to be and where He has appointed I should be."

The "gnawing query" (as he said in letter to friend) he had known coming down the coast "if apprentices are slaves" became more persistent on the island. After reference to some 700 or 800 Liberated Africans¹⁷ and other free people, he writes: "In an adjoining town are 200 Krumen, the wood-cutters who are bound apprentice for 2 or 3 years. Some escape inland, being discontented with their lot. Some have been stranded here from palm-oil ships and have no chance of returning home."

"In the cut between the sea banks lies the dungeon called the Guard House, its roof level with the surface of the earth. No windows for light, no grating for air, the great door closed and fastened with bar and pad-lock. At one side was long bar with shackles for hands and feet."

"Saw again the dungeon, from which singing proceeded! A hymn being sung in that dismal place!" . . . The man I heard singing in the Guard House, and whom the keeper says is always praying and singing, sent us a letter. He has been in confinement a long time. Had been shop keeper to John Scott¹⁸, was accused of taking goods to amount of £20, and compelled to pay this sum by loss of wages and property." . . . "Called on Mr. Thompson¹⁹ to ask release of poor Brew, who has been in close confinement since the 15th of September."

"Jan. 9. Saw three poor men chained together in (Mr. Thompson's) garden.²⁰ The chains were heavy. While we were at morning prayer the soldiers or constables tied up a black man to two posts, on which a bell is hung, about 300 yards distant from our window. After worship Dr. Prince and I spoke to Mr. Scott

¹⁷ The Repatriation scheme that flourished in Sierra Leone was failure here.

¹⁸ A leading Clarence trader.

¹⁹ Agent for principal Trading Company and acting Governor whilst Captain Beecroft was in Cameroon.

²⁰ The Portuguese in Angola still chain their prisoners whilst walking and working.

(the man's master), quoting the words "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." "Soon the flogging began, and I hurried to the Governor, who had gone out. Captain White²¹ said it was useless to proceed further. Several men were whipped, one with 70 stripes, the others with 20 each, for neglect of duties forced upon them, they being free men, therefore not supposed to work without compensation."

"Mr. Thompson is exerting himself to obtain a residence for us in the town. He is very kind, but alas, I already perceive he wields despotic power. It is lamentable that Great Britain gave up her authority over this rich, beautiful and important island."

The two missionaries worked splendidly together, Dr. Prince overcoming a natural diffidence in some of the situations. "The devil-house was wattle-walled. Bees had just swarmed and settled on one of the beams, and the nests of blue-winged hornets hung near. The 'offerings' were sticks dressed with feathers, an old wooden shield, broken pots, etc. The footpath to the town led through this building."

In the quest for information of Lander the Explorer, however, the Doctor needed no urging. "Found grave of Mr. R. Lander with difficulty, few here being acquainted with the spot." . . . "With Dr. Prince visited Lander's grave, a flat-topped covering marking the place."²²

"Houssa men, with Mina, the interpreter mentioned by Clapperton, Lander and Laird, visited us. (He) is in the *Ethiophe* with Captain Beecroft. He wears a white robe bought at Rabba, in appearance like a bishop's gown in the large sleeves and partly like a wagoner's smock-frock in the working of the material. He is intelligent but hard to understand."

"Mr. Dick the schoolmaster was with Mr. Lander in the boat when he was shot. We conversed (with him) about building a chapel for the inquirers."

Between visiting the sick and bathing and sketching and taking pictures with his "much too heavy" camera, the Doctor prepared his lectures ("had three-hour lecture on anatomy this afternoon from Dr. Prince") and his sermons.

"Jan. 10. Had worship in the open, about 80 present,²³ expounded 1 Tim. 6 ch. Dr. Prince speaking from John 4 ch. . . . "This morning's effort of Dr. Prince a talk merely; this evening he preached his first sermon, from Matthew iv. 17, making a

²¹ Of the *Golden Spring*.

²² They afterwards found this was the grave of an American Captain, that of Lander, some distance away, being marked by head and foot stone, with an oil-nut tree growing between.

²³ A small audience. Mostly they preached to two or three hundred.

judicious and good discourse. The appearance of a harvest of souls is very cheering."²⁴

Thus we take leave of John Clarke, or of this chapter of his life, remembering him riding on back of powerful negro through the surf, his keeping a giant monitor as pet, admiring his resolution, his patience and his descriptive genius.

"A poor wretch, with withered body, lying on the ground, in his mean hut, dashed me an egg."

"The chief wife of the King of Bassa visited us on way to Calvelly to sell smoked shell-fish. She was young and pleasing and her colour was light for an African."

"The wife of the (Clarence) headman, a tall woman somewhat forbidding of look, adjusted her small portion of shell attire (and) put out her hand filthy with clay and oil. I put delicacy aside and all sorts of squeamishness, and cordially shook hands."

With children he was always happy. "Mr. Smith the headmaster (Cape Coast) had 166 scholars on the roll, from 4 to 20 years of age. 114 were present and 26 read moderately well. They acquitted themselves far beyond expectation, and their singing was to us a Song of Zion in benighted land."

At the end of the month he boarded the *Jonathan*, 15 tons, for Cameroon, there to attempt the second part of the mission, "the banks of the Niger, if practicable, as high as Egga, Rabba and Bonassa." But that is another story.

Before leaving Fernando Po both he and the doctor determined to recommend the B.M.S. to begin work there as soon as possible. It was started in 1843 (two years after) and continued until 1858, when opposition²⁵ forced the missionaries across the twenty miles of sea to the mainland, where they built for the Liberated Africans the town of Victoria in Ambas Bay, Cameroon, for ever to be associated with the name of Alfred Saker.²⁶

The last entry in this Diary of John Clarke is dated Jan. 31, 1841. "What is before us we do not know: but God has wonderfully preserved us and blessed us hitherto. The work is His, for life or death, our trust is in Him. We hope to accomplish still more for this land and for Africa, and pray fervently from day to day that the glorious kingdom of our Lord may come, and all nations fear before Him. Amen."

F. W. BUTT-THOMPSON.

²⁴ Afterwards there was a wedding, the first of several recorded. "Jan. 25. Married 2 couples large company present." "Jan. 26. Married 3 couples."

²⁵ The Jesuits took over, but since 1870 the evangelization of the island has been in the hands of the Primitive Methodists. It has never been a fruitful field.

²⁶ Alfred Saker, 1814-1880.